

**CHARLES UNIVERSITY IN PRAGUE**

FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

**Institute of International Studies**

**Master's Thesis**

**2013**

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**Alone Amid the Storm: The Hungarian Uprising  
and the Western Powers**

*Master's Thesis*

**Prague 2013**

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**Academic Year:** 2012/13

## **Bibliographical Note**

DING, Xiaopeng. *Alone Amid the Storm: The Hungarian Uprising and the Western Powers*. 84 p. Master's Thesis. Charles University, Faculty of Social Sciences, Institute of International Studies. Supervisor: Dr. Vit Smetana.

## **Abstract**

*The purpose of this thesis is to review and revise all historical evidence hitherto available concerning the international aspects of the 1956 Hungarian Uprising. Its scope includes several layers, including how the peoples in the West, as well as their leaders, behaved during the crisis. It will look at the international arena in 1956 from the Hungarian perspective, as well as attempt to come to a historical explanation for Western, and specifically American actions during the uprising, and the precepts which led to them. In doing so, it shall in particular take a careful revision of the long-standing charges levelled against the West, concerning its alleged passivity, hypocrisy, or willingness to escalate the crisis via the controversial broadcasts of Radio Free Europe.*

## **Keywords**

*Hungarian Revolution, 1956, Cold War, Imre Nagy, Eisenhower Foreign Policy*

**Length of Thesis:** 185 121 characters

## **Declaration of Authorship**

1. The author hereby declares that he compiled his thesis independently, using only the listed resources and literature.
2. The author hereby declares that all the sources and literature have been properly cited.
3. The author hereby declares that the thesis has not been used to obtain a different or the same degree.

Prague. May 17, 2013.

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**Term:** SS 2013

Academic Year: 2013

**Title:** *Alone Amid the Storm: The Hungarian Uprising and the Western Powers*

**Submission Date:** May 17, 2013

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**Description of the Topic:** This dissertation aims to research aspects of the Hungarian Uprising of 1956 from the perspective of the Western Powers, in particular the response of the Eisenhower administration to the crisis in October.

**Research Question:** Given the critiques of the Western response to the October Uprising, what were the internal debates among the Western powers at the time of the crisis? What policy options existed at the time, and why did the course ultimately implemented triumph over all alternatives?

**Aim of dissertation:** The dissertation shall review the long-standing charge that the Western Powers aided the escalation of the crisis including via the CIA-supported Radio Free Europe. Their ambiguous policy, passive in face of the Soviet invasion of early November, distracted by the fallout of the Suez crisis, and lethargic in taking diplomatic initiative, led to a failure of Western policy during the Hungarian Uprising. The goal is a re-evaluation of this period in the domestic and international politics of the West in this crucial period, and the fairness of its critics.

**Proposed methodology:** The dissertation proposes to look at its subject in its several layers: the reactions to the October Uprising in the domestic, state, and inter-state arenas. Historiographical survey is to be taken via a summary of the basic arguments hitherto presented in secondary writings. Newspapers, memoirs, contemporary commentary and official communications will be collected to recount the perspectives of the Western countries in their various layers. Through the comparison of these sources, it will be seen whether inconsistencies existed in Western policy as they were explained domestically, in the policy-making community, and through diplomatic channels.

**Proposed Structure:** The proposed thematic break-up of the dissertation shall be arranged as follows:

1. Introduction 2. Historiographical Interpretations 3. Established Cold War Doctrine in Washington 4. Foreign Policy of the Nagy regime during the Uprising 5. Domestic Opinion in the West 6. Response of the Policy-Makers 7. Inter-State Efforts 8. Aid and Propaganda: What was achieved by Western relief efforts? 9. Conclusion- The Great Betrayal or the Triumph of Realism?

**Primary Sources and Secondary Literature:** List of available literature appended.

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# I

## Introduction

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From wild Carpathians to the Lower Danube  
One howl of rage. One tempest loud makes me moan:  
With bloodstained forehead and hair dishevelled  
Amid the storm the Magyar stands alone.  
And I would join this nation, I declare it  
If I were not Magyar from my birth  
For they are friendless, and the most deserted  
Of all the peoples of this circling earth. - Sándor Petöfi

In 1945, Hungary, defeated in war, became one of a half-dozen Central-Eastern European nations occupied by the advancing tide of the Red Army. For the next eleven years, she was gradually incorporated into the Soviet Bloc, a stuttering procedure which appeared to have congealed with the entry of Soviet Hungary into the Warsaw Pact in 1955. Yet despite the monopoly of Soviet and Russian power now ascendant in that part of the world, the Sovietisation of Hungary was never going to be a straight-forward or easy process. The Hungarian nation, and the Hungarian people were unambiguously hostile to the ideology of Communism, and perhaps even more so toward its imposition by her great historical nemesis in the form of Russia.

Hungary's anti-Communist legacy largely stemmed from the failures of the Hungarian left after the First World War, in which at first the hapless Social Democratic government of Mihály Károlyi, then, under the quasi-government of Béla Kun, not only successfully failed to alleviate Hungary's supreme crisis of Trianon, but unleashed a wave of anarchy and murder during its brief period in power, known as the Red Terror. When the National Army under the leadership of Miklós Horthy

reasserted power in Hungary, a counter-revolutionary wave of White Terror targeted the former Communist leadership, many of whom were Jewish. Whereas the White Terror was longer and more brutal than the Red Terror which preceded it, it was more popular among the populace. For the next two decades, as the Hungarian government passed into the hands of a nationalist-conservative consensus, the Communist Party of Hungary was banned, and most of her surviving leaders fled into exile. The loss of the war brought many of these leaders back into Hungary, in the trail of the victorious advance of the Soviet Army.

The Soviets, now in control of Hungary, were as of yet quiescent in imposing Communism on her. This partially stemmed from the weakness of the Communism in Hungary, even as a political kernel in 1945.<sup>1</sup> The bitterness with which the Hungarians experienced Soviet occupation was exacerbated by the initial brutal savagery of the Red Army, and the wanton prevalence of rape and murder which accompanied their arrival. Politically, however, for diplomatic and other reasons, the Soviets reverted to their Popular Front tactics of the 1930s, in which a coalition of nominally non-Communist parties would assume co-responsibility for postwar government. In the case of Hungary, this promise for political self-determination, however limited, was quickly betrayed in the *coup* of 1947, after which a Stalinist government led by the despot Mátyás Rákosi assumed office. After Stalin's death, the unpopularity of the hardline Rákosi régime was recognised by Stalin's successors, whereupon they appointed the Communist reformer Imre Nagy to the government in Hungary. In the years leading up to the revolt, the internal orientation of the Hungarian Working People's Party was deeply divided, as the Stalinists attempted to outflank their erstwhile reformist opponents in internecine attempts to retain power. Khrushchev's XX Congress speech, in which he denounced Stalinism, however, heralded a new age of altogether different possibilities. The movement by the Soviets

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<sup>1</sup> In Kádár's own estimations, there remained by the end of the war fewer than a hundred members of the Communist underground remaining in Hungary. Lendvai, Paul. *The Hungarians: A Thousand Years of Victory in Defeat*. Trans. Ann Major. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003. (Henceforth: L/VID) pp. 428.

thereafter to liberalise her relationships with her vassal nations, including extending the possibilities of a withdrawal of Soviet troops from Hungary, must be understood as backdrop against which the events of 1956 unfolded.

On October 23rd, demonstrations in support of protesters in Poland gathered momentum, and soon the entire country was up in arms, making demands of their own government. After a hastily-arranged intervention by Soviet forces to restore order in Budapest, the Soviets withdrew, and placed their support behind the figure of Imre Nagy, who now became the decisive figure. Nagy, however, soon appeared to have joined the forces of dissent he was supposed to tame, and the Soviet leaders, in the final days of October, changed their minds again, and decided upon a military invasion of Hungary. The full force of the Soviet Army was felt in Budapest on November 4th, and after a few days' battle and thousands dead or wounded, the Soviet Union had suppressed the Revolution.

Imre Nagy, who in the end had decided to cast his lot with the rebels, had fled to the Yugoslav Embassy upon the entry of the Red Army. On November 22nd, he left the embassy under promise of safe passage by his Moscow-appointed successor, Janos Kádár. Upon leaving the embassy, however, he was kidnapped, and whisked away to Romania. Nagy was subsequently secretly tried for treason, and executed by hanging in 1958, thereby becoming the martyr, and historical symbol of 1956.

The response of the West to the Hungarian Revolt of 1956 was hesitant and vacillating. At a time when Eastern Bloc was suffering its greatest crisis since its inception, the West was divided in a debacle of its own: the Suez Crisis. As the Suez Crisis pitted the British and French against Washington in the arena of international diplomacy, no concerted Western response could be formulated to counter Soviet actions in Hungary. However, this was not the main cause of the West's failure.

By 1956, the United States had largely accepted the stalemate in Europe as a fixed feature of the modern world, and although American political doctrine under the Eisenhower administration had publicly called for "liberation" and "rollback" of the Communist stranglehold on Eastern Europe, its

policies were acutely aware of the limited means by which the United States might force this upon the Soviets short of war. In 1956, neither side wanted a war, and both were apprehensive, lest strong actions provoked a belligerent response from the other. Central-Eastern Europe was not worth a third world war. Nonetheless, the position of the United States, as the champion of anti-Communism across the world, was complicated by matters of domestic and moral opinion. The initial success of a small people who had risen in arms against Soviet occupation, and the succeeding brutal Soviet crackdown, gripped the attention of the world, and demanded an appropriate response from the governments of the West. As we shall see, these governments had considerable difficulties navigating themselves in the mired channels of contrary duties. While the Eisenhower administration was busy convincing both the world, and itself, that it was taking an energetic position on Hungary, the reality behind the scenes shed light on a different story, albeit one which is complex, and by no means easily resolvable into categorical judgements of ethical norms.

This thesis largely aims to present these layers of action, or inaction, which hobbled the diplomatic response of the West during the Hungarian crisis of 1956, and which has opened up the Western governments, and particularly that of the United States to accusations of incompetence or hypocrisy by posterity. Whereas the vast majority of literature on the subject of Hungary in 1956 has devoted itself to the internal events in Hungary during the final weeks of October and early-November, this thesis focus shall mainly be on the international aspects of the Hungarian Uprising of 1956, and how the world at large reacted to those events.

## II

# Historiography

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I have, I may almost say continuously, enjoyed the spectacle presented by French historiography. And all the time the historical presentation turns out to be closely connected with French political and cultural life as a whole. - Pieter Geyl

In the aftermath of the Hungarian uprising, the Kádár government faced the herculean task of re-defining the meaning of 1956 for the generations to come. During his journey in Moscow in early November, where he had been persuaded by the Soviet leadership to take charge of a post-Nagy government, Kádár admitted to the Soviets that what had begun in October was a national rising which enjoyed the support of the people.<sup>2</sup> The Communist-imposed silence born of the defeated Revolution was defective from birth.

Prior to his conversion in Moscow, Kádár had also enjoyed broad support as a reformer and opponent of the Rákosi-faction within the Hungarian politburo. Due to his fateful decision in early November 1956, Kádár suddenly found himself at the head of a post-crisis Hungarian Communist party and government, hauled in by the Red Army's baggage train in a manner reminiscent of the entry of most Rákosi-era leaders in 1944/45. The homegrown Communist had finally become a "Muscovite," or so it initially appeared. For the next thirty years, this great political survivor would face the daunting task of rebuilding a national consensus which reconciled the dicta of official ideology with the demands of national feeling. The treatment of 1956 as a historical, political and emotional legacy was among the greatest of Kádár's challenges, one which until the end of his era was contained, but never

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<sup>2</sup> Békés, Csaba., et al, ed. *The 1956 Hungarian Revolution: A History in Documents*. Budapest: CEU Press, 2002. (Henceforth: DOC) pp. 357.

overcome.

For the next three decades, the official label given by the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party to the Uprising of 1956 was “counter-revolution,” a phrase which became the mandatory jargon of schools and universities during the same time. This was a necessary *idée fixe* made by the geopolitical realities emanating from Moscow; the imposition of an alien and dogmatic historical narrative, so contrary to the collective experiences of the contemporary populations asked to submit to it, was a process requiring a great deal of tact, all the more particularly on part of a national, guilt-ridden leadership.<sup>3</sup> How the label of “counter-revolution” was to be conferred unto the uprising became a details which, as the regime evolved from a repressive to an increasingly accommodative one, permitted considerable room for interpretive creativity.

Broadly speaking, the internal treatment of Nagy's legacy, and the legacy of 1956 may be divided into several paradigm shifts across the three-decade period of Kádár's leadership.

The first, repressive period began after Kádár's return to Budapest and the installation of a new government. The price Kádár exacted from Moscow, the final removal of the Stalin-era hardliners from positions of power in the post-1956 Hungary, meant that the repressions in no way heralded a return to the era of purges. When the new provisional Central Committee, one month after assuming power, identified the abuses of the Rákosi-era as the principle catalyst for the eruption of national outrage, it was being completely sincere. In the same resolution, however, the Committee criticised the revolt itself, and the man from their own ranks who in its course came to embrace it: Imre Nagy. According to its declaration, Nagy's error rested in his populism during the October turbulence, because Nagy had looked to the public rather than to the Party as the chief arbiter of reform, a measure which invited the participation of “reactionary” and “Horthyite-fascist” elements within Hungarian society, as well as

<sup>3</sup> On April 12<sup>th</sup> 1989, an ailing János Kádár confessed before the Central Committee to his responsibility not only for the execution of Imre Nagy, but also for his role in the trial of Rajk, Rákosi's Minister of the Interior and the most prominent victim of Rákosi's purges, a role which had been suppressed by the state for over three decades. L/VID pp. 463.

inciting the ambitions of “international imperialism.” To the extent that Nagy and the Revolt attempted to reform socialism in line with the New Course, their actions were to be lauded, as the motives behind the Uprising harboured legitimate grievances. In the end, however, the situation threatened the overthrow of socialism in Hungary, and military intervention was justified on this basis.<sup>4</sup>

The abduction, trial and execution of Imre Nagy placed renewed pressures upon the Kádár régime to renew its claims to legitimacy, a legitimacy which could only be implicitly established over the ruins of Nagy's legacy. The secretive and treacherous circumstances of the proceedings meant that the Hungarian public and the world only discovered Nagy's fate after the sentence had already been carried out.

In the immediate years after 1956, the Kádár government felt compelled, due to pressures domestic and foreign, to orchestrate the release of such information as it deemed necessary to support this legitimacy. The international interest in the capture and trial of Imre Nagy, an interest which spawned the publication of much anti-Soviet literature in the West, was an issue which exacerbated an informal war of information. During these years, the Hungarian government released its own evidence, in order to orchestrate a more favourable view of its conduct. A film of Nagy's trial was edited and released, which, notwithstanding overt efforts to doctor the effect, was unable to prevent widespread sympathy for the defendant. Then in 1958, the government released its “White Book” on Imre Nagy, containing samples of evidence collected for Nagy's trial. The book, a tome of international damage control, was published in several languages, including an English-edition with the subtle title of “*The Counterrevolutionary Conspiracy of Imre Nagy and Accomplices.*”<sup>5</sup> The curiosity behind this selective

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4 DOC pp. 463. The culpability which Kádár assigned to the hardliners was not a conclusion Kádár drew after returning from Moscow, but before, when on November 1<sup>st</sup>, in an unashamedly “populist” radio speech, Kádár spoke of how the “people [had] shaken off the Rákosi régime in a glorious rebellion.” A month later, Kádár's pronouncements on this subject basically remained the same, although almost everything else had changed. Deák, István “1956 in Hungarian Memory and Public Consciousness.” in: Schmidl, Erwin, ed. *Die Ungarnkrise 1956 und Österreich.* Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 2003. (Henceforth: UKÖ) pp. 90.

5 *The Counterrevolutionary Conspiracy of Imre Nagy and Accomplices.* Information Bureau of the Council of Ministers of the Hungarian People's Republic, 1958.



and heavily-edited collection was the fact that it was unable to accomplish the goals of Communist propaganda in its orthodox manner; because at his interrogations and trials, Nagy refused to provide “self-criticism” under duress, nor would he confess to any guilt. The documents of indictment themselves were laced with charges based on ideological abstractions, wherein the charges were that Nagy's policy pursued a “treasonous-nationalistic” line, abetting “counter-revolutionary” forces, while in the international arena, Nagy had committed the treasonous act of “appealing to the imperialists.”<sup>6</sup> Ultimately, the interpretation that Nagy had become, in Kádár's words, a “grovelling liar,” rather than merely a heretical theoretician was confirmed and compounded by his defiant attitude at his trial.

By the 1970's, this uncompromising condemnation of the Nagy-government's role in the uprising gave way to more flexible concepts, as the Kádár regime attempted to rebuild social stability upon a relaxation of Party authority, and an improvement in living standards. Awareness of the divide between Party and public on the legacy of the uprising, the process of re-defining 1956 in Kádár's historiography assumed the character of an “enforced historical amnesia.”<sup>7</sup>

Officially, the Party doctrine which defined the events of 1956 in the cant of Marxist jargon remained intact. However, during the 70's, the regime drew back from overt efforts of condemnation, and implicitly recognised a heterodox appreciation of the uprising. In 1972, Kádár at a birthday speech announced that there was more than one way to see 1956. In the judgement of Communist philosophy, the “scientific definition” of 1956 had to be “counter-revolution.” However, society could “all reach an understanding” that it was also a national tragedy.<sup>8</sup>

Subsequently, although the term 'counter-revolution' was the expression taught in Hungarian

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6 Rainer, János. *Imre Nagy: A Biography*. Trans. Lyman H. Legters. London: I.B. Tauris, 2009. (Henceforth: RAI) pp. 156-157.

7 Gyáni, Gábor. “Memory and Discourse on the 1956 Hungarian Revolution.” *Europe-Asia Studies* Vol. 58 no. 8 (2006) pp. 1199-1208. pp. 1199.

