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# International Relations and the 1956 Hungarian Revolution: a Cold War Case Study

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*Da die Ungarische Revolution im Jahre 1956 nur im internationalen Zusammenhang verstanden werden kann, bietet dieser Artikel einen Überblick über die internationalen Beziehungen während der Krisentage im Oktober/November 1956. Nach einigen historiographischen Bemerkungen werden zunächst grundlegende Aspekte der Nachkriegsordnung und des Kalten Krieges behandelt. Denn um das Verhalten des Westens während der Revolution zu verstehen, sind die nach 1945 etablierten und beiderseitig akzeptierten Einflussphären der beiden Großmächte USA und UdSSR grundlegend. Nur damit und mit der Angst des Westens vor einer nuklearen Eskalation lässt sich die Untätigkeit der Westmächte, allen voran der USA, erklären.*

*Wichtige Meilensteine hin zum Ausbruch der Revolution in Ungarn waren z.B. der „Arbeiteraufstand“ in Ostdeutschland 1953, der österreichische Staatsvertrag 1955, der 20. Parteitag der Kommunistischen Partei der Sowjetunion 1956 oder der „Polnische Herbst“, der 1956 quasi die Initialzündung für die Ereignisse in Ungarn darstellte. Der Aufstand in Ungarn, der am 22. Oktober mit Studentendemonstrationen begann und bald in einen Volksaufstand gegen die sowjetischen Besatzer mündete, wird in diesem Artikel mit den Entscheidungen im Moskau und in Washington verknüpft und im Zusammenhang mit der parallel ablaufenden Suez-Krise gesehen. Während die Westmächte aus den oben angeführten Gründen untätig blieben, schlugen Truppen der Roten Armee – nach anfänglichem Zögern der Kremelführung – schließlich den Aufstand in zwei Wellen nieder. Die sich parallel zu den ungarischen Ereignissen entwickelnde Krise im Nahen Osten, wo Frankreich, Großbritannien und Israel Ägypten angriffen, führte zu großen Unstimmigkeiten unter den westlichen Alliierten und erschwerte so ein geschlossenes Auftreten in der ungarischen Frage.*

*Der Beitrag greift auch die Rolle der Vereinten Nationen und die Diskussionen im Sicherheitsrat und der Generalversammlung auf, die das Zerwürfnis der westlichen Partner deutlich werden lassen. Schließlich wird auch noch auf die angebliche Involvierungen der CIA eingegangen und gezeigt, dass die amerikanischen Geheimdienste – im Gegensatz zu den Anschuldigungen aus dem Ostblock – weder die Revolution ausgelöst noch aktiv unterstützt hatten.*

The year 1956 stands out uniquely in the history of the Cold War for it was characterized by a unique accumulation of two major international crises. This chapter focuses on one of them, namely the Hungarian Revolution which erupted in autumn 1956.

The dramatic events in Hungary in October/November 1956 can only be understood when placed in an international context; a single-state approach can only yield one-sided and unsatisfying results. Historical research has shown that the Hungarian Revolution's fate was essentially decided by international politics. If the events of the preceding years were connected to changes in world politics, Hungary's fate became almost entirely dependent on the reactions of the great powers and other members of the world community after the outbreak of the armed uprising and the Soviet intervention. This chapter pays heed to this fact and therefore presents the bigger picture and the inter-relating factors between the essential states involved.

This case study in power from the 1950s opens many new perspectives concerning the analyses of public power and international relations in the course of history. The Cold War was a historically unique period where the states had to operate under the hitherto unprecedented conditions of a strictly bipolar world. In addition to that, when speaking about the post-1945 world, states can no longer be the only relevant points of reference for scholars studying international relations for a much broader spectrum of actors has to be taken into consideration: for instance, the newly created supranational organisations like the United Nations or the institutions generated by the European integration process had its saying and influenced decision making. On the following pages, the author will strive to analyze the way the international community in its larger sense – as explained above – reacted to the 1956 crisis under the unique circumstances of a bipolar world with two fixed spheres of influence.

States have traditionally been at the centre of analysis of international relations; especially the 'realist school' holds this perspective. When discussing international relations during the Cold War it is helpful to characterize the opposing types of states which faced each other off along the Iron Curtain: the 'democratic' states of the Western camp and the 'socialist' states of the Eastern bloc. Since this chapter deals with an uprising inside the Soviet orbit which was partly directed against this very system some reflections on the nature of socialist states seem adequate.

A 'socialist' (or 'communist') state can be defined as a state governed by a single political party (in occurrence the communist party) which declares its allegiance to the principles of Marxism-Leninism. These states are characterized by state ownership of productive resources in a planned economy, by a strong state apparatus dominated by the communist party and by totalitarian, authoritarian and repressive rule. The socialist states claimed to be what Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, the 'fathers of socialism', called the "dictatorship of the proletariat", defined as a transitional phase before reaching communism<sup>1</sup>.