8 Gyurkó, László. *Arcképvázlat történelmi háttérrel*. Budapest: Magvető, 1982. pp. 221-222. Cit. in: RAI. pp. 215. Also Kádár's 'personal tragedy', as he lamented in his belated apology in April 1989. Kádár died on the 6<sup>th</sup> of July, the day Nagy was posthumously rehabilitated by the Supreme Court. L/VID pp. 463.

schools until the 80's, it was in the régime's calculated interest to refrain from speaking about it. We now have manifold evidences that beneath the surface of conformity, a widespread passive dissidence from the official version of events frothed in the minds of the generation which was old enough to have witnessed 1956, an attitude which could not be completely concealed from the younger generations.<sup>9</sup> On the role of the Western powers in 1956 too, Kádárist historiography was skewed by the limitations of official ideology. Inherent in such views was the basic assumption of the implacable hostility of the Western Powers toward the Socialist Bloc, and therefore the deductive reasoning that Western reactions to the 1956 uprising were predicated upon the self-interest of the capitalist camp. Such views were expressed in a book by historian János Berecz in a book published in 1969, and subsequently translated into English under the title of *Counter-Revolution in Hungary: Words and Weapons*.<sup>10</sup> As an exemplar of literature on the history of 1956 produced in the Kádárite era, it may be indicative to note down some of its most striking features.

The book's effusive evaluation of Soviet policy during the uprising follows the internal logic of Party doctrine, and does not require repetition. Of greater interest is its depiction of the reaction of the Western Powers during the insurrection. Among its arguments was its professed belief that the Anglo-French offensive against Egypt, initiated on October 31<sup>st</sup> was launched to take advantage of the Hungarian uprising. Furthermore, the policy of the United States during the crisis was conceived in far more aggressive terms, than is now known to be the case; including the belief that the United States aimed to use the Hungarian rising as a means of inflicting a major defeat on the Soviet bloc. In its conformity to the idea of socialist solidarity, the work claims that the West had entertained far-flung

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9 Many such recollections can be unearthed in various oral interviews, translated in English at the UC Berkeley Oral Histories Office: *Survival: Lives of Hungarians Under Communist and Capitalist Governments 1956-2006*. Telling is the anecdote of Peter Bihari, born after the revolution: "My grandfather again was a person who always told his remarks, not very loudly, but I knew he had his own opinions about things. For instance, there was a thing about the "Counter-Revolution of 1956", and he never said that word, and when I asked him sometimes about that, in school and other places that was the official language, well, he didn't speak very openly, he just said \*\*\*\*\* useless."

10 Berecz, Janos. 1956 *Counter-Revolution in Hungary: Words and Weapons*. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiado, 1986. pp. 191-197

illusions about disunity within the Socialist bloc during the crisis, particularly in their ambition of effect a Sino-Soviet split, or creating trouble with Poland. This crude account, in which no doubt is spared when touching upon the malfeasance of the United States during the crisis, essentially paints a portrait of a polarised world in which tensions within both the Western and Eastern blocs are understated.

With the speech of Imre Poszgay in 1989 rehabilitaing Nagy and the revolutionaries of 1956, a new wave of interest appeared in Hungary on the events of 1956, fostering a fertile period of research assisted by the “archival revolution” which took place at the end of the Cold War. The opening of Soviet Presidential Archives has made available much of the missing evidence concerning the decision-making process within the Soviet Presidium in 1956. Although no complete minutes have been available of Presidium meetings, the general tenor of the decisive meetings are relayed through *ad hoc* notes scribbled out by the head of the General Department of the Central Committee, Vladimir Nikiforovich Malin. Although necessarily relaying an incomplete picture of the struggle within the Soviet Presidium, the notes have brought to light many questions long beset by speculative guesswork.<sup>11</sup>

Long before the Kádárite historiography of Communist Hungary had deceased into irrelevance, they were being challenged in the West. The initial wave of books on the Hungarian revolution flooded the the other side of the Iron Curtain in the period between 1956 and 1963, a process which began with ethical and pedantic essays, but ended in historical analysis. These books were primarily written by Hungarian émigrés, who sought to inform and acquaint the West with what had happened in Hungary in 1956. Such efforts tended, naturally, to deal with the domestic, rather than international aspects of the Hungarian uprising. The émigrés sought to influence the West, chiefly because of the frustration felt

<sup>11</sup>Rainer, János. Decision in the Kremlin, 1956 – The Malin Notes. Hungarian Cultural Center New York. <<http://www.reimaginefreedom.org/studies/doc/862.htm>>. Originally Published: The Road to Budapest, 1956. New Documentation on the Kremlin's Decision to Intervene. *The Hungarian Quarterly*, Vol. 36, 37. (1996) pp. 24-41, 16-31 respectively.

about the hapless ambivalence of Western governments. Some intellectuals, such as François Fejtő, an émigré intellectual of the left residing in France, the Hungarian rising of 1956 offered a unique chance for the re-negotiation of the *status quo* in Europe, an argument which was already implicitly anticipating what later historians would write: that by 1956, the United States had come to accept the division of Europe as an unalterable reality.<sup>12</sup>

The news of Nagy's trial and execution, and the subsequent efforts of the Hungarian government to justify its actions exacerbated the propaganda war over Nagy's legacy, in which the case for Nagy's rehabilitation was greatly aided by the exodus of Nagy's friends, many of them smuggling valuable documents to the West. One such émigré was the Hungarian journalist Tibor Méray, whose book *Thirteen Days that Shook the Kremlin* made the first attempts at providing a short historical analysis of what was happening on the international stage during the crisis days. The primitive sketch of the global factors behind the Hungarian rising included an brief analysis of domestic politics in the United States as well as the Soviet Union. Although the conclusions drawn by these early historians of '56 are now outdated, or been subjected to more detailed evaluations, many of the themes which Méray pioneered in his little book were to subsequently become important points for future research: the role of the Suez crisis, the cleavages within the Soviet politburo, the pressures of the presidential elections in America, have become basic issues in the historiography of 1956.

In the intermezzo of the 1970s and 1980s, several important books were published in the West which focused on the Hungarian rising through the international perspective. Such books included János Radványi's 1972 book *Hungary and the Superpowers: The 1956 Revolution and Realpolitik* and Martin Ben Schwartz's 1988 work *A New Look at the 1956 Hungarian Revolution: Soviet Opportunism, American Acquiescence*. In these works, criticism of American behaviour during the revolt, continued unabated, with the main critique focusing on the American leaders' woeful misreading

<sup>12</sup> Fejtő's views are summarised in *La tragédie hongroise; ou, Une révolution socialiste anti-soviétique*, first published in France in 1956.

of its own room for manoeuvre. The question of whether the failure of American diplomacy in the relevant weeks was due to genuine confusion, caution, or unwillingness is present due to the contrast between Radványi's beliefs, and the views of future writers. In Radványi's estimation, the United States bungled the situation by constantly being behind the curve of events: the State Department suffered from a lack of reliable information until the end of October, by which point its ability to act was suddenly thwarted by the Anglo-French invasion of Egypt. Was there a realistic chance that more dynamic action by the United States might have saved Hungary? Radványi held the view, that the Soviet leadership took the dangers of American intervention very seriously and the subsequent failure of American diplomacy to seize the initiative, and its eagerness to communicate its peaceful intentions to Moscow had contributed enormously to relieving the pressure on the Soviet leaders. Even today, Radványi's views deserve to be considered, due to his position as a high-ranking diplomat during the crisis, who experienced many of the deliberations behind the scenes first-hand.<sup>13</sup>

By the end of the Cold War, Western histories of the 1956 uprising were painting a clear portrait which were already effective in refuting many of the central assertions of Kádárite doctrine: the United States did not support the revolt of 1956, and on the contrary, took great pains to inform the Soviet Union of its accommodating attitude. East and West were not blocs of ideological solidarity, but consisted of many layers of cleavages which served to exacerbate the immobility of policy. Finally, while NSC policy had recommended a doctrine of promoting “national communism” on the Yugoslav model for the “Captive Nations”, when the time came to commit herself to action, the internal contradictions of Cold War doctrine paralysed her ability to act coherently in a crisis.

As the Communist régime's monopoly on power collapsed in 1989, the ideological chasm in which the war over the legacy of 1956 had become a proxy battle was quickly closed. In January 1989,

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<sup>13</sup> Radványi, Janos. *Hungary and the superpowers: the 1956 Revolution and Realpolitik*. Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1972. (Henceforth: RAD) pp. 11. Compare, however with conclusions reached in Borhi, László. *Hungary in the Cold War 1945-1956: Between the United States and the Soviet Union*. Budapest: CEU Press, 2004. (Henceforth: BOR) pp. 307.

the Hungarian government for the first time since Kádár's visit to Moscow in 1956 recognised the revolt as a popular rising. By June, the preparatory committee for a new Institute for the History of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution was formed, which has become a leading source of research into the Hungarian uprising during the past twenty years.<sup>14</sup>

Yet after 1989, out of the ashes of old feuds, arose fresh controversies. After 1989, the ready availability of new documents has provided the impetus for a large-scale revision of 1956, but what of its legacy twenty years on?

In the immediate aftermath of the transition, the restored memory of 1956 has served as an important element of national unity within Hungary. Its status has been enshrined in the new Hungarian constitution of 2012 as a fundamental basis of the Hungarian state's legitimacy.<sup>15</sup> The renewed political rifts opened by the generation after 1989 has thus far not much hindered the progress of research into the diplomatic history of 1956. To this day, one can speak of a relatively cooperative *Forschungsstand* in this field, largely untouched by the divisive acrimony visited upon many other aspects of the history of 1956.

During the Cold War, many of the books, written by historians and émigrés abroad, possessed the tone of an exasperated agitation, and disappointment with the failure of the West to recognise the importance of Central-Eastern Europe. After the Cold War ended, a new, somber and reflective tone prevailed in critiques of Western actions, now made primarily by Hungarian historians all too conscious of the condition Hungary was a country of secondary importance to the West, and certainly in 1956.<sup>16</sup>

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14 The 1956 Institute was a successor to the Imre Nagy Institute of Sociology and Politics, established in Brussels by a group of anti-Soviet socialist Hungarian scholars mainly as an organ to disseminate information about the '56 uprising to a Western audience.

15 An illusion shattered by riots in Budapest on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of 1956, with the demise of Gyurcsány's government. By that time, a rival institute to the 1956 Institute of János Rainer had established itself in Budapest, with a more conservative-nationalist orientation. RAI pp. xviii.

16 Litván, György., Bak, János, ed. *Die Ungarische Revolution 1956: Reform – Aufstand – Vergeltung*. Trans. Anne Nass. Vienna: Passagen, 1994. (Henceforth: RAV) pp. 97-101. In 1968, the émigré historian of 1956, Miklós Molnár published a book on the eve of the Soviet march into Prague, published under the French title of *Victoire d'un défaite*; Victory in Defeat. To wit: although the Hungarian rebels were defeated, they had won a moral victory, although the Soviets and their allies prevailed, they had been handed a disastrous moral defeat. Certainly true in 1956, but what did all this mean

Perhaps it is in line with this pessimistic evaluation of Hungary's international standing, that the new researchers also took a pessimistic estimate of how the 1956 might have succeeded, or at least resolved differently. In contrast to the earlier generation of émigré activists, eager to believe that a diplomatic approach by the Western Powers to the Soviet Union might have effected the neutralisation of Hungary, post-89 historians have generally been inclined to discount such a possibility. Apart from the difficulties of overcoming vast systemic and doctrinal shortcomings, most writings in the post-Cold War era have tended to emphasise that the Soviet Union would not have permitted the collapse of its security sphere in Eastern Europe, all its internal squabbles and political caution notwithstanding. This shift in tone is presumably due to the fact that most such historians are now native Hungarians, whose personal distance to the foreign powers in question places greater emphasis on understanding than on criticism. Consequently the behaviour of the West is becomes subject to political analysis, in which behaviour of states and nations in history are assumed to follow certain rigid “political laws.”

How then, do contemporary historians view the possible alternatives for 1956 once so well-regarded by émigré essayists, State Department strategists and not a few historians? One exemplar attitude was presented in 2004, in the form of a major monograph dealing with the subject of Hungary's international position in those years. In László Borhi's *Hungary in the Cold War*, the author concurred at the fundamental issue for the Kremlin was whether Hungary would be a pro-Soviet or anti-Soviet state in the future; the Austrian model was never contemplated to be a possible template for disengagement from Hungary. The major contribution of the book, however, lay in its treatment of the 1956 deadlock in the broader context of Soviet-American détente, attributing the inertia of American policy to the reluctance to jeopardise improving relations during the Khurshev thaw. At the conclusion of his remarks on 1956, Borhi states that, *contra* Molnár, the events of 1956 strengthened the Soviet position in Europe, and provided the basis for a relatively undisputed Soviet hegemony until the ebbing of the

Cold War.<sup>17</sup>

The prevalence of many Cold War illusions held by the Hungarian public, and the need to correct them became the subject of a recent article by Csaba Békés, treating several subjects which, according to the author, are still insufficiently understood by a public which still holds the view that the rising had a chance of success.<sup>18</sup> These views include an inadequate appreciation of the divergent views between the American government and the Hungarian public at the time of the rising, on the permanence of the postwar European order, and an inadequate appreciation that the neutralisation of Hungary in 1956 would have been unacceptable to the Soviet Union.

Bennett Kovrig, contributing to the argument, states that in the eyes of the State Department, the model which the State Department had its eyes on through the summer of 1956 was not the Austrian, but the Polish and the Yugoslav. During its dealings with the Soviet Union during the Hungarian revolt, the Americans had drawn erroneous conclusions from the Polish demonstrations earlier in the summer, and failed to appreciate the gap between a 'Polish' solution, which the Soviets would likely have tolerated for Hungary, and a "Yugoslav" one.<sup>19</sup>

One additional area rarely frequented prior to the collapse of the Iron Curtain has focused on the question of what the Hungarians expected from the West during their revolt. Since the collapse of the Iron Curtain, post-Communist historians were also able to provide valuable information on relations between the insurgents and the West.

Did the Nagy government ever take the West seriously during the crisis days? Contrary to the depictions of Kádár-era historiography, it now appears to be the consensus that the chances for direct collaboration between the Nagy-government and the Western Powers were faintly remote. Apart from

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17 BOR pp. 307.

18 Békés, Csaba. Could the Hungarian Revolution have succeeded in 1956? Myths, Legends, and Illusions. In: Ádám, Christopher et Egervari, Tibor. *The 1956 Hungarian Revolution: Hungarian and Canadian Perspectives*. Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2010. (Henceforth: HCP) pp. 32-52.

19 Kovrig, Bennett. Liberators: The Great Powers and Hungary in 1956. in: Romsics, Ignác, ed. *20<sup>th</sup> Century Hungary and the Great Powers*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1995. (Henceforth: HGP) pp. 260.



the West's distrust of Nagy and its failure to understand the true momentum of events in Budapest, it is now generally believed that neither Nagy's political strategy nor the revolt on the streets were predicated on hopes of Western help.<sup>20</sup> Rather, during the crisis days, Nagy's government entertained optimistic hopes about a concurrence with the anti-Stalinist East, hopes which would ultimately prove illusory.

In addition to the problems of high diplomacy, one aspect of Western intervention in the 1956 uprising which cannot be ignored is the the infamous failure of American propaganda, including of Radio Free Europe during the period. Considerable research has gone into disputing the point of the extent to which the propaganda broadcasts had an impact on the course of events. One of the principle contributors to the dispute, George R. Urban, was a Hungarian émigré who had been a leading contributor, and later director of RFE since 1960. In his book, Urban capitalised on the basic misconceptions held by the broadcasters about the October uprising, errors exacerbated by unpreparedness, ideology, and the lack of professional expertise by the broadcasters on the events they were attempting to influence.<sup>21</sup>

Whereas during Communist times, the record of overt American propaganda supported the ideological narrative, in post-Communist historiography, Hungarian historians have largely come to accept that RFE broadcasts did exert considerable influence upon some insurgents, although they did not influence the policy of the Nagy government. Nonetheless, the episode of RFE continues to reflect poorly on the coherence of American policy at best, and capacity for carelessness and self-delusion at worst, in the eyes of its Hungarian critics.<sup>22</sup>

These are the judgements of Hungarian historians, writing largely from the perspective of what *Hungary* might have reasonably expected from the West in 1956. The question of what the United

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20 RAV pp. 99-100., BOR pp. 282.

21 Urban, George R. *Radio Free Europe and the Pursuit of Democracy*. London: Yale University Press, 1997.

22 BOR pp. 306.

States or the Soviet Union might have done in 1956 is naturally one of different dimensions. As a chapter in the long narrative of Hungary's national history, the themes of 1956 are woven amidst a tale of illusions, neglect and abandonment, fit into the broader landscape of Hungarian history. The brutal realism with which modern Hungarian historians treat of the world's neglect of Hungary in 1956 is more than the mere channeling of hindsight. It also seems to fit, soberly but naturally, into the psychological unity of Hungarian history, reinforcing what émigré journalist Paul Lendvai called the „psychosis of a defeated nation,“ for 1956 was not the first instance in Hungarian history that Hungary had been abandoned by the very West to whom she had sacrificed herself to prove her belonging. As in the Mongol invasion of the 13<sup>th</sup> century or the Turkish conquest of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, 1956 provided one further example which forms the catharsis of the grand tragedy that is Hungarian history.

### III

## The Quagmire of “Liberation”

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A doctrine serves no purpose in itself, but it is indispensable to have one if only to avoid being deceived by false doctrines. -Simone Weil

In traditional interpretations of the Cold War, Churchill's flight to Moscow in October 1944 and his informal presentation of the “percentages agreement” to Stalin represented the first steps of the Western abandonment of most of Eastern Europe to Soviet influence. According to the agreement, Great Britain was to exercise predominant influence in postwar Greece, while Russian primacy in Romania and Bulgaria were recognised. Influence in Yugoslavia and Hungary was to be split between the two powers along fifty-fifty lines.<sup>23</sup>

What Churchill did not record in his memoirs were the prolonged negotiations which followed his informal agreement with Stalin, between Eden and Molotov on the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> of October. After long and pedantic haggling over the period of two days, Molotov and Eden rested on a revised formula of eighty-twenty for Hungary.<sup>24</sup>

Although the percentages agreement was a watershed event, symbolising the forthcoming division of Europe, there is danger in extrapolating its meaning with the benefit of hindsight. In the case of Hungary, it is not quite true that the West had abandoned any claims to moral influence precipitously, and certainly not in 1944. In their efforts to maintain a some semblance of a political foothold in Hungary after the war, the United States persisted longer and more stubbornly than Great

<sup>23</sup> Churchill, Winston. *Triumph and Tragedy*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1953. pp. 227.

<sup>24</sup> Resis, Albert. The Churchill-Stalin Secret 'Percentages' Agreement on the Balkans, Moscow, October 1944. In: *The American Historical Review*. Vol. 83, No. 2 (Apr., 1978) pp. 378. According to Molotov, this meant the Allied Control Commission would be directed by the Soviet High Command, but with 'representation' by the Western powers. But did 'representation' imply influence?

Britain, whose leadership probably suspected the truth sooner.

Churchill maintained that his “percentages” agreement with Stalin did not mean to divide Eastern Europe into “spheres of influence,” a concept with which his American allies would have been loathe to accept. Rather, it dealt with the temporary issues of administrative control to be exercised in the occupied countries, pending an overall postwar peace settlement. Churchill's visit to Moscow came merely weeks after the sudden defection of Romania in the war, and the consequent opening of the Carpathian Basin to Soviet invasion. It now became clear that Hungary would wholly lie within the Red Army's sphere of operations, and that the 80-20 ratio of influence extracted by Churchill in Moscow was the most optimistic estimate of postwar Western influence in Hungary which could have been expected.

After the armistice, the United States did take an active, albeit unsuccessful role in attempting to maintain some influence over Hungary's future. During the war, work on planning American policy for Central Europe was done by the State Department's Advisory Committee, which reported directly to the Secretary of State. Given Roosevelt's preference for personal wartime diplomacy, and his ignorance of the issues of Central Europe, many of its recommendations went unspoken at the summits of the Big Three. More serious than mere problems of summit administration was the fundamental American vision for postwar Europe. During the war, Roosevelt's desire to cultivate One World order, build upon the foundations be championed in the United Nations, was a vision predicated upon earning Stalin's trust and cooperation. It was largely due to the pursuit of this vision that many of the political advantages which the United States may have exploited to exert influence in Central-Eastern Europe after the war were unduly sacrificed.

In any case, the conclusions drawn by the Advisory Committee on Hungary were a mixed bag of sympathy and prejudice. The Committee largely supported a revision of the Trianon frontiers of Hungary. In a somewhat outdated throwback to Wilsonian idealism, it traced much of the region's

malaise back to the betrayed promise of self-determination after the First World War. However, its general conclusions on Hungary's were largely unfavourable. The perennial problem in Washington's eyes remained Hungary's feudal ruling class, who suppressed the potential of Hungarian democracy. That the reactionary government in Budapest had exercised great caution in aligning herself with Germany, that both prior to, and during the war, or that Horthy preferred to select Prime Ministers with Western sympathies and connections, went unobserved in the State Department. The main social agenda advanced by the Committee was the necessity of land-reform in Hungary, as a measure for combating her feudal pedigree and democratise her society.<sup>25</sup> Such projections of American political preferences upon Central Europe helps explain the long and indulgent patience with which Washington initially treated the new Hungarian governments.

The interim government installed in Debrecen in December 1944 consisted of a coalition of “non-fascist” parties: Communist, Smallholders, and Social Democrats. Unlike the puppet Polish, Romanian or Bulgarian governments, the Debrecen government was largely accepted by the West as a legitimate representation of “pro-Allied” forces in Hungary,<sup>26</sup> an acceptance reinforced by the victory of the Smallholders' Party in the November elections of 1945. This inclination to accept and work with the new Hungarian government was supported by the American officials' moderate expectations, even at the end of the war, as to the extent of control which the Soviet Union intended to exercise in the countries occupied by her armies. In 1945, as the symptoms of an advancing Soviet infiltration of Hungary's economy and internal affairs emerged, the Americans stubbornly held onto the legalistic view that Hungary was the joint responsibility of the Allied Powers, rather than an effective satellite of Moscow.

For the United States, the main method of retaining influence in Hungary, and counter-

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<sup>25</sup> Romsics, Ignác, ed. *Wartime American Plans for a New Hungary: Documents from the U.S. Department of State, 1942-1944*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1992. (Henceforth: R/WAP) pp. 35.

<sup>26</sup> R/WAP pp. 40.

balancing growing Soviet control of Hungary was economic. Although Soviet control of Hungary's economic infrastructure had been formalised by a Treaty of "Economic Collaboration," the United States sought a role for herself in the extension of American loans to facilitate reconstruction, a policy which was not discontinued until 1947.<sup>27</sup>

American influence in postwar Hungary experienced a brief Indian summer in early-1946, as Moscow was eager to resolve all outstanding disputes which might have hindered a general peace treaty with Hungary. The limited and ultimately meaningless concessions wrung from Moscow during these few months failed to address a central issue on Washington's agenda: the revision of the Trianon frontiers. In this calculation, the American position was opposed not only by Moscow, but by unexpectedly strong remonstrances from Prague and Belgrade. Furthermore, the American failure to win British support for the measure meant that the American delegation was forced to abandon the issue.<sup>28</sup>

However, soon the issue became not so much the external frontiers of a future Hungarian state, but her very political sovereignty. The conclusion of the Paris Peace Treaties with the German Satellites restored *de jure* sovereignty to the Hungary. In reality, the treaty's provision for the presence of Soviet armed forces in Hungary to guard and maintain lines of communication with the Soviet zone in Austria ensured that Soviet influence would remain paramount for an indefinite period. Subsequently the work of the Allied Control Commission restricted its activities to blocking unilateral Soviet decrees in Hungary, such as its attempt to dissolve the Freedom Party in the summer of 1946.<sup>29</sup> However, these would be the final effective rear-guard actions of the Western commissioners in Hungary.

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27 FRUS 1946 Vol. VI. pp. 256. The American Minister in Hungary, Schoenfeld: 'The Communist minority in Hungary which is pressing for Soviet Hungarian economic collaboration continues to make effective use of the argument that Western Powers including America are disinterested in this country's welfare and that therefore Hungary's survival depends only on Soviet good will...In my opinion, American interests require that US take advantage of every opportunity to foster Hungarian cooperation in preventing development of Soviet monopoly in Hungary...'

28 R/WAP pp. 42-43.

29 Max, Stanley M. *The United States, Great Britain, and the Sovietization of Hungary 1945-1948*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1985. pp. 89-90.

Up until the *coup* of May 1947, the counterpoise of Western diplomacy to Soviet coercion still permitted the Hungarian government to exercise a great deal of domestic independence. The piecemeal destruction of the government coalition, beginning with the arrest of Béla Kovács, the General Secretary of the Smallholders Party in February, and ending with the forced resignation of the Smallholders government at the end of May, provided a catalyst for a monumental revision of the American position in Hungary. This event came on the heels of Marshall's failure to procure a general settlement on postwar Europe in the Allied Council of Ministers in Moscow earlier in April. Seen in its own right, the "salami tactics" of gradual Sovietisation in Hungary were comparable to Russian tactics in the other satellites. However, the facade of Hungarian independence was maintained until 1947, and the sudden cynicism with which the veil was cast off was symptomatic of the period, a shock which effected a massive turn by the American Ship of State in the spring months of 1947. As the windows of cooperation with the Soviet Union on the future of Central-Eastern Europe were being closed, the United States gradually abandoned her attempts to influence events in the satellites through formal channels in favour of a policy of encouraging domestic resistance to total Stalinisation.

As relations between the Soviet Union and the West took a turn for the worse in 1947, and as the United States finally abandoned seeking Soviet cooperation for a general settlement, the first stages of the "Containment doctrine" were initiated via the Policy Planning Staff under the direction of George Kennan. The Policy Planning Staff's proposal for a European Recovery aid package to restore West European self-sufficiency was not explicitly targeted against Soviet interests, yet the Staff understood the implications the policy would have in the East. By extending the plan to all European countries, including the Soviet satellites and the Soviet Union, the European Recovery Program was seen to have a high probability of driving a wedge between Moscow and her satellites.<sup>30</sup> The immediate consequence of the Marshall Plan in Eastern Europe was the sealing of the Iron Curtain, and

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30 Kennan, George F. *Memoirs: 1925-1950*. New York: Pantheon books, 1983. pp. 340-341.

accelerating the Sovietisation of Czechoslovakia. More importantly, by 1948 the West had largely abandoned any notion of Soviet cooperation for a final determination of the status of Germany.

Alarmed by the prospect of a West German state, Stalin attempted to forestall the issue by obstructing access to West Berlin, culminating in the Berlin blockade.

The sudden deterioration of Soviet-Western relations across the board is essential for understanding subsequent events in Hungary, as the deterioration of the position of the West occurred in parallel to happenings elsewhere. In 1948, Rákosi moved to liquidate the remaining Western concerns in Hungary. In its attempt to flush out every remaining vestige of American influence in Hungary, trials of alleged saboteurs were staged by the regime, among them American nationals working in the Hungarian energy industry.<sup>31</sup> Their abductions led to a prolonged stand-off between the State Department and the Rákosi government which remained unresolved until 1951. Hungarian consulates were closed in America, while trade sanctions were deployed against the Soviet satellites via a licencing system which controlled the outflow of American exports to Europe.<sup>32</sup>

The new restrictions on East-West trade, designed to control the outflow of strategic materials to the Soviet Union, signified Washington's tacit recognition, not only of Hungary's entrenched status within the Soviet bloc, but also of the end of any American intentions to directly challenge that entrenchment. Such a reversal of postwar American policy after 1948 struck out at contradictory aims: American attempts to build influence in postwar Hungary via economic incentives having failed, the chief priority of her trade policy with Hungary became the containment of Soviet military potential. Her other objective, the subversion of Soviet control in the satellites by driving wedges between the Hungarian populace and the Soviet occupiers could no longer be maintained in the fragile economic sphere, nor by any American presence on the ground in Hungary. Henceforth American attempts to disrupt the cohesion of the Soviet bloc fell back upon covert means and exploiting unanticipated

31 BOR pp. 181.

32 FRUS 1948 Vol. IV pp. 553.



“opportunities.”

Having been shut out of Hungary by the Rákosi government on one hand, and having disavowed a direct contest to Soviet influence on the other, a third possibility presented itself by after 1948 in the form of the Tito-Stalin split. Tito's successful defiance of Stalin and his cultivation of a national Communist regime (“deviationism” in Communist parlance) seemed to offer a blueprint for the disruption of Soviet control in Eastern Europe. The tempting allure of the Yugoslav model for the State Department lay in its gradualism: the slow corrosion of Soviet authority in Eastern Europe, a kind of political siege implied by Washington's containment doctrine seemed the most desirable course of action which might effect the reduction of the Soviet Empire without recourse to war.

The National Security Council document NSC 58/2 outlined the new orientation in American policy toward the Soviet Satellites: while “liberation” of Eastern Europe remained a fundamental long-term cornerstone of American policy, the practical impediments of achieving them were overwhelming:

Since action in pursuit of the long term objective is not likely to achieve early results, NSC 58/2 is more particularly directed toward the short term objective of disrupting the Soviet-satellite relationship and in this way weaken the Soviet grip in these countries....the wave of purges involving Communists as well as non-Communists in these countries indicates that the Soviet leaders may well be worried over the prospects of large-scale “deviationism” and that their local Communist puppets are not at all secure in their position. In the atmosphere of suspicion and fear it may be open to us to widen some of the cracks which are appearing in the structure of Soviet control by psychological, economic and other means.<sup>33</sup>

In other words, Washington's policy became a waiting game in which it was believed that time was on the West's side. This siege strategy, combined with the growing polarisation of the world as seen from Washington during the 1950's meant that when Stalin offered fresh talks on German

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33 FRUS 1950 Vol. IV pp. 7.

unification in 1952, his advances were rebuffed by a suspicious American administration.<sup>34</sup>

In 1953 Eisenhower succeeded to the administration. During the election campaign, the Republican Party pushed for "Rollback" as opposed to "Containment." The success of the Republican campaign succeeded upon the back of the Second Red Scare, when accusations hurled by the McCarthyites against their political opponents, charging them of disloyalty and treason from within the highest organs of the American government, inflicted serious pressures upon national officials to pander to the exigencies of domestic opinion. Dissatisfaction with the geopolitical stalemate produced by the Truman administration in the world helped the Eisenhower campaign's promise of renewed and energetic measures to disrupt the alleged advance of Global Communism to resonate with the nation at large, and aided his sweeping victory in November. However, as events would soon prove, foreign policy under Eisenhower effected cosmetic shifts, rather than fundamental ones. Dulles' 'belligerent rhetoric notwithstanding, once in the State Department he largely fell in line with the previous administration's policies on Eastern Europe.

Apart from making such personnel changes to the Policy Planning Staff as to maintain political appearances, Dulles made one sweeping organisational modification which was to exact momentous consequences: the Policy Planning Staff, originally conceived by Marshall and Kennan as a committee of foreign policy experts to study and make policy recommendations, was removed from the aegis of the State Department and subjected to the authority of the National Security Council. The supersession of traditional foreign policy by "National Security Policy" in the United States through the efforts of Dulles had the immediate effect of transferring many decision-making resources and responsibilities

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34 An estimation of Eisenhower's foreign policy has gone through several paradigm shifts: now at least four generations of re-assessments, in which the so-called Revisionist, Hagiographical and Post-Revisionist camps have emphasised different aspects of Eisenhower-Dulles' foreign policy record, with differing estimations of his legacy. In an indirect manner, these estimations are inseparable from the manner in which American historians have been inclined to judge American actions during the Hungarian crisis. Bischof, Günter. 'Eindämmerung und Koexistenz oder "Rollback" und Befreiung? Die Vereinigten Staaten, das Sowjetimperium und die Ungarnkrise im Kalten Krieg, 1948-1956.' in: UKÖ pp.102-103.

from the ministries of the state to the Presidential Cabinet,<sup>35</sup> and would fundamentally change the shape and character of the American Constitution in the long-run. Dulles' exertion of control over American foreign policy had however, another, and more immediate consequence for Eastern Europe: the elevation of covert operations as the principle weapon of the Cold War.

The success of CIA in intervening politically in such places as Italy and Iran in the years preceding 1956 built up exaggerated premises within the American National Security apparatus about the potential of covert warfare. In a way too, covert warfare was a natural political outlet for the bellicose Dulles, who could neither embrace rapprochement with the Soviets, nor initiate an adventurous foreign policy potentially leading to war. The promise of covert warfare as a weapon to subvert and weaken Soviet power without direct military risk had a nascent appeal as a third-way doctrine. That in the end, “[Dulles'] proposed crusade amounted to little more than the intensification of psychological warfare,”<sup>36</sup> is certainly true, but that psychological war first began within the United States itself. As the embryonic pressures of the Media Presidency was advancing into the era of McCarthyism and Hydrogen Bombs, the infliction of contradictory imperatives increasingly demanded of the American leadership a policy of dualities, in which both the domestic addiction to “image-making” and the real imperatives of foreign policy may be simultaneously satisfied.

Thus when the Eisenhower administration's first NSC policy review on Eastern Europe was submitted in December 1953, the same limitations to American options in Eastern Europe were enumerated as the report of three years prior. However, due to the priority which the new administration placed on a fundamental change of political attitude, these limitations became the source of considerable incoherence in its basic recommendations: whereas “Incitement to premature revolt” in the Satellite states was to be avoided, the United States ought to “Be prepared to exploit any future

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35 Mosley, Leonard. *Dulles: A Biography of Eleanor, Allen, and John Foster Dulles and Their Family Network*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1978. pp. 308-309. (Henceforth: MOS)

36 Kovrig. In: HGP pp. 254-255.

disturbances similar to the East German riots of 1953.”<sup>37</sup> But what form should these preparations take? Should the United States be prepared to exacerbate a popular revolt which she would not have taken the moral responsibility to incite? These doctrinal questions remained unanswered until put to the test in 1956. Furthermore, the report made recommendations on the means which the United States did have at its disposal to attack the Soviet domination of Eastern Europe. Among these means supposedly at American disposal were “rallying the free world,” the utilisation of propaganda and increasing the economic difficulties of the Satellites via the continuation of export controls. The impotence of such measures to truly challenge the Soviet Union's hold on Eastern Europe was further diluted by its lack of a comprehensive vision. In drawing up its encyclopedic laundry lists of methods through which she might attack the Soviet Union short of war, the United States failed to see local or even regional problems as problems in their own right, rather than an issue subsidiary to victory in the Cold War. The NSC's grandiose long-term aims were reflected in its imprecision of language. In the report's recommendations on propaganda, for instance, its stated goal of “on one hand avoiding any commitments regarding when and how these people may be liberated and any incitement to premature revolt,” and on the other hand seeking to “maintain their faith in the eventual restoration of freedom,”<sup>38</sup> left considerable ambiguity as to what the content of such broadcasts into Eastern Europe should seek to achieve.

The coming together of the four Great Powers at Geneva in 1955, and the subsequent XX Soviet Party Congress in February 1956 which somewhat eased the tension in East-West relations compelled the Eisenhower administration to revise its views. Having previously estimated the

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37 NSC No. 3. Dated December 11, 1953. In: DOC pp. 34-35. Upon the death of Stalin in March, the question of the volatility of the Soviet hold over Eastern Europe was hastily discussed by Dulles, the State Department and the CIA. Dulles suddenly discovered that neither the State Department nor the CIA had any contingency plans for dealing with Stalin's death. In the absence of planning, or even a general estimate of its consequences, CIA director Frank Wisner recommended that Washington refrain from inciting the peoples of Eastern Europe, because they would be crushed militarily if they revolted. The CIA required time to smuggle arms and commandos into Eastern Europe before such a policy might succeed! MOS pp. 331.

38 Ibid. pp.42-43.

successful implementation of the Yugoslav model on any satellite country apart from Albania dimly, Khrushchev's efforts to mend differences with Tito after the XX Party Congress suggested that the USSR was now able to adopt a more accommodating policy on deviant forms of Communism. On the other hand, the renewed flexibility of Soviet policy in the aftermath of its de-Stalinisation suggested to American policy-makers that many of their aims could now be achieved by encouraging the internal process of change Soviet bloc. Therefore in its final recommendation before the tumultuous events of 1956, the NSC recommended a policy which would “stress evolutionary change rather than revolution change” within the satellites.<sup>39</sup>

To understand the eventual shift in American policy towards Hungary during the postwar years, from one of engagement, to resignation, to the formation of a “Captive Nations” doctrine which then failed in 1956, it is necessary to appreciate the slowness with which shifts in consensus are achieved in the policy-making establishment of Washington. The first consequence of this mental and physical procrastination occurred during the war, when Roosevelt preferred to believe that the political status-quo achieved as the result of military operations during the war would not prejudice a negotiated resolution of all controversial issues in a general peace conference after the war had ended. By the time the war ended, and the Soviets had established an effective monopoly of coercive force in Hungary, the Americans would only belatedly recognise the *de facto* partition of Europe. Even later on, in the substance of the NSC reports to the administration, it is clear that the American intelligence community's ability to predict the future in Eastern Europe amounted to a colossal failure.