While societies based on communist (or similar) ideologies have existed throughout history communist states are an innovation of the 20th century. With the hindsight of

our times we can say that communist governments have arisen mostly during times of general political instability and came to power by revolutions led by communist parties, for the most part in the aftermath of World War II. They were all modelled after the Soviet Union (founded in 1922) which roots' can be traced back to the October Revolution of 1917. It was Joseph Stalin who had implemented his idea of "socialism in one country" there in the 1930s and had thereby created the state and party structure which all subsequent communist state were to be based upon.

Since the Thematic Working Group I doesn't concentrate exclusively on states but analyzes states, legislation, and institutions as integral parts of public power the author chose to discuss the role of two institutions – albeit two of very different kind – in the context of the Hungarian Revolution. The first institution – the United Nations – was chosen because this international forum constituted a new and almost revolutionary element of the post-1945 world order which deserves a closer look. The second institution is the United States' Central Intelligence Organization (CIA), a national institution which is nevertheless international in its focus and activities.

## HISTORIOGRAPHY ABOUT THE HUNGARIAN REVOLUTION

When discussing the historiography of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution one needs to differentiate between publications written in Hungary itself and works published abroad, mainly in the West. Another important differentiation is historiography before and after 1989 which is not only of interest because of the newly accessible primary sources since the end of the Cold War but also concerning the issue of freedom of research.

The puppet-regime under János Kádár installed by the Soviets after the uprising tried to discredit the Revolution as a "fascist counterrevolution" and published a series of phoney 'white books'. These propaganda activities ceased after about four years and from then on the events in October/November 1956 were shrouded in a veil of silence: even the mentioning of the Revolution in terms that deviated from the official version was sanctioned by heavy repression. Needless to say, serious research on the topic was impossible in Hungary during the Kádár era. However, as time went by, illegal publications and pamphlets flourished starting with the 1980s. By the middle of the 1980s, the 1956 Revolution became again a central issue for the opposition and could not be contained any more by the Kádár regime.

In contrast, Western historians, Hungarian emigrants in exile and the many very active Hungarian exile organisations or institutions like the 'Imre-Nagy-Institute' in Brussels kept alive the memory of the actual events and published an enormous amount of studies. Early important works are for example the press documentation of Melvyn Lasky or the report of the UN special commission<sup>2</sup>. The historians in their early works tried to analyze the importance of the Revolution for Hungarian as well as European history and paid special heed to the intentions and program of the insurgents.

In order to categorize the research on the Revolution, four lines of analysis and interpretation have been discerned<sup>3</sup>:

1. the Revolution's embedment in the democratic worker's milieu (e.g. the Worker's Councils and the Revolutionary Councils) was stressed by the members of the Hungarian communist opposition (above all by the follower's of Imre Nagy)<sup>4</sup>;
2. the search for a 'Third Way' between capitalism and communism and national issues were highlighted by democrats from the left<sup>5</sup>;
3. the interpretation of the uprising as freedom fight of the Hungarian people (not: Revolution) was put forward by the catholic-conservative followers of cardinal Mindszenty<sup>6</sup>;
4. the armed uprising and opposition to communism as such was a characteristic of the works of anti-communist groups<sup>7</sup>.

The Hungarian Revolution and its international dimension has often been a subject of research in the fifty years that have since past. Nevertheless, scholars did not get access to important official documents before the late eighties and early nineties. Before this date, the publications were based on press report, the media, official announcements or memoirs. The real historiographic 'revolution' coincided with the end of the Cold War and the demise of the Soviet Union. However, access to primary sources and thus historiography about the Hungarian Revolution had shown considerable regional differences during the Cold War: In the western countries, the events of 1956 had been a subject of research based on primary sources since the middle of the 1980s and the number of works dedicated to the Hungarian Revolution is overwhelming. In the Eastern European countries and the Soviet Union, genuine research based on primary sources could not be done before the end of Cold War and took some time to materialize.

Following the 1989/1990 change of regime in Hungary, books exempt from the ideological distortions of the Kádár era could finally be published in Hungary itself. In 1991 Hungarian president Árpád Göncz welcomed the book published by György Litván and János M. Bak as the 'first true history' of the revolution<sup>8</sup>. This new trend was epitomized by the so called 'Yeltsin Dossier' which was a dossier of Soviet archival materials related to the 1956 Hungarian Revolution handed over to Hungarian President Árpád Göncz by the Russian president Boris Yeltsin during a November 1992 visit to Budapest<sup>9</sup>.

The research done in the Eastern European countries portrayed the Hungarian Revolution very much from a national point of view, concentrated on the events within the concerned country and neglected the international implications. In addition, these publications were for the most part only published in Eastern European languages and thus only useful to a minority of researchers. This plight changed drastically since the end of the Cold War when the international aspects could be studied on the basis of primary sources for the first time. The most important research is now available in English.

Since the end of the Cold War there has been a boom and an enormous interest in the year of the 'double crisis'. One of the most active institutions is the Cold War International History Project established at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington, D.C. in 1991. The main goal of the project is to support the full and prompt release of historical material by governments on all sides of the Cold War and seeks to disseminate the new information. In Hungary, an entire institution under the name of Institute of the History of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution<sup>10</sup> was established in 1990 and has done impressive research since then. Another institution worth mentioning is the Historical Archive of the Hungarian State Police (*Állambiztonsági Szolgálatok Történelmi Levéltára*) which was set up in 2003<sup>11</sup>.

## THE ROAD TO REVOLUTION AND ITS INTERNAL CONTEXT

### Balance of Power and State Systems during the Cold War

In the second half of the 20th century, the international system had undergone serious transformations. The international system of the interwar years which had still been dominated to a large extent by European states was washed aside and the antagonism of the two new 'superpowers', the United States of America and the Soviet Union (and their respective systems of alliances) turned into the decisive factor replacing the age-old conflicts and traditions. The Soviet Union was driven by a historically grown sense of insecurity and built an orbit of absolutely reliable satellite states around its Western borders which were sealed off by the so called Iron Curtain. A gap in this zone of security which appears as a reversal of the *cordon sanitaire* of the inter-war years was to be avoided by all costs.

After the first 'hot' phase of the Cold War with Korean War as its point of culmination had luckily passed by without a direct superpower confrontation, both the United States and the Soviet Union in reality had to practically abandon war as an instrument of policy against each other once the Soviet Union had acquired the atom (1949) and the hydrogen (1953) bomb<sup>12</sup>: The new paradigms of nuclear warfare turned the old concepts of geopolitics upside-down. The factors of geography (size, position, access to the sea etc) which had been decisive in the past now played a minor role. This new balance of power based on nuclear potency has often been described as a 'balance of terror' in which the protagonists deterred each other by the threat of nuclear annihilation. In contrast to previous historical struggles between great powers, the deterrence did not rely on the fact that none of the two camps could prevail in a full-out struggle because of approximately equal distribution of force but rather on the factor of mutual assured destruction ('MAD') in the case of war.

In Eric Hobsbawm's words, the peculiarity of the Cold War resided in the fact that no imminent danger of war existed: In spite of apocalyptic rhetoric, both superpowers accepted the global distribution of force since the end of the Second World War<sup>13</sup>. The discipline within the bloc, sometimes restored by the use of force, overpowered internal tensions and made the world relatively easy to grasp and to predict<sup>14</sup>.

The Cold War had clearly frozen the international situation and in doing so had stabilized the world. However, aside from the numerous proxy wars, the world seemed to be on the verge of a nuclear showdown more than once during the Cold War: the two Berlin crises 1948/49 and 1961, the double crisis of Suez and Hungary in 1956, the Cuba crisis in 1963, the Vietnam War 1965-73 or the Yom Kippur War are some well known examples. The events in October/November 1956 were exceptional because dramatic developments within the Eastern Bloc (in Hungary) coincided with an international military conflict in Egypt which amalgamated into a very complex double-crisis.

For a better understanding of the status quo of the international system in the year 1956 we must quickly turn to the two protagonists on the international scene and their respective relations to Eastern Europe, or in other words to the Soviet satellite states.

### The Superpowers and Eastern Europe since 1953

Since the late 1940s, the Soviet Union had been spending loads of money in order to keep pace in the arms race with the United States. Applying the rules established in the 1930s, Moscow tried to generate the needed capital for weapons production by reducing its spending in the agricultural and economic sectors. Finally, the new leadership after Stalin's death (in March 1953) realized the need to create a more balanced economic structure and decided to liberalize its repressive regime. Since such a step could only be effectuated in the context of a general improvement in East-West relations the Kremlin initiated a rapprochement with the West<sup>15</sup>.

While the new Soviet leaders were now willing to bargain with the West (as proven by the Austrian State Treaty of 1955), there were clear limits of compromise: The status of the satellite countries was among the issues not to be discussed. On the other hand, the decision was taken in Moscow to live with nationalism in the Soviet bloc as long as a country remained safely communist<sup>16</sup>. In the Yugoslav case, the Soviet leadership gave public sanction to the notion that there could be more than one way to socialism<sup>17</sup>. In reality, as we shall see, the Kremlin was totally unprepared to accept the Yugoslav 'model' for its other satellites.

The new Soviet policy was proclaimed by Nikita Khrushchev, first secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), on the 20th CPSU congress in February 1956 which can be considered as a turning point in the politics and ideologies of the Soviet Party and the international communist movement. Besides public sanction of the de-Stalinisation, the idea of peaceful coexistence was accepted, the role of neutral states acknowledged and different ways to socialism tolerated. As a consequence, the communist leaders of the satellite states were equally compelled to liberalize their regimes in order to comply with the Soviet longing. In Hungary, this unleashed a reform movement which gained more and more momentum and eventually led to escalation.