One central feature of its estimations was its tendency to mistake the past for the future. Hence while in 1950, the Yugoslav example seemed an appealing model in prying loose the bonds of the “Captive Nations,” by July 1956, it had become “unlikely that the Yugoslav experience will be repeated in any [of the satellites.]”<sup>40</sup>, at a time when events in Poland had given renewed prospects of just such a

<sup>39</sup> NSC 5608/1. Dated July 18, 1956. DOC pp. 155.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. pp. 153. Contrast, however, with the detailed report prepared by U.S. Army Intelligence, which was able to gather

likelihood.

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substantial information, both psychological and political concerning conditions in Hungary since the armistice. Document No. 8: Study Prepared for U.S. Army Intelligence, "Hungary: Resistance Activities and Potentials," January 1956. DOC. pp. 86-105.

## IV

### Nagy's Russian Gambit

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With this I depart: that, as I slew my best lover for the good of Rome, I have the same dagger for myself, when it shall please my country to need my death. - Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*

Between the Second World War and the outbreak of the Hungarian Uprising, the situation and composition of the Hungarian government underwent several transformations, transformations largely determined by the tide of events abroad. The first leader of the Hungarian Communists, Mátyás Rákosi, had been a Muscovite and a bourgeois intellectual of Jewish extraction. Although known to posterity as by the appellation of "Stalin's best pupil," Rákosi appeared to have been disliked by Stalin personally, regardless of his grovelling, sycophantic behaviour before the Red Tsar. His eagerness to cultivate favour with Stalin perhaps galvanised him to push for the unpopular economic measures for which he is remembered: requisitions of property, forced collectivisation, and the rapid heavy industrialisation of what had hitherto been an agricultural economy. Nagy's emergence as a popular icon of the Hungarian resistance was due in a large degree to his opposition to the self-imposed economic depression of the Rákosi years.

The key instrument of Rákosi's authority rested in his personal access to Stalin himself. Thus when Tito split from the Soviet bloc in 1948, Rákosi became an enthusiastic instigator of a wave of "anti-Titoist" political purges within the Party. The controversial persecution, torture and execution of his Minister of the Interior, László Rajk, lent an atmosphere of repression and fear within the Party itself, which would lead to the fracture of the Party between the "hardliner" wing, led by Rákosi, Ernő

Gerö, and Minister of Defense Mihály Farkas, and the reformers, among whom Imre Nagy and János Kádár would become the most consequential.

The death of Rákosi's patron Stalin in 1953 led to a period of transition, in which events in Hungary largely mirrored the de-Stalinisation process then occurring in the Soviet Union, culminating in the dramatic events of 1956. The poor harvest of 1952, and Hungary's sorry economic quagmire in general offered the pretext in Moscow for a change of guard. In 1953 Rákosi was summoned to Moscow, and was there charged with his dictatorial style, his personality cult, and his jealous concentration of power at the exclusion of other loyal comrades. Rákosi was compelled to recant his errors, and appoint Nagy as Premier of Hungary.

Rákosi's fall from favour gave the reformers the temporary upper hand in Hungary, but the balance within the Council of Ministers had remained delicate.<sup>41</sup> In the period of internecine intrigue within the Soviet Union itself, no government in Hungary could establish itself in certain confidence of its authority, until the winner had emerged within the Kremlin. Rákosi was kept on as General Secretary, but it was clear that the Kremlin now favoured allowing Nagy the initiative in reforming the Hungarian state.

Imre Nagy emerged after the hubristic Rákosi-era as the most popular politician in Hungary, but his path to the apex was fraught with chance and misfortune. Born in 1896 in the town of Kaposvár, Nagy, unlike much of the Stalin-era leadership, was possessed neither of a formal education, nor was he of Jewish, or urbane extraction. Although later gaining the reputation for his populist, "peasant" qualities, Nagy's background was more properly *petit bourgeois*. His easy manners, rustic sentimentality, and penchant for both drink and women offered an almost Manichean contrast with the abstemious intellectualism of Rákosi.

Captured by the Tsarist Army during the First World War, Nagy came in contact with

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41 RAI pp. 59-60.



Communist doctrines as a POW in Russia. Nagy, now a dedicated Communist, elected to remain in the Soviet Union after the war. During his long exile in Moscow, Nagy occupied himself with a number of jobs, from translator to statistician to Soviet informant to wartime radio broadcaster in the Soviet Union's Hungarian radio service. His most prominent role, and most enduring legacy of the Moscow years, was his preoccupation with Agricultural problems in the context of Marxist theory. Although never having finished his formal education in Hungary, Nagy acquired by his personal diligence and tenacity obtained recognition as an authority of agricultural affairs. His principle theory which later set him out against the hardline Sovietisation of the Hungarian economy was largely concluded on the basis of an orthodox Marxist theory. Nagy was an early opponent of Rákosi's economic policies, on the grounds that the latter was attempting to leap directly from feudalism to socialism, without permitting the intermediary stage of capitalism to emerge, to wit, "the problem and challenge of the present in Hungary are not capitalism vs. socialism, but rather large vs small enterprise."<sup>42</sup>

Installed at the apex of the Hungarian Workers' Party in 1945, Nagy served first as Minister of the Interior, in which capacity he bore partial responsibility for the expulsion of ethnic Germans from Hungary. That Nagy occupied such an important and central position, one for which his constitution was particularly ill-suited, was reflective of the numerical weakness of Hungarian Communism in the postwar period. Nagy's meekness, his preference for focusing his energies upon agricultural theory and other academic subjects over the implementation of Stalinism in Hungary, and, most culpably in Rákosi's eyes, his open and jovial relationship with the common people meant that Nagy was soon demoted from his position of authority.

Rákosi's fall from grace in 1953, however, became Nagy's opportunity. In the Kremlin meeting of June 1953, Nagy spoke of the errors of Rákosi's policy: the cultivation of a police state, creating friction between the Party and the masses, and deviating from the principles of Marxist-Leninist

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42 Imre Nagy, "Egy brosúra margójára." in: *Új Hang* 4 (1938). Cit. in: RAI pp. 32.

teaching.<sup>43</sup> In other words, in the Kremlin's eyes, Nagy was the sincere, reform-minded Communist who, with the added benefit of personal popularity, seemed to be the most suitable man of the moment.

Although the Soviets initially gave their full backing to Nagy's "New Course": a programme for a more organic transition to socialism, they later became disturbed by many of the consequences of Nagy's dismantling of the Hungarian police apparatus, including the outbreak of anti-Soviet sentiment in the cities and countryside. The increasing distrust of the Soviet government for Nagy, and the opportunism of Rákosi, now waiting in the wing to denounce Nagy as an unfaithful Communist took its toll. After suffering a heart attack in 1955, Nagy was relieved of his position as Premier, and replaced by András Hegedüs, a more conservative figure. Thus at the outbreak of the 1956 revolt, Nagy held no official position within the government, although he became a favourite figure of Hungarian opposition groups, such as the Petöfi Circle.

In the meantime, events abroad had contributed to the eager anticipation of change at home. Since the end of the war, the Soviet Union had maintained troops on Hungarian soil. Their status as an occupying force was officially terminated by the peace treaty of 1947, but the Soviet presence in Hungary was prolonged via bilateral agreements in which the Soviet Union was entitled to station troops in Hungary to protect their lines of communication to Austria.<sup>44</sup> When the Soviet occupation of Austria came to an end in 1955, the legal pretext for the continuous presence of Soviet troops in Hungary also ceased to exist.

The downfall of Soviet Premier Malenkov in 1955 was a temporary respite for the hardliners in the Soviet bloc, as Malenkov had been the chief proponent of reform in Soviet foreign policy. However, Khrushchev soon emerged as a power behind reform. The immediate effects of Soviet policy were seen in its efforts to rehabilitate Yugoslavia, justified by a theory of "different paths to socialism." In reality, however, the Soviet Union's new policy on Yugoslavia served its strategic purposes, and did

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<sup>43</sup> RAI pp. 59.

<sup>44</sup> BOR pp. 226.

not fundamentally alter the status of the Soviet Union's European satellites. Khrushchev was willing to tolerate Yugoslav independence as a *fait accompli*, and a political necessity, but such toleration did not extend to the notion of permitting the Soviet dependencies to follow a similar path.<sup>45</sup> Nevertheless, the Soviet Union was increasingly eager to renegotiate her relationship with her satellites. The outbursts of 1956, in Poland first, and then in Hungary, forced the hand of Soviet policy in caught in an awkward era of transition, and temporarily halted its momentum.

The outbreak of revolts at the end of June in Poznan signalled the first great challenge to the post-Stalinist attempt to normalise Soviet relations with the satellites. The violent crackdown on the Polish protesters, involving over 50 dead and hundreds arrested, was the last gasp of the old guard Stalinists in Poland. In response to the crisis, the Polish Communists elected Gomulka, a reform figure as First Secretary in October. Gomulka's nomination was taken with alarm in Moscow, where it was feared that the new First Secretary might steer Poland towards an independent position within the Eastern Bloc. Gomulka's demand for the dismissal of Soviet general Rokossovsky as Polish defense minister seemed to confirm the Kremlin's fears that they were losing control over Poland. Thus as the threat of a Soviet invasion mounted on the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> of October, Khrushchev and Gomulka both backed down, and arrived at a compromise: Poland would remain firmly entrenched in the Soviet alliance, but exercise greater independence in her domestic policy. The de-escalation of the Polish crisis influenced Soviet thinking for a similar *modus vivendi* with the reformist Hungarian government a week later, and who would undoubtedly preferred to have come to a similar resolution, had the they found a willing partner in Budapest.

On October 23<sup>rd</sup>, just as the tensions in Poland were being defused, pro-Polish demonstrations broke out on the streets of Budapest. The demonstrations gradually escalated into a mass movement. The government was taken by surprise, as crowds of students gathered under Parliament had asked to

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45 BOR pp. 237.

hear from their most respected political figure, Nagy. Nagy's first speech revealed that he still harboured, in his own mind, the prospect of a reformed socialism within Hungary. His promises of widespread domestic changes, however, failed to placate the crowd. As the situation escalated, Nagy found himself facing increasingly difficult choices for which his simple and jovial constitution were temperamentally unsuited. While he worked to defuse the situation, First Secretary Gerö worked to bring Soviet troops into Budapest.

At the outbreak of the revolution, Nagy held no official posts in the government or party. Although Rákosi was now out of government, Gerö, a member of the old guard, was still entrenched as Secretary General.<sup>46</sup> However, as Soviet troops moved into Budapest, the Kremlin desperately sought a political solution to the problem. On October 24<sup>th</sup>, the Hungarian Politburo was reshuffled, with Nagy made Premier. The first duties of the new government was the debate on the presence of Soviet troops in Budapest, as well as measures for restoring order in the city.

Although Nagy commanded the pulpit, he did not command full authority. The Kremlin, in appointing the new cabinet, had underestimated the latent tensions between its members. Thus while the Kremlin put its support behind Nagy to author a peaceful resolution, at the same time, more forceful methods were being introduced by members acting at cross-purposes with Nagy to master the situation. Nagy's principal goal, that of disarming the demonstrators through negotiations and political promises were unsuccessful, but from the vantage of Moscow, it appeared that Nagy was playing his role perfectly. Thus on October 24<sup>th</sup>, at a meeting of the heads of states in the Eastern Bloc, Soviet leaders and their foreign allies expressed their approval of Nagy's actions, implicitly indicating their hope that Nagy would be able to stabilise the situation, paving the way for political negotiations between the Soviet Union and a new, moderate and reformist Hungarian government<sup>47</sup>

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46 In 1954 Rákosi was forced out to facilitate reconciliation with Tito, Rákosi's anti-Titoist purges, the most famous of whom was László Rajk had made him unsuitable for the new era of socialism. Hajdu, Tibor. In: HGP pp. 250.

47 DOC pp. 226. This document, apart from displaying the Kremlin's miscalculations about Hungary, shows the its obliviousness to the depths of inter-party conflict, now flowing into the open between the new Premier Nagy, and the

Such hopes were soon broken, when Soviet tanks fired into a crowd of Hungarian protesters, and a bloody battle broke out in the streets in which Hungarian police units dispatched to maintain order joined the revolt.<sup>48</sup>

The chaos into which the government was thrown, the demure reactions from Moscow, and the situational powerlessness of the hardline members of the Politburo created a vacuum of authority in which members of the Hungarian politburo, now impotent to maintain order, began another round of internal fighting which pitted the hardliners led by Gerö against the advocates of moderation, who were attacked as following a policy of "concessionalism." By the end of the day, however, the Soviets intervened and decided the issue by forcing Gerö to step down from the post of First Secretary.

Nagy was now at the helm of a foundering vessel. The two options available to him, the "political" and the "military" solutions were debated, and the political option received broad support. On the 27<sup>th</sup>, however, it became clear that the political reforms which must be implemented were far in excess of those initially contemplated. At a meeting with his old supporters from the demonstrators, Nagy was brutally informed that a growing rift was opening between him and the people. In his notes on that day, Nagy admitted that to invite Soviet intervention was to have the whole country turn against him.<sup>49</sup> It was probably from this moment on that Nagy was prepared to retreat from the party line, into a personal policy towards the uprising. In the succeeding days, he still attempted to stabilise the situation by granting increasing concessions. The ineffectual Hungarian security forces were ordered off the streets, as Nagy assured the demonstrators that he had begun negotiations to effect Soviet withdrawal, all the while working behind the scenes to maintain Soviet support for his accomodative policy.

While seeking to announce his new policy, Nagy kept in contact with the Soviet delegation in Budapest, Mikoyan and Suslov, who approved of Nagy's measures. However, a renewed outbreak of

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Party's First Secretary, Ernö Gerö.

48 DOC pp. 196-197.

49 RAI. pp. 111-112.

violence of the 28<sup>th</sup> once again set Nagy against the Old Guard within the politburo, who endorsed harsher measures.<sup>50</sup> Nonetheless, Nagy's radio message in the afternoon again expressed his solidarity with the protesters, and spoke of a "New Order" in the relationship between Hungary and the Soviet Union and the "National Independence" of the socialist countries.<sup>51</sup>

News of Nagy's actions in Budapest divided the Soviet Presidium, as the Malin notes now reveal. Mikoyan and Suslov had endorsed Nagy's policies in Budapest, but now the Soviet leadership, in view of the deteriorating situation, was left to make its own assessments. Fears about the unreliability of Nagy were raised, and Khrushchev raised the possibility, even likelihood, that Nagy would turn anti-Soviet. However, in the end no one raised their voice in favour of the only alternative: the formation of a new government, which could only be achieved by military occupation.<sup>52</sup> Thus on the 28<sup>th</sup> of October, the Soviet government appeared to still grudgingly form a consensus around supporting Nagy, albeit as a provisional policy. Soviet patience was reaching exhaustion, as from the view of the Kremlin, the initial wave of accommodating policies such as strengthening the hand of the reformers in Budapest, and being willing to take a hands-off approach to the crisis in deference to the national authority, had exacerbated the crisis to the extent that the Soviet Union was on a brink of a major international defeat. After the Soviet Presidium changed its mind and policy, on October 30<sup>th</sup> or 31<sup>st</sup>, Khrushchev argued that the loss of Hungary would be tantamount to the loss of Soviet prestige, which would "expose the weakness of [Soviet] positions."<sup>53</sup>

Although the reversal of Soviet policy was decided at the latest on the 31<sup>st</sup>, this dramatic turn-about went unperceived in Budapest, with great importance, for two reasons. First, on the 30<sup>th</sup>, Nagy received an advanced copy of the Soviet declaration to be issued the next day, the "Declaration of the

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50 RAI. pp. 113.

51 Gosztony, Peter, ed. *Der Ungarische Volksaufstand in Augenzeugenberichten*. Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1981. pp. 263.

52 DOC pp. 262-269.

53 DOC pp. 307.

Government of the USSR on basic principles of development and further strengthening of friendship and cooperation between the Soviet Union and the other socialist countries" which declared the readiness of the Soviet government to negotiate the presence of Red Army troops on Hungarian territory.<sup>54</sup> Secondly, during negotiations with the activists, it became clear that secession from the Warsaw Pact was one of the Revolution's cardinal demands.<sup>55</sup> From the streets in Budapest, it appeared that the Soviets were backing down, a scenario which perhaps emboldened Nagy to for the first time discuss on the 31<sup>st</sup> the possibility of Hungarian secession from the Warsaw Pact.

Nonetheless, Nagy received the first indications on the morning of the 31<sup>st</sup>, that Soviet troops were prepared to enter Hungary. At this juncture, Nagy took his boldest diplomatic gamble during the crisis: Nagy announced on the 1<sup>st</sup> of November, in a note via the Soviet embassy, then to all Hungarian legations, and finally on the public radio, that Hungary with withdrawing from the Warsaw Pact.

In the minutes of Nagy's cabinet meeting, and subsequently in the message delivered to Andropov, the programme of the government consisted of a join guarantee by the four Great Powers of Hungary's neutrality, and an appeal to the United Nations to confirm her status. If, however, the Soviet troops could be withdrawn immediately, Hungary would forgo approaching the United Nations.<sup>56</sup>

It has been said that the feverish hopes awakened by the victory of the revolt on November 1<sup>st</sup> awakened unreal hopes in the participants of November 1<sup>st</sup>, that when the declaration of neutrality came on November 1<sup>st</sup>, the euphoric mood already established in wake of the revolution's Pyrrhic victory gave the fighters of Budapest the confidence necessary to believe that Nagy's bold political stroke might succeed. In retrospect, historians have struggled to explain the rationale behind the act.

According to Békés, the government resolved on the measure "essentially because the situation could

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54 DOC pp. 300-302.

55 RAI pp. 119.

56 DOC pp. 328-329.

be no worse."<sup>57</sup> In Litván's estimation, the declaration of neutrality was a "leap in the dark."<sup>58</sup>

According to Nagy's biographer Rainer, "he wanted above all to gain time in the nearly hopeless situation, to take the Soviet leaders by surprise and to strike at their vulnerable point with a bold, internationally relevant initiative." Yet there is a general consensus around the conclusion that "Nagy wanted to negotiate directly with the leaders in Moscow and therefore left the request to the UN dangling,"<sup>59</sup> a view validated by Nagy's relative indifference to Western possibilities during the crisis.

Was Nagy's desperate gamble calculated to forestall, or even stop the imminent Soviet invasion? Did Nagy believe that such a declaration would force the Soviets back into seeking a diplomatic solution? Was it designed to rob the Soviets of a legal pretext for invasion? Was the threat to place the issue before the UN similarly an attempt to coerce the USSR into accepting Hungarian neutrality? We cannot be certain. What does seem certain is that neither Nagy, nor anyone else in the Hungarian government expected much help from the Western members of the four Great Powers. Whatever the Hungarian leadership attempted to achieve by their stillborn *fait accompli*, what Nagy wanted in November was what he had in late October: the consent of Moscow.