While the Soviet Union had somewhat loosened its grip on its satellite states after Stalin's death, the American policy towards Eastern Europe was Janus-faced. On the

one hand, President Eisenhower and his secretary of State John Foster Dulles strongly promoted the 'liberation' of Eastern Europe and the 'rollback' of Soviet influence in their public statements. On the other hand, given the probable apocalyptic outcome, they were determined to avoid a superpower conflict at all costs. Despite the bellicose American rhetoric Eisenhower had already realized in 1953 that 'liberation' could only be attained by risk of a nuclear escalation. He therefore secretly adopted a more gradual and evolutionary programme: Instead of open provocation, the US policy should consist only of propaganda and support for semi official émigré entities<sup>18</sup>.

It remains that the public pronouncements of the US administration created the illusion that its foreign policy was still determined to actively liberate the Eastern European countries. An armed intervention when necessary seemed probable. In reality, the American officials had definitely ruled out a military intervention by 1956 and by the way neither expected any significant changes in Eastern Europe nor considered resistance in the satellite countries against the Soviet Union as being decisive (see Source).

After having discussed the policies of the two superpowers the events in Europe that directly led to the escalation in Hungary have to be addressed.

### Important steps to the revolution

The first 'test' for the post-Stalin era was the worker's uprising in East Germany in summer 1953: Moscow's order in the direction of East German party officials to introduce a 'new course' meaning more liberal political and economic policies had an unexpected effect: The sudden abandonment of much of the hard-line dogma, coupled with East Germany's leaders' refusal to ease production quotas for workers, quickly led to an outbreak of strikes and riots in Berlin on June 17. The economic demands were soon joined by political ones, strike committees were founded and party offices taken by storm. Police forces supported by Soviet units squashed the peaceful revolt within a day and harsh repression followed<sup>19</sup>.

In the context of the Hungarian Revolution, the 'Austrian example' played a significant role<sup>20</sup>: the signature of the Austrian State Treaty on May 15, 1955, the withdrawal of all allied troops (including the Soviet ones) and the unilateral declaration of neutrality on October 26, 1955 were attentively followed by Austria's eastern neighbour. Austria definitely served as an example for all those eager to get rid of the Soviet yoke and inspired many Hungarian intellectuals who strove to emulate the 'Austrian way'. There is thus ample reason to speak of Austria, its State Treaty and neutrality as a 'Trojan horse' for the Soviet Union in regard to this satellite states<sup>21</sup>.

In summer 1956, it came to a dramatic showdown in Poland<sup>22</sup> which eventually served as an ignition for the Hungarian Revolt. On June 28, 1956 a worker's revolt broke out in Poznan and dozens of deaths were to deplore. Moscow feared unwelcome changes in Poland since one of the most prominent victims of Stalinist purges in Poland in the

1940s, Wladyslaw Gomulka, reached for the party leadership. In order to prevent this from happening, a delegation of top Soviet officials including Khrushchev paid a surprise visit to Warsaw on October 19. In a hastily arranged meeting with Gomulka and other Polish leaders heated discussion developed. Whereas the Soviet delegation made part of their anxiety about the upcoming changes in Poland the Poles wanted a clarification of the status of Soviet troops in Poland and a pledge of non-interference. When Gomulka protested after having learned about the Soviet troop movements towards Warsaw, Khrushchev complied with the request after some hesitation. Despite various forms of Soviet pressure, the Polish authorities did not give in and the meeting ended without any firm agreement.

After the Soviet delegation returned the next day, the Central Committee of the Polish Communist Party elected Gomulka first secretary and some of the stern Stalinists were eliminated. Gomulka who did not seek confrontation with Moscow then adopted a conciliatory tone and stressed the need for strengthened political and military ties with the Soviet Union. He struck a compromise with the Soviet Union: The Soviets accepted the new Polish leadership which gave assurances that the political reforms in Poland would not threaten the local communist rule or the unity of the Soviet bloc. When the situation in Poland seemed to calm down, the events in Budapest at the same time became more dramatic.

### Hungary before the Revolution

The Revolution, albeit a surprise to most of the world, had a long pre-history and was only the eruption of a long quelling crisis of Stalinist socialism. Already by summer 1952, Hungarian communism had reached a state of crisis due to the combined weight of the imposed economic rigidity and political excesses in the form of purges, show trials and other forms of repression.

Beginning in June 1953, Moscow summoned the Hungarian communists to reform and called for a partial change in the political and economic policies. The Kremlin's intention was not to reform the Hungarian socialist system but rather to prevent a collapse. Alexis de Tocqueville wrote a century earlier that the most dangerous moment for an evil government is usually when it begins to reform itself. Exactly this was to happen<sup>23</sup>.

On June 27/28, 1953, the Hungarian Central Committee – carrying out Moscow's wishes – passed a resolution and condemned the past policies such as forced industrialization, exploitation, collectivization or the state terror. Soon after, the Stalinist Prime Minister Mátyás Rákosi was replaced under Soviet instigation by the reform communist Imre Nagy (Rákosi remained in power as head of the party). Nagy then proclaimed a “people friendly” New Course which featured among others a reform of the economy (no more absolute priority to the heavy industry), a stimulation of agriculture, an increase in the standard of living, and the end state coercion. Understandably, the former elite resisted and their leader Rákosi and the Hungarian state police (ÁVH) obstructed the reform process.