In the early days of November, Imre Nagy attempted to make contact with the leaders of the other socialist republics, in hopes of obtaining at first mediation, then refuge from Moscow. Due to parallel circumstances in Poland and Hungary, it was perhaps in Poland that the Revolution found its broadest support. To the Polish government too, Nagy appeared to have been a fellow reformer influenced by the "spirit of the Polish October." With the declaration of neutrality of November 1<sup>st</sup> however, Nagy had advanced one step too far, and hesitantly, Gomulka eventually acquiesced with the Moscow position on Hungary.<sup>60</sup> Nonetheless, the essential ambivalence of the Polish position was sustained after the overthrow of the Revolution, as after Nagy had fled to the Yugoslav embassy,

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57 HCP pp. 43.

58 RAV pp. 104.

59 RAI pp. 129.

60 Goralczyk, Bogdan. Die Ereignisse in Ungarn 1956 aus polnischer Perspektive. In: UKÖ pp. 192.



Gomulka once again attempted to play the role of mediator between Nagy and Kádár. Later on, after Nagy's capture, Gomulka attempted to persuade the Soviets to show Nagy leniency, to no avail.

In the beginning of November, Nagy had also attempted to reach out to Romanian leader Gheorghiu-Dej in order to broaden his channels of communication to the Kremlin. However, unbeknownst to him, Romanians had already decided upon offering to contribute troops to an eventual invasion of Hungary.<sup>61</sup>

Nagy's career, however, was brought to an end by a conspiracy involving the Yugoslav leader Tito, whose minister in Budapest sent Nagy and members of his government the first warnings of the anticipated Soviet entry into Budapest on November 4<sup>th</sup>. Nagy and his cabinet were offered sanctuary in the Yugoslav embassy. Once there, however, Nagy became the victim of a well-orchestrated plot by Tito, in agreement with the Soviets, to facilitate the removal of Nagy from power, and to persuade him to resign in favour of a new government led by Kádár, hence securing the legal foundations of the post-1956 régime.

After being enticed out of the Yugoslav embassy by Kádár by promises of safe passage, Nagy was betrayed for a final time, as he was arrested, tried and executed two years later.

During his short administration in 1956, Nagy's foreign policy, in so far as it existed, was based on illusory hopes, one in which the imperatives of domestic and foreign policy may both be simultaneously mastered. Imre Nagy was not a diplomat, and had virtually no experience of global politics, and unlike his predecessors and rivals Mátyás Rákosi and Ernő Gerő, Nagy had no understanding of the West.<sup>62</sup> In so far as he sought to consult foreign powers, he sought advice from the other socialist governments in the Eastern Bloc: Poland, Romania and Yugoslavia, who abandoned, betrayed and ultimately conspired against him. Nagy's narrow horizons, his instinctive desire to resolve

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61 RAI pp. 130-131.

62 Paul Lendvai suggests that, apart from the disadvantages of being an intellectual and a Jew, Rákosi's impeccable English meant that when visiting the White House on a trade mission in the mid-40's, Rákosi looked far too chummy with his host than was generally tolerated by the Soviets by the late 40's. L/VID pp. 435.

the issues within the framework of the Soviet bloc, and his vaccinating leadership meant that his foreign policy options became extremely limited at the onset of the crisis. If the Western Powers were slow to embrace Nagy as the figurehead of the revolution, this lack of regard was fully reciprocated by Nagy.

Looking at Nagy's decisions through the contours of the Cold War, it remains remarkable how little Nagy thought of exploiting Cold War cleavages to his advantage. Caution, character and conviction all played their roles in blocking a more ambitious vision, and the clumsiness of his attempts to juggle an impossible balance during the uprising displayed his limitations.

Even so, it remains difficult to see what alternatives Nagy had under the circumstances, other than walking down the path eventually tread by Kádár. For their respective decisions, Nagy was disgraced and executed, while Kádár became one of the longest-surviving leaders of the Communist World. Nonetheless, the difference between the two unenviable choices would mark for many years to come the distinction between martyrdom on one hand, and the treason on the other.

## V

## The Press, The Public, and the Crisis of Communism

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La Hongrie vaincue et enchaînée a plus fait pour la liberté et la justice qu'aucun peuple depuis vingt ans. Mais, pour que cette leçon atteigne et persuade en Occident ceux qui se bouchaient les oreilles et les yeux, il a fallu et nous ne pourrions nous en consoler, que le peuple hongrois versât à flots un sang qui sèche déjà dans les mémoires. - Albert Camus

As the Hungarian uprising began, media in the West was preoccupied with events in Poland. As the crisis in Hungary began to overshadow Poland, the centre of gravity slowly shifted southward. To millions of passive spectators in the West, the scale of the revolt became immediately obvious, although its significance was not yet known. Poland had always held a greater sentimental significance for the American public than Hungary, a sentiment which was mirrored in its greater strategic importance in East-West relations of the period. In *Time Magazine's* issue published the week following the revolt's outbreak, its commentary on events in Hungary was still limited to little more than a paragraph embedded in an article on the Soviet Satellites. It was clear that even by the end of October, Poland preoccupied American attentions.<sup>63</sup> By the time *Time* found its byline in November when it issued its verdict in "Hungary: The Five Days of Freedom," it was not much more than an obituary.<sup>64</sup>

In the less-detailed medium of newsreels and the daily press, the tenor was more quickly found. In them, there was little evidence that the events of October in Hungary had awakened any original epiphanies. By 1956 the bulk of American media was well-trained in the ideological catechism of the Cold War, and passions with which such events were to be depicted were almost reflexive; from the

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<sup>63</sup> 'The Satellites: Sudden & Dangerous' *Time* 29.10.1956.

<sup>64</sup> 'Hungary: The Five Days of Freedom.' *Time* 12.11.1956.

initial condemnation of the first Soviet intervention, to the celebratory mood of triumphalism when the plucky "freedom fighters" seemed to triumph at the end of October, to renewed depictions of Soviet brutality when Soviet tanks reappeared in Budapest in November.

Yet if the attitudes of the American press in those days reveals little to the historian about the Hungarian uprising, it reveals much about the attitudes held by the American public towards Central-Eastern Europe, the Captive Nations, during the early phases of the Cold War. The American media was privy to some of the tectonic shifts which had been occurring in the Soviet satellites since Stalin's death and magazines such as *Time* had covered some of the inter-party factionalism of Hungary's Working People's Party in years leading up to 1956.<sup>65</sup> When Nagy succeeded to the government of Hungary, and announced the New Course, his actions were interpreted as a communist surrender to popular pressure, rather than the culmination of power shifts within the party itself. The vacillations of fortune which occurred within the satellite Communist parties were duly reported, but its significance was limited in the eyes of the American Press.

Ever since the United States abandoned her claims to influence in Hungary in 1948, what happened in Budapest was traditionally interpreted through the lens of what was happening in Moscow. The estimation that every movement the globe over which went by the label of Communism was carefully masterminded from Moscow was already a view which led to momentous reactions over China, Korea and Indochina. That the Hungarian Communists, although formally dependent on Moscow, had a nerve centre of its own was a condition laden with too much ambiguity for the polarised atmosphere of the mid-50's. Therefore, while Gerö or Rákosi may be condemned, their roles were not seen as much more than the pawn-pushes of the Muscovite chessmasters, who bore the real burden of guilt. The conflict which broke out in 1956 was not seen through the prism of Hungarian socialist reformers versus Communist hardliners, but rather that of the Hungarian People versus the Soviet

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65 See: 'Hungary: Communist Confessional' *Time* 08.11.1954 and 'Hungary: Socialist Legality' *Time* 09.04.1956.

government, and, ultimately, of Freedom versus Oppression.

Between condemning Soviet actions and lauding the heroic struggles of the Hungarian "freedom fighters," the Western media displayed a curious indulgence for the seriousness of their own governments. In a typical example, in the Monday, November 5<sup>th</sup>, the *Guardian*, reporting the attack on Budapest, opened with the credulous headline "Eisenhower Calls on Russia to Withdraw Troops,"<sup>66</sup> thus flattering the addiction of Western leaders for making demands which they knew to be politically impossible.

However, on the other side of the fence, there appeared already in 1956, serious public voices of criticism in the West, deploring a response steeped in what it considered to be moral hypocrisy. Barely one week after the defeat of the insurrection, an article in *Der Spiegel* appeared written by magazine-founder Rudolf Augstein (under the *nom de plume* of Jens Daniel), which angrily vented against the baseness of the self-serving reactions which the Western governments had displayed towards Hungary.

Upon reflection, one is overcome by sadness when one sees how prominent politicians of the West reacted to the brutal onslaught of the Red Army, in which they either forget their own faults, or they use to reinforce their prejudices of self-righteousness.

No, they have not been right. They did not hold it possible that Poland could free herself from Russian serfdom without firing a single shot. They did not hold it possible that the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Hungary and Romanian would be brought to official discussion by the Soviets themselves. The tragedy of the result in Hungary, in which an ordeal impregnated with future promise was brought to a halt by the unleashing of the most terrible and bloody retribution, does not concern them.

For years they have not acknowledged that there are only two ways: either help the peoples of Eastern Europe by force of arms- an exceedingly honourable way, or pave the Soviets a way, through a tough political engagement

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66 'Soviet Tanks Crush Resistance' *The Guardian*. 5.11.1956.

back into their own borders. No one in the West had ever been ready to come to the aid of any of the rebels in the areas ruled by the Soviet Union. Whenever a revolt became drenched in blood, it was quite enough to give encouraging or commiserating speeches. Now Hungary too has been forced to learn this lethal lesson: that everyone who heeds the insincere and endlessly comforting liberation-speeches of Western politicians shall be betrayed.<sup>67</sup>

The events in Hungary had a larger geopolitical significance in public demonstrations it solicited in the other satellite states. In Poland especially, for the month between the outbreak of the revolt in Budapest, and the 19<sup>th</sup> of November, millions of dollars in materiel aid was given by Polish individuals, through the Polish Red Cross, and other such means. Large-scale demonstrations erupted around the country, with some reaching over 10 000 protesters.<sup>68</sup>

Public agitation was not confined within the frontiers of the People's Democracies. In those Western European countries which had a strong Communist presence, the outbreak of the Hungarian revolt triggered a wave of proxy conflicts. On November 7<sup>th</sup>, a public riot besieged the headquarters of *l'Humanité*, the Soviet-sponsored mouthpiece of the French Communist Party, with loss of life in the ensuing struggle.<sup>69</sup> Similar scenes occurred in Rome, as the gendarmerie had to be called in to protect Communist Party headquarters from passionate protesters. What had begun as student protests on events in a foreign country soon came to assume a domestic dimension.

If the outbursts of the anti-Communist public in the West had been riotous, the effects of the uprising the domestic Communist Parties of Western Europe were equally dramatic. The year 1956 was *l'année terrible* of the Western Communist movements. Initially, prior to the arrival of Soviet forces in November, the Italian Communist Party (PCI) under Togliatti attempted to pave over heightened

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67 Daniel, Jens. "Die Ungarische Tragödie." *Der Spiegel*. 14.11.1956. Translation mine.

68 Goralczyk, Bogdan. 'Die Ereignisse in Ungarn 1956 aus polnischer Perspektive.' in: UKÖ pp. 195.

69 *Le Parti Communiste Français et L'Année 1956*. Bobigny: Actes des Journées d'étude organisées par les Archives départementales de la Seine-Saint-Denis, 2006. pp. 39. (Hereafter: PCF)

tensions by hoping on a policy of Soviet moderation. Togliatti and the entire party were caught in a quandary over events in Budapest. The aspirations of Nagy, his expressed desires for an independent socialist course, reflected broad accord with the pluralist socialism adopted by the PCI leadership. Yet the instinctive, and parochial unwillingness to criticise the Soviet Union being the reflexive habit of the party, in the end, the PCI struggled to remain within the confines of the Moscow line. When the Red Army returned to Hungary, the Communist Party was forced into an uncomfortable choice. Finally, when Togliatti relented, and called the crushing of the uprising a 'brutal necessity'<sup>70</sup>, the party's internal solidarity had been cracked. Where the PCI refused to cross the line, individual members of the party spoke up. These controversies broke into the open at the VIII Congress of the PCI, where speaker Antonio Giolitti openly denounced the Soviet invasion of Hungary. 1956 was the watershed event in the history of the Italian left, in which hundreds of thousands of members walked out on the Communist Party, including Giolitti himself.<sup>71</sup>

In France too, the events of 1956 marked the apogee in the Communist Party's internal crisis. The French Communists under the leadership of first Thorez then Duclos had maintained a Stalinist posture through 1956. The internal dissent marked by de-Stalinisation had already fractured the Party, whereas the events of 1956 saw a further round of defections.<sup>72</sup>

While the major Communist Parties of the West clung on to the pro-Moscow line in 1956, her intellectuals and fellow-travellers were abandoning her. Camus, a year after the revolt, wrote of the shameful inadequacy of the West, and remarked that "Hungary conquered and in chains has done more for freedom and justice than any people in the last twenty years."<sup>73</sup> While the reaction of the Western left was largely condemnatory, the remaining defenders of the Soviet invasion largely conformed to the

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70 Urban, Joan Barth. *Moscow and the Italian Communist Party: From Togliatti to Berlingue*. London: I.B. Tauris, 1986. pp. 239.

71 "Between the Italian Communist Party's own count, some 400 000 members left between 1955 and 1957." Judt, Tony. *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945*. London: Penguin, 2006. pp. 321 (Hereafter: JPW)

72 PCF oo. 95.

73 Camus, Albert. *Le Sang des Hongrois*. Paris, 1957.

idea that that the uprising in Hungary had been co-opted by foreign and reactionary elements. One of the French intellectuals who refused to abandon his Muscovite views, Jean-Paul Sartre, reacted in *L'Express* views largely along these lines. In it, he spoke of the "possible existence of a reactionary conspiracy on the part of the army, everything shows that the Hungarian insurrection was orienting itself toward the wholesale liquidation of that which is the socialist base of the régime."<sup>74</sup> For him, as for Togliatti and undoubtedly thousands of other disoriented Communists in the West, the Hungarian episode was a "tragic" yet "brutal" necessity.

In Britain as well, 1956 saw the loss of Raphael Samuel and E.P. Thompson, to the Communist cause, as they left the Oxford Communist Historians Group and pursued a New Leftist course thereafter. Eric Hobsbawm, the most prominent member who remained behind, was again a symptomatic case of his ilk. After 1956, the West European Communist remnant would prefer to keep silent on issues of Stalinism and the Hungarian "tragedy."

It was not the case that the Communist intellectual remnants were completely taken in by the Soviet propaganda, which they found themselves compelled to repeat with ever more cynical voices, if at all. After 1956, those who remained loyal to the Communist party did so because of their unwillingness to compromise entrenched habits of thought, or because they had remained loyal to the romance and illusions of their youths. However, because of 1956, that generation was unable to transmit those illusions to a younger and fresher generation. In 1958, when the Imre Nagy Institute was established in Belgium, its overarching character remained overtly socialist. It was a time when the main thrust of its publications, that Imre Nagy had not been a traitor to socialism, might have still claimed a sympathetic readership among fellow-travellers in the West. By 1989, when Viktor Orban announced that "It is a consequence of the bloody repression of the Revolution that we have had to assume the burden of insolvency and reach for a way out of the Asiatic dead end into which have been

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<sup>74</sup> Sartre, Jean-Paul. "Après Budapest." In: *L'Express* 9.11.1956.



pushed. Truly, the Hungarian Socialist Worker's Party robbed today's youth of its future in 1956,"<sup>75</sup> the implication was clear. Even among the dedicated left, Europe and the West had moved on from its adolescent flirtation with Communism, with which Hungary remained bound in an unhappy marriage.

The greater effect of the Hungarian uprising on the United States was the revival of Hungary's image, however briefly, as the avatar of a freedom-fighting people. Atavistic memories of Lajos Kossuth's triumphal tour of America in 1851 swept back into American memory, as the outpouring of support in America for Hungary continued for the next decade,<sup>76</sup> buoyed by the energy of 1956. Such public outpouring of sympathy for Hungary was necessarily alloyed by the American public's projection of their own cultural and political outlooks unto a *Faraway People of Whom They Knew Nothing*. Although the hospitable reception with which Hungarian refugees were subsequently received into the United States, and the sympathies of the American people were authentic, these sympathies stemmed from a very general perception of the forces at play. In the ideological polarisation of the Cold War, the American people knew less about Hungary's politics or special circumstances, than they understood what the struggle in Hungary was really about. What had happened in Hungary confirmed their views that the contemporary world was one in which "freedom" struggled against Communist tyranny, and the Hungarian people in 1956 had left unambiguous the question of whose side they were on. Consequently, the belligerence with which the American press felt itself free to denounce Soviet actions, as contrasted with the cautious approach taken by her statesmen in diplomatic channels, were a mere reflection of the growing rift which had opened between what was being said internationally on one hand, and domestically on the other. Although it is not true that the twin October crises of Hungary and Suez were decisive in securing Eisenhower's electoral victory in his bid for a second term in November, Eisenhower's ability to role-play the part of an aggressive, confident and experienced leader

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75 JPW pp. 323.

76 Glant, Tibor. *The New York Times and the Memory of the 1956 Revolution*. Center for Hungarian Studies and Publications. <[http://hungarianpublications.org/uploads/text/studies/Glant\\_First.pdf](http://hungarianpublications.org/uploads/text/studies/Glant_First.pdf)> pp. 7. (Hereafter: GLA)

during the crises probably contributed to the landslide it became when the final votes were tallied, and in which Eisenhower swept 41 states, and all states outside of the South.

A few other curious and largely symbolic events occurred in the United States in consequence of 1956. Governor of New York Averell Harriman announced in 1958 the existence of a "Hungarian Freedom Fighters' Day" in his state<sup>77</sup>, a move imitated by Ronald Reagan on the national level in 1981. On Broadway, the cantankerous character Zoltan Karpathy from the musical *My Fair Lady* had her nationality changed from Hungarian to Romanian, while Pulitzer Prize winner James Michener in the following year penned the journalistic essay *The Bridge at Andau* (the border crossing with Austria through which many refugees poured) treating the tragic themes of the heroic resistance, and the Pyrrhic victory gained by the Red Army in crushing the freedom fighters of Budapest.

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<sup>77</sup> GLA pp. 6.

## VI

### The Janus-Faced Eagle

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Nicht Blindheit ist es, nicht Unwissenheit, was die Menschen und Staaten verdirbt. Nicht lange bleibt ihnen verborgen, wohin die eingeschlagene Bahn sie führen wird. - Leopold Von Ranke

The sentiments of the American people during the 1950's, that the world was in the midst of a Manichean clash of two great moral forces, was a view which was reflected in the prejudices of her policy-makers. In their view, the benefits and disadvantages to be gained by directly dealing with the Soviet satellite states were marginal. The only place where decisive results may be obtained was in Moscow. Thus while in the year 1956, relations between Washington and Budapest steadily improved, as Hungary sought direly need of American and West German economic aid,<sup>78</sup> none of these promising developments were noted, or even registered in the highest echelons of Washington when the waves of dissent unfurled themselves on the streets of Budapest in October.

It is fairly easy to pinpoint where the revolt lay in Washington's "Grand Picture" of the world in 1956. Whereas the Eisenhower administration eagerly sought to impress the world, and its own public, of the dynamism of its own global campaign against Communism, it had already tacitly accepted the *Status Quo* in Europe as the probable roadmap of the future. This doctrine, inevitably concluded on the premise of the balance-of-power concepts of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, implicitly underestimated the internal fragility of the Soviet system, as well as the capacity of the Captive Nations, who were awaiting their "liberation" by Washington to change the map of Europe through their own initiative.

Thus it was no surprise when, as the street demonstrations thickened into national revolt in

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<sup>78</sup> BOR pp. 278.

October, Washington was caught wrong-footed. In the scheme of the Cold War's master narrative, the insurrection of 1956 had come at an awkward time, when the West was attempting to push detente with the Soviet Union, and when the volatility of the peoples in Eastern Europe stood to frustrate this policy goal. Here, with the initiation of the unexpected, lie the weakness of Dulles' Janus-faced design: the United States could hardly pursue her goals of detente with Moscow by treading around the corpses of Hungarian martyrs. Some fitting position would have to be found to appease both sides of the dualism into which America's Cold War policy had trapped her policy-makers.

As noted, this doctrinal problem had been brushed aside during the first term of Eisenhower's presidency, as the inexorable rise of the CIA and covert operations in American national security policy provided a comfortable middle-ground in Central-Eastern Europe, providing the ability to take action without risking general war. Now, in 1956 the ultimate test came, as Foster Dulles and his friends in the CIA discovered their own impotence.

When the news of the uprising arrived in Washington, it was Frank Wisner, Director of Plans at the CIA who took the initiative for action. For the director of covert operations, the revolt in Budapest appeared to the opportunity for which the CIA had been directed to exploit. He pitched to CIA director Allen Dulles the prospect of taking active steps to aid the insurgency: the airlift of arms and supplies, as well as trained agents who may take the lead in organising the insurgency. For the CIA director, however, as for his brother, there was no prospect of active measures.<sup>79</sup> With the decisive presidential election merely days away, the administration was loathe to take any action which might upset global politics. Dulles was furthermore annoyed by the approaching Anglo-French intervention in Egypt, and all the more unhinged that their actions severely limited his room for manoeuvre.

On October 26<sup>th</sup>, when the issue of Hungary was brought up at a meeting of the NSC, Secretary Foster Dulles thought that there would thereafter be the presentation of two difficult alternatives for the

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79 MOS pp. 419-420.

Soviet Union: either a return to a hardline Stalinist policy vis-a-vis the satellites, or risk their loss through radical liberalisation. At the meeting, debate was raised as to whether the United States ought to open communications with the Soviet Union, affirming that the Western powers would take no approach to exploit a "free" Hungary to threaten the security of the USSR. Although Eisenhower rejected the motion in the NSC, the idea seemed to have won out later during the day, and Eisenhower changed his mind, although Foster Dulles remained objectionable to the entire enterprise.<sup>80</sup>

Eisenhower in any case was eager to "do something," or at least take the appearance of doing something. Although his wishes could not be ignored by Foster Dulles, they were effectively deflected when the secretary of state prevailed in insisting that the UN Security Council would be the most suitable arena for approaching the Soviets. In the meantime, precious days would pass, and as will be seen, the British and French would have their own agenda to face before the UN.

On October 27<sup>th</sup>, Foster Dulles acceded to Eisenhower's wishes and delivered a campaign speech at the Dallas Council of World Affairs, which was supposed to reassure Soviet leaders of America's disinterest in Soviet satellites as potential military allies. Dulles, however, as was his wont, operated independently and according to his personal inclinations. Prior to delivering the speech, he had it altered so that the final product had a far more aggressive appearance than intended by the President. In it, he boasted that in Poland and Hungary, the "weakness of Soviet imperialism [was] being made manifest." Of the role of the United States, Dulles affirmed that "the captive peoples should never have reason to doubt that in us a sincere and dedicated friend who share their aspirations," but "[who] do not look upon these nations as potential military allies." Instead, Washington saw them as "part of a new and friendly and no longer divided Europe,"<sup>81</sup> bulletin points hardly calculated to allay the anxieties of Soviet leaders.

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80 Memorandum of 301<sup>st</sup> NSC Meeting. 26.10.1956. In: DOC pp. 240-243. & Memoranda of Conversation between Eisenhower and Dulles. 26.10.1956. In: DOC pp.244-245.

81 FRUS 1955-1957. Eastern Europe. pp. 317-318.

The Secretary of State did not seem to operate under any apprehension that he was working against time, for when the NSC next discussed the Hungarian situation on the morning of the 1<sup>st</sup> of November, the participants declared the temporary victory of the Hungarian patriots to be a miracle. Three years prior, Wisner and the CIA eschewed the moral responsibility of outright encouraging the peoples of Eastern Europe to revolt, for fear of inadequate preparations taken by the CIA. Now Foster Dulles in command of the NSC held the leash on the CIA once again, as at first when the revolt broke out, it caught Dulles by surprise. By the end of October, Washington was again caught wrong-footed, by the surprising successes achieved by the revolt by the end of October, even without the support of foreign powers. In the NSC meeting of November 1<sup>st</sup>, Allen Dulles remarked tellingly on the occasion that "events had belied all our past views that a popular revolt in the face of modern weapons was an utter impossibility."<sup>82</sup> Events on the streets of Budapest had now outdone the clairvoyance of American policy-makers, as they once again were forced to re-evaluate the situation.

Again, they were unprepared, and again, they were too late, for on the same day, Soviet forces were returning to Hungary, and the prospects of a diplomatic solution had already passed. Borhi's subsequent assertion that American passivity during the crisis "did have a sound inner logic; American strategy was predicated on the slight hope that if Washington showed restraint, Moscow might be willing to accept the Finlandization of Hungary"<sup>83</sup> would thus seem to be a contradiction in terms. Buoyed on by Eisenhower, Foster Dulles was compelled to act, but he dragged his feet, and the "hope" was very slight indeed.

The gravest misconception of Dulles during the crisis was his premonition in the opening days of the revolt that it would inevitably put pressure on Moscow to either liberalise further, or retrench into Stalinism. In fact, until October 30<sup>th</sup>/31<sup>st</sup>, the Soviet Presidium was attempting to toe a middle-line, and its initial hopes invested in Nagy may be ironically contrasted with Dulles' open distrust and

<sup>82</sup> Memorandum of 302<sup>nd</sup> NSC Meeting. 01.11.1956. In: DOC pp. 324.

<sup>83</sup> BOR pp. 296.

dismissal of Nagy in the NSC meeting of November 1<sup>st</sup>, when his leadership was judged to have failed in rallying the insurgency. The lack of effective Hungarian leadership in Washington's eyes freed the American government to eschew the option of making direct contacts, and return to its preferred *modus operandi*: that of ignoring the domestic governments of the satellites.

No new resolutions were taken at the NSC meeting of November 1<sup>st</sup>, as the outbreak of the Suez crisis had cast the eyes of American policy-makers upon a more vital sphere of action. As preparations for a joint Western stand became bogged down over the inability of the Western Powers to unite in the UN, America's scope for action became limited to her ability to influence the Soviet Union via bi-lateral channels. Hence on November 4<sup>th</sup> an impotent letter was issued by Eisenhower's office to Soviet Chairman Bulganin, requesting the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Hungary. The request was, to no one's surprise, answered a few days later with a firm refusal. Thereafter there was nothing for the Eisenhower administration to do but wash its hands of the fiasco. After its successful re-election, the administration reiterated its argument, that while it had always supported the liberation of Eastern Europe, it was not responsible for encouraging the doomed rebellion in Hungary.<sup>84</sup>

Although the events in Hungary had damaged the detente process, they did not derail it completely. Soviet-American relations continued to improve during the late-50's, as the Cold War became normalised into a staple feature of the international system.

If the American reaction, caught in its own doctrinal mires, was passive and ambiguous, the reaction of her primary allies was even less energetic. Britain and France were, at the time of the outbreak of the revolt, in the final preparatory stages of an attack on Egypt. Both governments, like Washington, were eager to communicate to Moscow their intentions to avoid provocations during the crisis.<sup>85</sup> Although Cold War-era Eastern Bloc historians had frequently accused the Anglo-French

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84 Békés, Csaba. *The 1956 Hungarian Revolution and World Politics*. Budapest: Institute for the History of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution. 1996. pp. 24. (Hereafter: HRWP)

85 HRWP pp. 17.

governments of exploiting the situation in Hungary to divert global attentions from their own adventure in North Africa, researches conducted by Csaba Békés have made a frequently congruent case, that the scheduling for the Suez operation was planned out between Britain, France and Israel a day prior to the outbreak of demonstrations in Hungary.<sup>86</sup> Thus when the Israeli attack commenced on October 29<sup>th</sup>, it was not in reaction to developments in Europe, but in conformity to the schedule set out on the 22<sup>nd</sup> at Sèvres. When the uprisings did break loose, the timing was bound to create difficulties for Britain, France and Israel, as comparisons between Hungary and Egypt could hardly be avoided in international opinion. Subsequently, the breakdown of attempts to coordinate a policy response among the three Western Powers hinged on the friction which developed in consequence of Suez, and the disparate interests pursued by the United States on one hand, and the Anglo-French governments on the other. The failure of the Western efforts at the UN, to be covered in the next chapter, was merely a mitigation of the initial disunion of the West in late-October. The consequent disintegration at the UN was merely a reflection of that.

On October 25<sup>th</sup> the British Foreign Office discussed how to best respond to the appearance in Budapest of the Red Army. According to the Memorandum of Eastern European Affairs director Thomas Brimelow, the British government was under the misapprehension that Nagy was responsible for the "invitation" of Red Army reinforcements into Budapest, but nonetheless indicated its preference for Nagy over likely alternatives, for Nagy "seems to offer the best prospects for a more liberal Communist regime in Hungary."<sup>87</sup> Above all, according to the memorandum, "we must be careful not to say anything which might encourage hotheads in Budapest to further useless rioting." Britain's passivity was further reinforced when Foreign Secretary Selwyn Lloyd drafted a new memorandum on October 31<sup>st</sup>, advising against directly contacting the Soviets. Such a letter, in the judgement of the Foreign Secretary, would be "mere polemics," a judgement undoubtedly befitting Eisenhower's later

<sup>86</sup> HRWP pp. 18.

<sup>87</sup> Memorandum from Thomas Brimelow to the British Foreign Office News Department. 25.10.1956. In: DOC pp. 234.



attempts.<sup>88</sup> As Eden did not receive the Foreign Secretary's note for many days, during which he was preoccupied with the Suez operation, the Hungarian issue never achieved more than a secondary importance in British attentions, except as a diplomatic hindrance at the United Nations, where both Suez and Hungary were scheduled to be discussed at the beginning of November.

At the beginning of the Hungarian crisis, the French government too, was occupied hosting the three-power conference at Sévres, in preparation for the joint Egyptian operation. In addition to the distraction of Egypt, France had a domestic insurgency of her own to deal with in Algeria which became a growing concern in the mid-50's. Nonetheless, according to Gusztáv Kecskés, "French Foreign Ministry officials received the news of the Hungarian Revolution with a sincere desire to help," however, their effectiveness was hampered by the secrecy in which the momentous preparations for Egypt the government had been cloaked. Nonetheless, "French diplomats- although affected more closely by the Algerian war and Suez events – paid closer attention to the case of Hungary."<sup>89</sup>

French sympathies for Eastern Europe were expressed as a matter of course by the French Foreign Minister Christian Pineau in a speech on October 26<sup>th</sup>, nonetheless, like his British and American counterparts, he preferred treading with caution to seizing the opportunity, and took the occasion to announce France's non-intervention in Hungarian affairs.<sup>90</sup>

In West Germany, Konrad Adenauer, perhaps the foreign leader closest to Foster Dulles, fashioned his response in the same belligerent spirit as his American friend. In a speech in Hanover at the beginning of the revolt, Adenauer attacked the legitimacy of the German Democratic Republic by reading aloud the support given by the GDR to Soviet actions. Adenauer concluded: "I am ashamed, that a German should have written in such a manner. I believe, that the incidents in Poland and Hungary justify our last declaration, that we shall never deal with the regime, with the enslavers of the

88 Draft Minute by Selwyn Lloyd to Anthony Eden. 31.10.1956. In: DOC pp. 317.

89 See: Kecskés, Gusztáv. 'The Suez Crisis and the 1956 Hungarian Revolution.' In: *East European Quarterly*. Vol. XXXV, Spring 2001, No. 1. pp. 47-58.

90 HRWP pp. 17.

'GDR.'"<sup>91</sup>

Unlike West Germany, which was securely entrenched in the Western bloc, the response of the Austrian government was necessarily more ambiguous, since neutrality in the Cold War had been one of her treaty obligations of 1955. Thus, although Austrian sympathies were largely with the Hungarian demonstrators, form had to be observed in the practise of her foreign policy. Thus, when on October 28<sup>th</sup>, Vienna sent out a note imploring the Soviet Union to "end the bloodshed, and stating that "re-establishment of freedom on the basis of human rights will strengthen peace in Europe,"<sup>92</sup> the note was circulated among the three Western Powers as well. Austria's attempts to accede to her international obligations, while serving as a sanctuary for Hungarian refugees aroused Soviet suspicions, and led to recriminations which however did not deter Vienna from her policies.

Although the startling coincidence of the Hungarian uprising and the Suez crisis made the diplomatic efforts of the period more acrimonious, and frustrated the Hungarian fighters who saw in Anglo-French actions a betrayal of *their* cause<sup>93</sup>, it was clear that even if there had been no Suez crisis, the West would not have substantially altered their policy towards Hungary in October. The only way of securing Hungary's freedom in 1956 would have been with the threat of war, and few historians, either then or today, thought that such should have been the policy of the Western Powers. Nonetheless, was the policy of entrenched passivity the only alternative, or was there indeed a third way? For many years, some historians have suggested that Washington might have offered Moscow concessions in Europe as the price for leaving Hungary: that the United States might be prepared to disengage from the Cold War if the Soviets were willing to retreat from some of their holdings.<sup>94</sup> Indeed, Eisenhower's call to Foster Dulles on October 26<sup>th</sup> invited the exploration of this very prospect, although the

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91 Bulletin des Presse- und Informationsamtes der Bundesregierung. Presse- und Informationsamt der Bundesregierung. 30.10.1956, Nr. 205. Bonn: Deutscher Bundesverlag.

92 Nielsen, Catherine. 'Neutrality vs Neutralism: Austrian Neutrality and the 1956 Hungarian Crisis.' In: UKÖ. pp. 228.

93 RAV pp. 100.

94 See for example, the reflections of Hungarian-American historian John Lukacs in his 1998 book *A Thread of Years*. Lukacs, John. *A Thread of Years*. London: Yale University Press, 1998. pp. 390.

concessions the United States would have eventually had to offer demanded a much higher price than Eisenhower's vague suggestions at the outset. One view, taken by some Hungarian critics of the Eisenhower administration, and of Foster Dulles in particular, centred around their willingness to *rather bear those ills they had, than fly to others they knew not of*. To wit, in the mirror of Hungary reflected their unwillingness to challenge the crystallising division of Europe.

The view that the Soviet leadership could have perhaps been persuaded to leave Hungary by offering Western concessions is not completely groundless, as minutes of the CC Presidium during the crisis show, prestige was a factor in the Soviet decision to return to Hungary at the end of October.<sup>95</sup> Yet for the Soviet Union, the problems in Budapest concerned not only Hungary, but the volatility of the entire Eastern bloc. After the withdrawal from Austria, Hungary was never more than an asset of secondary strategic importance to the Soviet Union. However, if Hungary were allowed to leave the Warsaw Pact, what would have been the consequence of the precedence for other Warsaw Pact states? Although Hungarian critics sometimes bemoan that the West did not expend enough efforts to extricate Hungary from the Warsaw Pact in 1956, the problem was much larger than Hungary alone.<sup>96</sup>

Finally, the question must be begged: was the Eisenhower administration ever really serious about finding a way to keep the Soviets out of Hungary? If we take the question to mean the Eisenhower administration in its totality, the answer is not as transparent as may be wished. Eisenhower himself did seem to express some concern for his administration's lack of action during the crisis in Hungary, and, on the final leg of an electoral race, seemed eager to be at least *seen* as doing something to alleviate the crisis. However, in matters of foreign affairs, Eisenhower was never a match for Foster Dulles, who effectively directed American foreign policy under his administrations. The two Dulles brothers, who had between them shaped America's national security doctrine since 1953, were

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<sup>95</sup> Minutes of the CPSU CC Presidium Meeting. 31.10.1956. In: DOC pp. 307.

<sup>96</sup> The one country which did leave the Warsaw Pact, Albania, cannot be compared with this case, as Albania shared no contiguous frontier with other Warsaw Pact members, and was of minimal strategic significance.

in no eagerness to "deal" with Russia. At the end of the Korean War, Foster Dulles' unwillingness to approach the Soviets so frustrated Eisenhower, that the latter was supposed to have retorted: "If Mr. Dulles and all his sophisticated advisers really mean that they can not talk peace seriously, then I am in the wrong pew. For if it's war we should be talking about, I know the people to give me advice on that – and they're not in the State Department."<sup>97</sup> In reality, the determined Dulles brothers had no interest in overturning Truman's doctrine of containment which they inherited. Their instinctive, hard-line attitude of *neither war nor detente* meant in effect under their tenure, the United States was pursuing a policy of permanent division in Europe, although rhetoric supplied it with many epithets.