In order for Nagy's program to succeed Rákosi and the old Stalinist elite needed to be replaced. Nevertheless, the Kremlin grew more and more suspicious of Nagy's policies and by the beginning of 1955 they withdrew their support from him<sup>24</sup>. After that, Rákosi succeeded in charging Nagy with anti-party activity and had him removed from the premiership and all party posts (Nagy was succeeded by András Hegedüs in April). Nagy who had a circle of supporters known as the 'Party Opposition' (colleagues, students, writers, journalists etc) refused to be put to rest and wrote a number of memoranda and polemics against the Hungarian and Soviet leadership<sup>25</sup>.

As a repercussion of the already mentioned 20th Party congress, the leaders in Moscow had decided that it was time for another political intervention in Hungary and finally sacked Rákosi as First secretary in summer 1956. As he was replaced by Ernő Gerő, another loyal communist, the Hungarians' dissatisfaction with the regime grew even more as the economic conditions kept deteriorating.

On October 6, 1956, the ceremonial reburial of László Rajk<sup>26</sup>, a prominent victim of the Stalinist terror, took place as a consequence of the rehabilitation process started by Nagy. The moving ceremony deepened the moral crisis of the regime, strengthened the party opposition and sparked student demonstrations.

## THE EVENTS IN OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 1956 AND ITS INTERNATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

On October 22 a student gathering at the Technical University in Budapest adhered to an independent student association set up a week earlier in Szeged in the South of Hungary and formulated 16 (highly political) demands, featuring the withdrawal of Soviet troops as the first point. The press and radio refused to reproduce them. As a consequence, the students announced a demonstration for the next day. At the same time, they wanted to express their sympathy for the recent events in Warsaw which had been attentively followed by them. While the paper *Szabad Nép* strongly welcomed the student's demonstration Imre Nagy himself did not support it because their demands went far beyond what he had in mind.

### The Escalation

As the top party leaders returned to Budapest on October 23 from talks in Belgrade they were quite stunned by the situation and dithered. Finally, they settled their internal conflicts and voted to ban the rally but withheld authorization to use extreme measures. Faced with strong resistance and the Budapest police chief's announcement that the police would not take up arms against the peaceful demonstrators, they realized that the demonstration could only be halted by coercion and reluctantly lifted the ban. All that time, the Hungarian leaders had been in direct contact with Moscow and received directives from the Kremlin.

In the afternoon of October 23, the demonstration got underway and finally concentrated at Bem square<sup>27</sup>. While Imre Nagy on whom all hopes rested disappointed the demonstrators with a speech from a balcony of the parliament violence finally broke out at the radio station between protestors and the ÁVH after a provocative speech of the first party secretary Gerő. The protestors managed to temporarily take control of the building and the same evening demonstrators at City Park toppled a massive statue of Stalin. The demonstration had turned into an open revolution.

### Reaction of the Hungarian Leadership and the Kremlin

Hoping for a negotiated settlement as in the Polish case, the Soviet leadership was reluctant to use military action against the revolt.

It is conceivable that the option of a military intervention was not Moscow's first choice. Moscow had put quite an effort into its propaganda campaign wooing the Third World countries. A brutal intervention by the 'peace-loving' Soviet Union would have had unpleasant repercussions on the Soviet prestige. Besides that, the interest to secure the inner cohesion within the Soviet bloc and the still feeble process of reconciliation with Yugoslavia were further reasons not to intervene militarily.

Nevertheless, the CPSU Presidium agreed to allow Soviet troops stationed in Hungary to take part in restoring order on the condition that the Hungarian government delivered a formal written request to Moscow<sup>28</sup>. At 9 pm, local Red Army units advanced to Budapest.

Since Imre Nagy seemed to be the only one capable of controlling the situation Nagy was appointed Prime Minister on October 24 and was joined by other reform minded supporters in the Central Committee. He faced a daunting task: The new Prime Minister was confronted not only with demands to change the inner organisation of Hungary but also its international status within the Soviet alliances system.

Meanwhile, the rebels were surprisingly successful in resisting the entering Soviet troops and kept the revolution alive over the next several days. Munitions factories, printing presses, and police stations were attacked. Despite optimistic evaluations by the Soviet emissaries which had been sent to Budapest after the eruption of the Revolution, a bloodbath occurred on October 25 in front of the Parliament. The question of responsibility for the bloodbath has not been clearly answered but the massacre left at least 100 people dead. After the massacre, the regime's approach to handle the crisis got out of hand, the Central Committee was paralyzed by the opposition between the reformers and the hardliners. By October 26, the Revolution was no longer confined to the capital and spread to the provinces.

By the evening of October 27, Imre Nagy – who had been loyal to the party and the Soviet Union until then – decided to take the initiative and claimed leadership of the reform movement. After negotiations with the Soviet envoys, the CPSU Presidium finally gave its blessing to Nagy's reform plans because the foundations of the so-called

“people’s democracy” seemed safe based under Nagy’s programme which did not feature a change in the power structure or a change in the political system itself. It looked like Hungary would follow the Polish way. However, the Soviets left no doubt that this was the furthest they could consent: The Soviets emissaries laid out very clearly that Moscow would not hesitate to intervene if this line was passed.

The whole situation got even more complicated when the uprising in Hungary intertwined with the military conflict in Egypt. Recalling this “unbelievably feverish period”, André Fontaine, the editor-in-chief of the foreign political column of *Le Monde*, said that there were mornings when, affected by the piles of news arriving from these two crises areas, the front page had to be changed several times: “At eight o’clock we decided to emphasize Suez and yet, another half an hour later, Hungary was ahead. And then again it changed”<sup>29</sup>. We must therefore briefly cover the events in Egypt.

### The Suez Crisis

In July 1956, the Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal Company in response to the American refusal to finance the Assouan dam and drew closer to the Soviet Union. The two European nations mostly concerned by the nationalization, Great Britain and France, had both ample economic and domestic reasons to intervene and eliminate Nasser. After negotiations yielded no result, they devised the following plot (Plan ‘Musketeer/Kadesch’) in cooperation with Israel: Israel would attack the Suez canal whereupon France and Great Britain would intervene to ‘restore order’ after an ultimatum to Egypt. To plan the operation in detail, British-French-Israeli talks were held from October 22 to 24, 1956 in Sèvres (France). The events in Hungary, which set in meanwhile, were most likely discussed there but the time-plan was not altered<sup>30</sup>.

According to the plan set up in Sèvres, the Israeli government launched an offensive on the Sinai peninsular on October 29/30. On November 5, they first Franco-British forces landed in Egypt. The reaction of the United States who had warned the British against unilateral action was fierce<sup>31</sup>. On October 30, Eisenhower stressed that the use of force was not acceptable and the US submitted a tough resolution in the Security Council calling Israeli forces to withdraw. Faced not only with major threats from the Soviet Union (nuclear weapon strikes on Western Europe) but also under heavy pressure from the United States (by attacks on the pound), Great Britain threw the towel and ended the operation on November 6.

Given the ostensibly parallel timing of the two events in Egypt and Hungary, is tantalizing to establish links between the Suez and the Hungarian crisis<sup>32</sup>. Some scholars have argued that the Soviet Union intervened because it knew the Western powers occupied, others claimed that France and England attacked Egypt because they believed the Soviet Union embroiled with Hungary. The truth is that the outbreak of both crises developed simultaneously without directly influencing each other. The Franco-British-Israeli decision to intervene had been taken on October 21 (thus before the outbreak

of the Revolution in Budapest) and the military operations from October 30 to November 6 have not been influenced by the events in Hungary. Nevertheless, the Suez crisis did play a major role in the treatment of the Hungarian question before the UN. In addition, we can assume that the Suez incident had facilitated the Soviet decision for military intervention in Hungary.

### The Western Reaction

The Hungarian revolution had taken the Eisenhower administration by surprise. A military intervention in the Soviet orbit which had been ruled out years before seemed out of reach because it would have led to a nuclear escalation. Many officials still felt that the United States had to at least somehow live up to the administration's rhetoric about 'rolling back' the Soviet influence. It was therefore mostly out of prestige that the US brought the affair before the UN Security Council. Meanwhile, Secretary of State Dulles made his famous and often reiterated pronouncement – which was originally conceived as an assurance that the US would not exploit an eventual independence of the Eastern European countries for its own purposes – that the US did not consider the Soviet satellite states as potential allies. In fact, this pronouncement was quite a sensation since it can be interpreted as a first sign that the US officially renounced its liberation policy. English and French top officials made similar pronouncements.

Besides the discussions in the UN organs the NATO Council also convened several times during the crucial days but came to the conclusion not to take any steps in order not to offer the Soviet Union an incentive for an armed intervention. The UN whose importance will be analyzed later was therefore the only international forum where the Hungarian question was openly and widely discussed.

Not only in Europe and in North America but all over the world rallies sympathizing with the freedom fighters in Hungary were organized and aid programmes initiated. As we have seen, these manifestations did not have an effect on the cautious Realpolitics of the western governments who were fully aware that too bold actions would herald World War III.

### Victory and Defeat of the Revolution

Prime Minister Imre Nagy who had taken the lead of the reform movement announced his new measures on the Hungarian radio and promised to meet most of the rebel's demands. The Hungarian Worker's Party (HWP) Political and Central Committees approved this program after Moscow's *nihil obstat*. While Nagy wanted to strike a compromise with the Soviets, the rebel groups went even further and called for free multi-party elections and the withdrawal of Soviet troops. Nagy was forced to make several concessions and announced in the afternoon of October 30 that the one-party system had been abolished and he formed an 'inner cabinet' of representatives of the 1945-48 coalition parties. While Revolutionary Councils sprang up and took over in most of

the country the previously banned political parties were revived. On October 30, mob violence broke out and in fights over the HWP Committee Building 23 people – many ÁVHs – lost their lives.