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97 MOS pp. 332.

## VII

### Failure at the U.N.

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Unfortunately, the policy of violating the inalienable rights of peoples is still in evidence in the United Nations itself. - Nikita Khrushchev<sup>98</sup>

In the days succeeding the outbreak of revolts in Hungary, the three Western Powers were in accord on the subject of Hungary. Each government had independently come to the conclusion that provocative measures against the Soviet Union were to be avoided, effectively meaning that pressure could only be applied from a different quarter: through the motions of the UN. This approach to the UN was decided upon in Washington on October 26<sup>th</sup>, and the United States in turn invited Anglo-French participation in a joint initiative to convene a special UN meeting in which the subject of Hungary might be placed on the agenda.<sup>99</sup>

Although formally allied to the British and French in Europe, the CIA under Allen Dulles had taken little heed of British interests in the Empire, and, on occasion, actively sought to displace British influence in it. A series of incidents during the first years of the Eisenhower administration in Central America and the Persian Gulf saw CIA operations come to blows with British interests.<sup>100</sup> Foster Dulles too, failed to cultivate cordial relationships with the Anglo-French leadership. The inclination of the French to withdraw from Indochina in 1954 further exasperated him, as he attempted to pressure the government of Mendès France to reverse course, to no avail. Apart from a difference of policy, a difference of temperament fundamentally separated Dulles from his European counterparts, as Dulles

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98 Address to the United Nations General Assembly, Sept. 23 1960.

99 HRWP pp. 18.

100 See: MOS pp. 342-351.

preferred a practical, informal diplomacy, often calculated to elude accountability and unashamed of placing his would-be allies in embarrassing situations. Having cultivated less than cordial relations with the European powers prior to the Suez crisis, the Secretary of State turned against them when the time came to condemn Anglo-French actions publicly before the world.

Such endeavours could have done no other than harm the ability of the Western Powers to act as a cohesive bloc in cases of emergency, and particularly on Hungary. The demand by Dulles to the British and French that the Western Powers treat the Hungarian issue in tandem was accepted only after considerable resistance, as the two European Powers were scheduled to commence their North Africa operations on the 31<sup>st</sup> of October themselves, and a high-profile political remonstrance against Soviet actions in Hungary would have been awkward indeed. Nonetheless, the joint request was submitted by the three powers to the Security Council on the 27<sup>th</sup>.<sup>101</sup>

The Security Council never had the opportunity to debate the tripartite proposal before Israeli forces moved against Egypt on October 29<sup>th</sup>. On the next day, the British and French governments issued ultimatums to both Egypt and Israel, while the Anglo-French code name for the Suez operation, *Musketeer*, was given on October 31<sup>st</sup>.

The debacle over the Suez had been many years in the making. Since 1951, the Egyptians had attempted to abrogate Britain's traditional rights on the Suez Canal. As the Arab Revolution in Egypt which brought about the presidency of Nasser created further friction with Britain, London looked to Paris and Washington for diplomatic support. Support was not forthcoming from Washington, although the State Department too, had become wary of Nasser's overt attempts to exploit Cold War rivalries for domestic gain. The United States, then in the process of financing the Aswan Dam project to build favour with Egypt, withdrew from the collaboration. Nonetheless, Dulles was cold to the idea of a military strike against Nasser, as he had no wish to witness a resurgence of British influence in the

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101 HRWP pp. 19.

region.

France was more supportive of British overtures, as by 1956 the government of Guy Mollet had faced an escalating Arab revolt in Algeria, a revolt which was not only supported, but actively aided by Nasser's government. Furthermore, France's close ties to Israel gave British the possibility of staging a local action to justify her own intervention. Thus the leaders of Britain, France and Israel met at Sévres from the 22<sup>nd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> of October, to finalise the details of their impending operations against Egypt.

The plan called for Israel to invade the Sinai peninsula, whereupon Britain and France would intervene in the role of a peacekeeping force, and deploy their troops to cover the Suez Canal, and incidentally separate the Israeli and Egyptian forces. As previously indicated, the timing of the Suez operation was not predicated on any premonition of what was about to happen in Eastern Europe; the leaders only discovered the extent of those portentous events after leaving the conference.

When the British and French did commence their military intervention in the Suez on the 31<sup>st</sup>, the Eisenhower White House was resolved to speak up. In an address on the same day, Eisenhower rebuked the Western European allies and remarked that “There can be no law if we work to invoke one code of international conduct for those we oppose and another for our friends.”<sup>102</sup> Nor did American actions restrict itself to public pronouncements, as in the UN Security Council, the US representative opened a motion demanding a return to the *status quo ante* in the Middle East, a motion supported by the Soviet representative. Although the Anglo-French possession of a veto was capable of jettisoning any resolution from being adopted in the Security Council, the diplomatic embarrassment could not be concealed.

Why did the Eisenhower administration decide so precipitously to take its stand against the UK and France? As the minutes of the 302<sup>nd</sup> meeting of the NSC shows, Foster Dulles' arguments were decisive in the formulation of Washington's doctrine. Dulles attempted to impress upon Eisenhower

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<sup>102</sup> Hartmann, Frederick H. *The New Age of American Foreign Policy*. London: Macmillan, 1970.

that the United States had been "walking a tightrope between the effort to maintain [her] old and valued relations with [her] British and French allies on one hand, and on the other trying to assure [herself] of the friendship and understanding of newly independent countries who have escaped from colonialism." Furthermore, for Dulles, who was inclined to reduce the European Empires anyhow, introduced the ideological angle: that "Unless [the US] now asserts and maintains [...] leadership, all these newly independent countries will turn from us to the USSR."<sup>103</sup> More revealing from the minutes of the 302<sup>nd</sup> NSC meeting was how completely the Suez crisis had overtaken the crisis in Hungary as the cardinal priority of the national agenda. Dulles, who had exercised extreme caution when dealing with the USSR on Hungary, now had fewer inhibitions when it came to being provocative towards his allies.

The stand-off between the Americans and the British and French in the Security Council meant a complete breakdown of Western cooperation in the UN on the Hungarian issue. In the Security Council, British and French delegates moved to secure a hastily-drafted resolution condemning Soviet actions. Such a resolution would certainly have been met with a Soviet veto, but the procedural approach served the desire of the British and French governments to move the debate on Hungary into the General Assembly, where it might have been considered alongside the impending debate on the Suez crisis. The attempt to fuse the Suez and Hungarian crises into a single debate was a conscious policy move, in order to alleviate some of the pressures on the Western European Powers at the UNGA.

Therefore on November 2<sup>nd</sup>, British and French delegates at the UN attempted to persuade their American counterpart to move with them on an immediate UNSC resolution, but to no avail. The British delegate, Dickson, thereupon remonstrated that the Americans had lost interest in Hungary, and only wanted to increase pressure on the UK and France.<sup>104</sup>

The Anglo-French initiative to move the Hungarian debate into the General Assembly was

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<sup>103</sup> FRUS 1955-1957. Vol. XVI. pp. 906. This was also more or less the line which Dulles gave the British and French at the tripartite conference in July: that the United States would not support any military action in the Suez zone. Fuhrer, Hans Rudolf. 'Ungarn und Suez: Militärische Aspekte einer Doppelkrise im Kalten Krieg.' In: UKÖ pp. 153.

<sup>104</sup> FRUS 1955-1957. Vol. XXV. pp. 368.



opposed by the Americans, who were determined to orchestrate a cease fire in the Suez, and had few qualms about going over the heads of their allies to achieve it. The two debates were to remain separate issues.<sup>105</sup> However, the scene at the UN changed on the 4<sup>th</sup> of November, as the Soviets invaded Hungary, at a time when the American UN representatives had broken off negotiations with their Anglo-French counterparts due to deadlock over the Suez. Prior to the return of the Soviet Army to scene, the United States had intended to use the debates in the UN as an opportunity to engage with Soviet diplomats behind the scenes. Now the American representative, Henry Cabot Lodge implemented the Anglo-French plan without consulting his allies. The motion to refer the Hungarian debate to an emergency session of the General Assembly was initiated and passed.

The removal of the issue from the Security Council to the General Assembly was a tactical choice. So long as the interested powers held the veto in the UNSC, there was no chance of any resolutions being adopted. The General Assembly operated under no such impediments, but as its resolutions were non-binding and unenforceable, the pressures it could exert were largely moral. Such pressure was duly applied in GA, when the American motion calling for the withdrawal of Soviet troops was put to a vote. Fifty nations supported the resolution, eight against and fifteen abstained.<sup>106</sup> The resolutions of the GA imposed no discomfort on the Kremlin, as Soviet leaders already knew that the Great Powers who sponsored the resolution had no intention of backing it up with their own political or physical resources.

Viewed from the Hungarian side, the UN too was a woefully inadequate instrument for the resolution of their problems. By the time the issue of Hungary moved to the General Assembly, Nagy's

<sup>105</sup> See: Békés, Csaba. Secret Negotiations by the Western Great Powers October 26th-November 4<sup>th</sup> 1956. British Foreign Office Documents. Hungarian Cultural Center New York. <<http://www.reimaginefreedom.org/studies/doc/858.htm>>.

<sup>106</sup> Györkei, Jenő., *Horváth, Miklós, ed. Soviet Military Intervention in Hungary 1956*. Trans. Emma Evans. Budapest: CEU Press, 1999. Poland, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Bulgaria and Albania voted against the proposal, while Yugoslavia, India, Finland and most Arab nations abstained. The resolution *A/RES/1004(ES-II)* also called upon the member nations to supply Hungary with humanitarian aid, and affirmed Hungary's right to self-determination. The line taken by the Soviet delegate, Suslov, at the UN argued that Nagy's government had been deposed by the Hungarian workers, and his appeal to the UN was therefore legitimate. The workers of Hungary had nominated a new provisional government, at whose invitation Soviet forces entered Hungary.

government had already approached the UN, albeit with its own motives. On November 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup>, Nagy, pressed by the prospect of the unfolding Soviet invasion, sent telegrams to UN Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld, asking for UN aid in arranging a Four-Power recognition of Hungarian neutrality.<sup>107</sup> Simultaneously, Nagy hoped, much in the same vein as the US government, to use the UN debates as a forum for approaching the Soviets for bi-lateral negotiations. In the resolution adopted by Nagy's cabinet on the 1<sup>st</sup>, the Hungarian government would annul their requests to the UN if the Soviets would reverse course on troop deployments.<sup>108</sup> The international outreach to the UN and the Western Powers, then, was not so much an attempt to resolve the crisis, but an attempt to improve the Hungarian government's leverage in bi-lateral negotiations with Moscow.

In a tragic twist of fate, Nagy's gamble at the UN backfired on all counts. His appeal to external intervention did not stay the Soviet invasion, but incriminated Nagy of treasonous and heretical acts after the Soviet-backed régime of Kadar was installed in power. When the UN received his appeals, the acrimonious relationship between the 'Great Powers' to whom Nagy appealed had reached their nadir, and who, in any case, had displayed little confidence in his government as the crisis unfolded.

In retrospect, Nagy's approach to the UN had a whiff of 19<sup>th</sup> century diplomacy, in which a small power might have appealed to a Congress of Great Powers to find a compromise. However, as the positions taken by the three Western Powers had proved, in 1956 at least, the Western Powers had lost their ability to conduct the necessary feats of dexterity which might have been performed by past generations.

Throughout the twin dilemmas of Hungary and Egypt, Washington, London and Paris exhibited a crisis-averse mentality which unconsciously reinforced the *status quo* in the world. The only Great Power which did exhibit considerable agility during the crisis was the Soviet Union, which navigated her way out of the labyrinth under circumstances of great fortune. The Suez crisis influenced her ability

107 Telegrams from Nagy to Hammarskjöld. 01.11.1956 & 02.11.1956. In: DOC pp. 332-333, 346.

108 Minutes of the Nagy Government's 4<sup>th</sup> Cabinet Meeting. 01.11.1956. In: DOC pp. 328.

to respond in Hungary in three ways. First, facing the prospect of lost prestige in Egypt, the Soviets could not acquiesce in a second defeat in Hungary. The fear of losing face temporarily reinforced the hardliner position in the Presidium in building a consensus behind intervention. Secondly, the diversion of the world's attention to Egypt provided her with a useful diplomatic cover for undertaking her repression of the Hungarian rebels. Finally, the fallout between the Western Powers fatally impeded their ability to take a concerted stand during the most vital days of the Soviet invasion.

As Dulles had to restrain Wisner and the CIA from being overeager during the crisis period, so did the US State Department work to restrain other would-be allies in adopting an aggressive approach to Hungary. Thus when Franco's foreign minister, Artajo attempted to sound out the US on the possibilities of sending a Spanish volunteer force to Hungary, the State Department responded unambiguously, that the US would give no support to such actions, and requested that Spain refrain from taking independent initiative.<sup>109</sup> Dulles promised the Spanish, as he promised Eisenhower, that the main thrust of America's efforts would be channelled through the UN.

The UN, apart from adopting a resolution urging with withdrawal of Soviet troops in Hungary, adopted several other meaningless resolutions of a moral character. A UN Special Committee was sent on a fact-finding mission and issue a report on the uprising. Since the Kádár government refused to admit UN inspectors into Hungary, nor would the Romanian government, then in custody of Imre Nagy, permit access to the deposed Hungarian leader, the special committee assembled its report largely based on refugee accounts. Unsurprisingly, its findings were that the demonstrations which began on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of October were legitimate expressions of popular will, and that the new Hungarian government led by János Kádár had little sympathy amongst the public. Its conclusion, that the Soviet Union's action in Hungary constituted a violation of Hungarian sovereignty<sup>110</sup>, was again endorsed by

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109 BOR pp. 300.

110 See: *United Nations Report of the Special Committee on the Problem of Hungary*. General Assembly. Official Records: Eleventh Session. Supplement No. 18 (A/3592) New York. 1957.

an overwhelming majority of the assembly.

The question of whether better cooperation between the Western Powers would have mattered is in want of a definite answer, but more than fifty years after the failed Western 'diplomatic offensive' at the UN, there remain valid reasons to be sceptical of their intentions. At the time, it was understandable that, given what was happening behind the scenes, the British and French were hesitant to behave impulsively on Hungary. In the United States, with Eisenhower facing an impending election, and Dulles firmly at the helm of foreign policy, there was never much prospect of strong measures by Washington. Eisenhower appeared to have felt some concern over the inaction of his government, whereupon Dulles persuaded both the President and his foreign allies, that the United States intended to take action through the UN. Yet Dulles knew from the beginning that there were no instruments in the UN which may compel the USSR to change her Eastern European policy. Ironically, having shifted the focus of the US diplomatic offensive to the UN, at the UN Dulles was perfectly happy to permit a merely perfunctory condemnation of Soviet activities, rather than place the full diplomatic weight of his nation behind the 'moral consensus' thereby achieved. More plausible is the explanation that Dulles needed the UN as an arena for his 'Janus-faced' diplomacy, whereby he might create the impression of having secured a moral victory, without having actually achieved one. As the British and French delegates to the UN complained, the Americans were more interested in putting pressure on her own allies at the critical juncture, than on the Soviet Union. Had she been serious about Hungary, Western solidarity would have been required, which in turn would have required a tacit acceptance of the Anglo-French position in Egypt, however disagreeable to the State Department. As Békés concluded in his essay,

The UNGA provided an ideal playground for [the] political see-saw game, given that its resolutions were far from coercive measures, especially not when they condemned a superpower or its allies. Since this was a well-known

fact in Moscow, the Americans were hoping that the Soviets, who had not shown the least concern about international public opinion, would not be seriously distressed.<sup>111</sup>

The manner in which the United States attempted to negotiate the dual crises of October suggests that Washington had sought and won a double 'moral' victory by her stand, and her ultimate victory over her own allies was far more consequential than that over her nominal rival.

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111 HRWP pp. 23.

## VIII

### Radio Free Europe

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A trumpeter, bravely leading on the soldiers, was captured by the enemy. He cried out to his captors, "Pray spare me, and do not take my life without cause or inquiry. I have not slain a single man of your troop. I have no arms, and carry nothing but this brass trumpet." "That is the very reason for which you should be put to death," they said; "for, while you do not fight yourself, your trumpet stirs all the others to battle." - Aesop

Of all the mangled elements of American policy either implemented or otherwise, the broadcasts of Radio Free Europe into Hungary during the crisis had elicited the greatest degree of attention.

In 1956, radio propaganda had been a relatively novel phenomenon in the United States. Prior to the Second World War, the United States, in contrast to most European nations, lacked the presence of a state-owned radio apparatus. It was only after Pearl Harbor that the American government, through the Office of the Coordinator of Information, soon hereafter to be renamed to the Office of War Information (OWI), began the dissemination of state propaganda via, most prominently, Voice of America radio broadcasting.<sup>112</sup> The onset of the Cold War renewed the appeal of information wars as a political instrument of the American government, an appeal which intensified under the Eisenhower administration. The course toward the expansion of unconventional and covert tactics in the American arsenal received their impetus from George Kennan's *Long Telegram*, which outlined the variety of informational and covert 'subterranean' tactics likely to be employed by the Soviet Union to enfeeble the strength and unity of the West.