On October 30, the world was stunned by a Soviet declaration which announced that Moscow was in favour of building new relations within “the great commonwealth of socialist nations” based on “the principles of complete equality, of respect for territorial integrity, state independence and sovereignty, and of non-interference in one another’s internal affairs” and made open references to the Hungarian situation<sup>33</sup>. This surprising declaration prompted immediate and enthusiastic reactions abroad. However, within a day of releasing the declaration, the Kremlin realizing that communist power in Hungary was about to collapse made a total turn around and decided to mount a massive military intervention in Hungary. The Soviet Presidium which had convened nearly every day between October 23 and November 4 seemed convinced that the communist system was threatened and that an intervention was unavoidable. In the first days of November Khrushchev negotiated with the leaders of the Eastern European countries and a Chinese delegation and assured himself of their support for military action<sup>34</sup>. Khrushchev had selected János Kádár who was flown out to Moscow as head of a new Hungarian government.

Meanwhile, the Revolution got organised: the HWP was dissolved and a new party, the Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party took its place, a Revolutionary Armed Forces Committee and a Revolutionary National Defense Commission was set up. While Nagy and his government were busy consolidating domestic conditions, the planning for the invasion was well under way.

Moscow did not inform Nagy about its decision to intervene militarily and pretended to willingly enter negotiations over the removal of the Red Army. When Nagy and his supporters learned about the Soviet troop movements themselves and the Soviet ambassador only found subterfuges the Hungarian Prime Minister realized that the Kremlin had opted for a military showdown. As a last ditch attempt, the government took the bold step of declaring Hungary’s neutrality<sup>35</sup>, renounced the Warsaw pact and called on the Security Council of the UN. When Nagy declared Hungary’s neutrality on November 1, he argued that the Soviets had breached the contract by invading Hungary. What he had in mind was something like the Austrian model<sup>36</sup>.

In the morning of November 4, the assault on Budapest commenced. Nagy and his followers accepted the asylum at the Yugoslav embassy while Cardinal Mindszenty<sup>37</sup> took refuge in the American legation. The Kádár government formally took power on November 7. After the repression of the uprising which was more or less concluded by November 11 the new regime first sought a compromise with the reform movement but then shifted to repressive methods by the beginning of December. By spring 1957, the large-scale resistance had been broken, Kádár’s power consolidated and the population seemed to live with the new situation.

On November 22, Imre Nagy and his entourage were lured out of the Yugoslav embassy with a guarantee signed by Kádár but were promptly arrested and taken to Romania.

This episode worsened the Soviet-Yugoslav relations even further. The time until spring 1957 was characterized by massive reprisals, mass arrests and trials at the people's courts. The long prepared trail of Nagy and his followers was postponed several times because of international implications and finally took place in spring 1958. Nagy and two of his followers were executed on June 16, 1958.

### The Role of the United Nations

Since its foundation in 1945, the history of the UN whose role should have been to "save future generations from the scourge of war" has been characterized by the search of a working balance between national sovereignty and national interests on the one hand and international order and the long-term interests of the international community on the other. In retrospect, the UN could not live up to be the initially planned universal organization of collective security and was reduced to a discussion forum with 'no teeth' abused as an instrument for the great powers to dominate its structures<sup>38</sup>.

As stipulated before, the United Nations was the only international forum where the suppression of the Hungarian Revolution was duly discussed<sup>39</sup>. If there was any real tension between the superpowers they confronted each other in the UN organs. It needs to be said from the start that this was mainly propaganda, initiated by the US trying to make up some of its lost prestige. Once again, the UN provided an ideal playground for the great powers since its resolutions did not have any chance of being put into force – all the more, the Soviet Union had never cared a great deal about the UN and its resolutions. All that could be achieved there was public pressure.

The Hungarian crisis occupied the UN from the start and the correlation with the events in Egypt is apparent. In the days before the Israeli attack on Egypt on October 29, the US, British and French UN representatives meet behind the scenes and secretly discussed and aligned their actions. There was agreement among them that the Soviet intervention had to be unambiguously condemned in public. The United States, France, and Great Britain jointly called – upon American instigation – for a meeting of the Security Council on October 27 to debate the situation in Hungary<sup>40</sup>. The cautious wait and see tactic the Western allies had adopted changed with the escalation of the Middle East crisis with British and French involvement. From then on, each of the three western representatives strove to use the stage of the UN to advance its great power interest. The Hungarian crisis was therefore only a tool in the hands of the great powers: The Americans heavily pressured their allies to stop their operations in the Middle East, the US delegation even presented a resolution demanding the immediate stop of the action. The French and English – hoping that this would draw attention away from their action – wanted to move the Hungarian question from the Security Council to the General Assembly<sup>41</sup> which had convened to discuss the Suez crisis. The US did everything in its power to prevent just that until the second Soviet intervention. It was then US-delegate Lodge who – expecting a Soviet veto in the Security Council – urged to move the question to the General Assembly and tabled a resolution that condemned

the Soviet intervention, called for the immediate withdrawal of Soviet troops and recognized the right of the Hungarian people to choose its own government.