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112 Puddington, Arch. *Broadcasting Freedom: the Cold War triumph of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty*. Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2003. pp. 7 (Hereafter: PUD)

The initiative for the expansion of radio propaganda into Soviet-controlled Europe, then, was at its inception conceived to be a counter-propaganda campaign against the Soviet Union. In 1948, the Policy Planning Staff presented a proposal to the NSC concerning the establishment of "liberation committees" which would preserve national hopes, provide inspiration for popular resistance, and, in the event of a war, serve as springboards for liberation campaigns for the satellite nations.<sup>113</sup> In the following year, Radio Free Europe was founded by a group of prominent anti-Communist statesmen led by Allen Dulles, whose CIA subsequently became the primary financial supporter of RFE. One distinctive feature of RFE was its ability to mobilise a talented group of Central- and Eastern-European émigrés and refugees who operated the broadcasting under American supervision. Unlike the Voice of America, RFE was not conceived as a mouthpiece of the American government, but rather a competitive source of information in each targeted country, where the inhabitants would be addressed by their own diaspora from beyond the Iron Curtain.<sup>114</sup> The radio was based in Munich, due to its proximity to its targets, and national channels were formed, of which, the Hungarian section, the VFH, or Voice for Free Hungary, was responsible for maintaining a Hungarian-language schedule. The programmes, nominally independent and non-affiliated, became an effective propaganda tool for the CIA in Central-Eastern Europe, where, among other achievements, it announced the death of Stalin before the the Eastern Bloc's news apparatus managed to obtain TASS clearance, and leaked the contents of Khrushchev's "secret" XX Congress speech to the satellite nations.<sup>115</sup>

The ascent of the CIA under the leadership of Allen Dulles saw "psychological warfare" consolidated as a fundamental component of American global strategy. In particular, where it pertained to the Captive Nations, the NSC meeting of December 11<sup>th</sup>, 1953 advised propaganda, along with

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113 Cummings, Richard H. *Radio Free Europe's Crusade for Freedom: Rallying Americans Behind Cold War Broadcasting*. Jefferson: McFarland & Co., 2010. pp. 6

114 Holt, Robert T. *Radio Free Europe*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1958. pp. 3

115 Granville, Johanna. "Caught With Jam on Our Fingers": Radio Free Europe and the Hungarian Revolution in 1956. *Diplomatic history* Vol. 29. no. 5 (2005) pp. 811-839. pp. 821 (Hereafter: GRA)

diplomatic, economic and covert warfare as a means by which the United States might "attack the Soviet domination of the satellites."<sup>116</sup>

When Budapest arose in protest in October, Radio Free Europe's basic structure and constitution exhibited its weaknesses. The fact that the staff of RFE was mainly composed of Hungarian émigrés, who were undoubtedly moved by the drama unfolding in their homeland, contributed to the exuberant, immoderate and encouraging nature of many of the controversial broadcasts. During the initial week of apparent triumph, the broadcasters of RFE not only used language which intimated the prospect of Western action, but supplied military tactical advice to the rebels. The radio programming openly encouraged the rebels to persevere in their fight, promising a political payoff which, of course, never arose. They furthermore overstated the rebellion's capacity for military resistance in face of a Soviet armoured offensive; in one of its most irresponsible broadcasts reflecting all these shortcomings, on the 28<sup>th</sup> of October, it was announced that:

Three days ago we said that every day, every hour gained by resistance is worthy the sacrifice, lessens the risk. This statement of ours is emphasized by the meeting of the U.N.'s Security Council, called together for tonight ... There are rumors that Moscow ordered further three or four divisions into Hungary from the Sub-Carpathian area and Rumania. According to pessimists these forces will snap up the freedom fighters in no time. We on the other hand say: let us not be scared of these numbers indicated as overpowering forces.<sup>117</sup>

In contradiction to the NSC's policy of dodging moral responsibility for violent conflagrations which may occur in Central-Eastern Europe, the staff of RFE, mesmerised by the prospect of achieving the goal for which they had worked for many years in exile, employed the American propaganda

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116 NSC Nr. 174. In: DOC pp. 42. The term 'psychological warfare' apparently appeared in the English language during the Second World War, as a mutation of the German word *Weltanschauungskrieg*, a phrase originating in Nazi doctrine, and perhaps more accurately descriptive of 50's Cold War propaganda than its latent English translation. GRA pp. 813  
 117 RFE Broadcast On October 28<sup>th</sup>, 1956. Borsanyi, Julian. 'Armed Forces Special No. B-1' In: DOC pp. 286.



machine in a cause in which they severely overestimated their chances. In its unambiguous encouragement of the rebels during the waning days of October, the RFE had effectively detached itself from the discipline which Foster Dulles had been frantically attempting to impose upon all branches of government, in order to prevent them from acting with undue aggressiveness. This included restraining the CIA, the primary patron of RFE, in whose ranks there was also much incredulity that the occasion which they had long awaited would now be doused by an inexplicably passive policy. After all, if covert operations doctrine was not promulgated to take advantage of situations such as this, what was its purpose at all?

The CIA and all its aligned projects, including RFE had become part of the swollen National Security apparatus built up by the Dulles brothers to be the main armies of the Cold War. Now Foster Dulles found it difficult to impose his will down the chain of command, and commanders on the ground employed local initiative, buoyed by personal feelings and motivations which were, in the circumstances, understandable.

After the Soviets returned to crush the uprising in November, Radio Free Europe's conduct during the revolt began to be called into question. The Eisenhower administration fell back upon the exculpatory fiction, that RFE was a private organisation independent of the government.<sup>118</sup> The initial excuses of RFE's organisation too, denied any activities other than "factual reporting of the news without any exaggeration, predictions, or promises."<sup>119</sup> Soon, however, the truth was revealed, as transcripts of the broadcasted programmes were translated and became available. In December, an internal report by RFE's internal political adviser William Griffith found that although RFE's reports during the crisis contained relatively few flagrant violations of policy, they contained many

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118 When the American ambassador to the U.N., Henry Cabot Lodge complained to Eisenhower about American culpability in inciting the Hungarian revolts through RFE, and subsequently turning their backs on them when they got in trouble, Eisenhower responded that he had not incited anyone to rebel. Memoranda of Telephone Conversations between Eisenhower and Lodge on November 9<sup>th</sup>. In: DOC pp. 406.

119 GRA pp. 823.

exaggerations, insinuations and distortions which gave an altogether false impression of Western policy at the time. The report concluded, that

In General, we have found that the VFH (Voice for Free Hungary) did not measure up to our expectations during the first two weeks of the Hungarian Revolution. ... Many of the rules of effective broadcasting technique were violated. The tone of the broadcasts was over-excited. There was too much rhetoric, too much emotionalism, too much generalisation. The great majority of the programs were lacking in humility and subtlety. VFH output for the first two-week period in particular had a distinct 'émigré' tone; too little specific reference was made to the desires and demands of the people in the country.<sup>120</sup>

Thereafter, commenting on the military advice dispensed by RFE on anti-tank, guerrilla and partisan tactics to the fighters in Budapest, the report wryly stated that: "Here at its worse is the émigré on the outside, without responsibility or authority, giving detailed advice to the people fighting at home."<sup>121</sup>

In the aftermath of a doomed revolt in which over 2 500 Hungarians were killed and countless more wounded, the atrocious encouragement and illusions of hope dangled by the announcers of RFE demanded a heavy soul-searching on part of the broadcasters and speechwriters who had so severely overreached the occasion. Their actions had been in contravention of established American doctrine on the use of propaganda, as well as the foreign policy decisions of the moment. Yet in another vein, it is reasonable to reconsider whether the ambiguous stance outlined in NSC Nr. 174, in which "utilization of our propaganda facilities is conditioned by the necessity of, on the one hand avoiding any commitments regarding when and how these peoples may be liberated and any incitement to premature revolt, and on the other hand seeking to maintain their faith in the eventual restoration of freedom"<sup>122</sup>

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120 Policy Review of Voice for Free Hungary Programming, October 23-November 23, 1956. In: DOC pp. 465.

121 Ibid.

122 NSC Nr. 174. In: DOC pp. 42-43. Also cited above.

did not pave the path to irresponsibility by attempting to avoid responsibility. As an astonished Frank Wisner asked Allen Dulles during the uprising, "What [happened to] 'liberation' and 'rollback'?"<sup>123</sup> The Eisenhower administration and Dulles in particular had for three years sold the world and its own public on its determination to liberate the Captive Nations. Their doctrines indicated that they wished for success but were unwilling to be responsible for failure. This in essence meant that liberation would become a proactive policy only when it stood a chance of happening without risk anyhow. In the meantime, there would be abstract measures to weaken the Soviet Union's political, military and economic potential, so that some day, somehow, this might come about. Those who eagerly awaited a different policy from Washington in the feverish October days could be forgiven for failing to read between the lines of what was effectively a non-policy.

Nonetheless, the NSC's phrase of "attacking Soviet domination of the satellites" was not a mere slogan, but became the fundamental purpose of RFE, for the satellites were regarded in Washington as the Achilles' heel of the Soviet Empire. As Eisenhower's psychological strategist Charles Douglas Jackson conceived it, "If we can keep the Russians busy with the people they have already conquered by holding out a genuine hope of freedom, we can, perhaps, prevent the march across Western Europe." Even more baldly, former CIA-director General Walter Bedell Smith saw RFE as an effective instrument in exacerbating Soviet problems in the satellites: "These countries are in the Soviet back yard, and only as their people are reminded that the outside world has not forgotten them...do they remain potential deterrents to Soviet aggression. Therefore the mission of RFE merits greater support than before. It serves our national interest and the cause of peace."<sup>124</sup>

Implicit in such views was that the "liberation" of the satellites was now, in the new, scientific and bureaucratic era of American policy-making, a tactical lever to be employed in pursuit of the ultimate goal, rather than the ultimate goal itself. This orientation also accounts for the hostility with

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<sup>123</sup> MOS pp. 420.

<sup>124</sup> Both cit. in: PUD pp. 15.

which RFE treated Nagy's reformist regime after 1953, and why it continued to incite against his government well into the Revolution. RFE's American backers were in the early-50's not much excited by the prospect of gradual and localised solutions to the Cold War. Rather, they were fixated by the big picture of power dynamics between the Great Powers, a picture in which the pawns were acceptable sacrifices for an opportunity to strike at the opposing king. Ironically, the very "neurotic view" of global affairs diagnosed of the Soviet Union in Kennan's 1946 article, which had directed her "toward weakening of power and influence and contacts of advanced Western nations" as its ultimate goal had, *mutatis mutandis*, become reflective of the behaviour of the American government as well.

There remains the question of what role, if any, the RFE broadcasts had in eliciting a Soviet response. In her essay on the subject, Johanna Granville posited that the Soviet leaders saw the activities of Radio Free Europe (which they colloquially called Voice of America) as evidence of the extent of American subversive activities in their sphere of influence. The Hungarian Communist leaders had long blamed anti-Soviet attitudes within the Hungarian populace on foreign, reactionary, and imperialist influences, above all the popular broadcasts sponsored and funded by the West. On November 2<sup>nd</sup> while attempting to explain the situation in Moscow, Münnich blamed foreign radio broadcasts, among other influences, for the extent of the revolts. In the post-revolt Kádárite era, the compromising presence of RFE during the uprising aligned with the régime's assertion that the initially reformist demonstrations had been infiltrated by foreign and "counterrevolutionary" elements, who aimed to overthrow Communist leadership in Hungary, and sever solidarity in the socialist world.<sup>125</sup> Although it is probably true that the post-revolutionary régime in Hungary intentionally exaggerated the intensity and effectiveness of foreign infiltration to justify its own repressive actions, it was not an entirely baseless attribution of the CIA's motives.

Radio Free Europe's effect in bolstering the Hungarian resistance is equally difficult to evaluate.

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125 GRA pp. 822.

Subsequent surveys of Hungarian refugees have shown that among the rank and file of the revolutionaries, RFE's broadcasts had a more than negligible effect. While RFE played no part in inciting the revolt, when the revolt had ignited, and, for a few days, appeared to be within the reach of victory, RFE's exhortations merely reinforced those illusions which the fighters in Hungary were predisposed to believe. Some interviewees surveyed after the suppression of the revolt claimed that on the basis of RFE's broadcasts, they were led to believe in a successful political transition. Others claimed that they were led to believe that a war was imminent.<sup>126</sup> In any case, such flights of hope and fantasy did not reach the well-informed circles of Budapest, who cherished few expectations, and had no relevance to the policies of the Nagy cabinet.<sup>127</sup>

Seen in its entirety, the fiasco of Radio Free Europe cannot be laid solely on the back of the Eisenhower administration. In its exuberant rhetoric of late-October, the broadcasters of Radio Free Europe had grossly exceeded its internal operating standards, which in turn conformed to the ground rules laid down by the official dicta of American foreign policy. However, as the propaganda policy of the American government made clear, the United States had wanted it both ways, for what was the purpose of the CIA's string of "covert operations" in Hungary, if not to prepare the groundwork for civil revolt? With the moral and political failure of liberation propaganda in 1956, the incoherence of its basic doctrine was made manifest, as political damage control became an embedded concept in the architecture of foreign policy, although most people in the era, including those old-fashioned idealists fighting and dying in Budapest, were not yet cynical enough to realise it.

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<sup>126</sup> According to Borhi, one RFE survey among refugees showed that approximately half expected some kind of American intervention. Borhi, László. 'Liberation or Inaction? The U.S. and Hungary in 1956.' in: UKÖ. pp. 133-134.

<sup>127</sup> RAV pp. 99.

## IX

### Reflections and Legacy

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If men could learn from history, what lessons it might teach us! But passion and party blind our eyes, and the light which experience gives us is a lantern on the stern which shines only on the waves behind. - Samuel Taylor Coleridge

On January 28th 1989, Imre Pozsgay spoke for the first time of a *népfelkelés*, a popular uprising. During the Kádár-era, the prescribed terms were "counter-revolutionary events," and later, "counter-revolutionary tragedy." After Imre Pozsgay opened the door, "popular uprising" has since 1989 been the preferred term in Hungary for the events of 1956, whereas in foreign, and particularly English-speaking literature, the word *Revolution* has been the preferred moniker.<sup>128</sup> The distinction is subtle but significant: a Revolution implies the usurpation of government by forces hostile to her. However, what had happened in 1956 was a rising up, at first by the people, but eventually, by the government as well, in opposition to foreign and alien domination.<sup>129</sup>

Thus on the 6th of July, 1989, when János Kádár died, on the same day, the Supreme Court of Hungary annulled the indictment of Imre Nagy and his co-defendants, as presented over four decades ago.<sup>130</sup> This act of national beatification symbolised the posthumous exoneration of the Uprising, as well as of the ill-fated Nagy government, who, whatever his personal and political failures, in the end represented the will of his country. The re-legitimisation of the Revolt and Nagy has, in the ensuing

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128 Deák, István "1956 in Hungarian Memory and Public Consciousness." UKÖ pp. 89.

129 The Hungarian Uprising was also more universally popular than the most famous Revolutions of Western nostalgia: In the French, American, Dutch, Russian Revolutions, and in the Revolutions of 1948, the revolutions were still the revolutions of particular classes, galvanised by the leadership of a hard minority. The Revolution of 1956 was supported by virtually everyone in Hungary, and never managed to find effective leadership.

130 RAI pp. 192

political arena, failed to clarify the open question of who was to inherit the Revolution. The questions opened would lead to a trail of divisive acrimonies over the next two decades, from which not even the reputation of Imre Nagy would remain immune.

In the the United States, apart from the minority of the public who remember the events of 1956 with remorse and cathartic pathos<sup>131</sup>, the lessons still remembered have still eluded public introspection.

On the 50th anniversary of 1956, with Hungary was again in civil chaos, George W. Bush flew into Budapest for the memorial events. In his speech, he declared that "we've learned from your example, and we resolve that when people stand up for their freedom, America will stand with them." The "lesson" which George W. Bush had learned was of course disarmingly simple: "We'll help the Iraqis defeat the enemies of freedom," the pupil told his teachers.<sup>132</sup> Not a word on why the Americans did not, indeed, could not have "stood with them" in 1956. Over two centuries ago, Edmund Burke warned the Europe of his age that "circumstances give in reality to every political principle its distinguishing colour and discriminating effect. The circumstances are what render every civil and political scheme beneficial or noxious to mankind."<sup>133</sup> In 1956, the rulers of America suddenly and rudely discovered that their particular historical "circumstances" prevented their political principles from acquiring the hues of reality. It is a lesson all too easily forgotten by the great "propositional nation." Easily forgetting history, by stripping history down to its "political principles," fifty years onward, Hungary was still *That Faraway People of Whom They Knew Nothing*.

Yet for the bearers of memory, the year 1956 was a watershed year for West and East alike. In the Soviet Bloc, the uncertainties raised in inter-Bloc relations by the death of Stalin appeared to have

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131 See, for instance, conservative commentator Pat Buchanan's eulogy on the 50th anniversary of 1956: "To those of us then of the same age as the Hungarian students, the heroism of Budapest in 1956 was unforgettable. And what we felt as the Russian tanks crushed them was shame. They had risked their lives in the fight against communist tyranny, but we were not willing to do the same." Buchanan, Patrick J. "November '56: Defining Moment"

132 Stolberg, Sheryl Gay. "Bush Compares Iraq War to Hungary's Uprising." *New York Times*. June 22, 2006.

133 In *Reflections on the Revolution in France*

been closed: the contrast in the manner in which the Soviets dealt with Gomulka on one hand, and Nagy on the other, illustrated the extent to which the Soviets were prepared to reform her relations with her satellites.

In the West, the year 1956 marked the year which saw the final stage of Britain's imperial retreat, as her responsibilities in the World were gradually being usurped by the United States. Henceforth, Eden's successor, MacMillian, would see Britain's role in the world as playing the Greek Polybius to America's Roman Scipio: "Whatever their hesitations, however ambivalent they might feel about particular US actions, British governments would henceforth cleave loyally to US positions."<sup>134</sup> In France, De Gaulle drew the opposite conclusion: whatever the strategic benefits of French atlanticism, it could no longer be counted on to defend French interests.

The Hungarian Uprising of 1956 is still seen as a milestone in the Cold War, but in reality, its most farreaching and revolutionary consequences were upon the relationships of states within the two alliance blocs themselves. In the long path to detente between East and West, the events of 1956 were merely an unpleasant bump in the road. Less than three years after the quelling of the Uprising, Khrushchev was invited to the United States to tour the country. At the National Press Club in Washington, Khrushchev was asked by one reporter how he intended to justify the decisions of his government in Hungary. With peasant embarrassment, Khrushchev responded that

The so-called Hungarian question, you see, has stuck like a dead rat in the throat of some people they are disgusted with it and yet cannot spit it out [...] We have long settled all matters with Hungary and are advancing triumphantly shoulder to shoulder. They are building socialism and we are building communism. [...] I can add that I will not ask you any counter-questions of this kind, because I have come to the United States with other aims, because I've come with good intentions and an open heart. I have come here, not to dig up various questions so as to aggravate

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134 JPW pp. 299.



relations between our two countries.<sup>135</sup>

Khrushchev's visitation to the United States were met at the time with public expressions of outrage and protest. None of these, nor the record of Soviet actions fundamentally changed the course of the American Ship of State. For the next three decades, Hungary remained in the Eastern Bloc, under tolerable circumstances, due to the tact and moderation of a relatively liberal Communist régime. In the end, the fate of Hungary was, as the generation of policy-makers under Foster Dulles had suspected, intimately bound with political earthquakes emanating from Moscow. In its basic premonitions about the world then, the Eisenhower administration's judgement seems to have been vindicated by the events of the late-1980's. Still, the historian cannot help but suspect that they were right for the wrong reasons.

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135 Khrushchev, Nikita. *Khrushchev in America*. New York: Crosscurrents Press, 1960. pp. 28-29

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