The second emergency session (the first one was dedicated to the Suez crisis) on November 4, 1956 and the 11th session of the General Assembly during November and December then produced several resolutions demanding that the Soviet Union withdraw its troops<sup>42</sup>. The Hungarian question remained on the UN agenda until 1962 without any fruit. It needs to be added that being castigated for its aggression year after year was quite embarrassing for the 'peace-loving' Soviet Union eager to woo the Third World.

The documents available prove that before the second Soviet intervention it was not really the United Nations but the Western great powers who were responsible for the fact that the UN did not even try to take effective measures in the interests of the Hungarian Revolution because their actions were motivated by the Middle East crisis<sup>43</sup>. During the time when the UN could have responded to Nagy's appeal, the western powers were paralysed because of their internal quarrels. The fact that the Hungarian government had declared its neutrality and called on the UN fell into oblivion. It thus appears that the real confrontation in the UN did not happen between the Soviet Union and the Western powers but between the US, Great Britain, and France.

### Did the CIA trigger the 1956 Revolution?

The operations of intelligence agencies during the Cold War sparked human fantasies about the 'hot war' of the secret services. These motives have been taken up in movies and literature and rather recently also by historians<sup>44</sup>. Research in the last decades has shown that the history of the Cold War can not be written without taking into account the role of intelligence organizations in this struggle.

The intelligence and espionage issues were of paramount importance in the context of the Hungarian revolution since the Kádár regime built its alleged legitimacy partly on the accusation that the Revolution was in fact a 'counter-revolution' triggered and directed by Western powers via their secret services. The West was accused of having long prepared the uprising and of supplying the insurgents with weapons, equipment, and directives. In order to gauge these accusations, it is thus essential to take a closer look at the activities of the most conspicuous intelligence agency, the United States Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in Eastern Europe, especially in the 1956 context. The emphasis will be placed on the one hand on the CIA propaganda operations and on the other on the question of US covert actions during the crucial days in October/November 1956.

The psychological and covert warfare of the United States towards Eastern Europe was an integral part of the overall US-policy since 1945. C.D. Jackson, Eisenhower's 'psychological warfare guru' defined psychological warfare not as "an occult science practiced on a couch, but [as] just one of many clubs in the bag of a Foreign Minister or the military commander"<sup>45</sup>.

In order to assess the US intelligence efforts in Eastern Europe which have to be placed in the overall context of the Cold War described above one ought to go back to the roots of the conflict. The creation of the CIA in 1947 provided an impressive bureaucratic apparatus which coordinated the psychological and covert operations of the US government<sup>46</sup>. Already in NSC-4A (National Security Council Directive) the CIA was authorized to “initiate and conduct covert psychological operations designed to counteract Soviet and Soviet-inspired activities...”<sup>47</sup> NSC 10/2 from June 1948 which was by the way drafted by George F. Kennan defined “covert operations” as follows: “all activities ... conducted or sponsored ... against hostile foreign states or groups or in support of friendly foreign states or groups but which are so planned and executed that any US Government responsibility for them is not evident to unauthorized persons and that if uncovered the US Government can plausibly disclaim any responsibility for them”<sup>48</sup>. Starting in 1948, the Truman administration following its ‘counterforce strategy’ against Soviet expansionism launched quite impressive covert and clandestine operations in Eastern Europe (always, of course, under the premise of ‘plausible deniability’) in order to stir revolt against the occupying power. By 1952, it became clear that this strategy had failed: The undermining of the security apparatus had not been possible and a revolt in the satellite countries was not in sight.

Shortly after Eisenhower took office, the uprising in East Germany forced him to review his security policy of ‘rollback’ and ‘liberation’ which he had proclaimed during the election campaign. In NSC-162/2 from October 1953, which defined Eisenhower’s ‘New Look’ policy a ‘dynamic’ policy to liberate the satellite countries was ruled out<sup>49</sup>. This policy which was corroborated in later documents (such as by NSC-174 from December 1953) advocated propaganda offensives but strove to avoid incitement of premature revolts by covert and clandestine activities as well as an American promise of intervention<sup>50</sup>. When assessing the CIA’s implication in Eastern Europe we must therefore differentiate between propaganda activities and covert operations.

Winning the minds of the Eastern European peoples was one of the most important premises of the US psychological warfare campaign, all the more since the US had recoiled from open provocation of its enemy. By far the most effective tool to achieve this were propaganda radio broadcasts to Eastern European countries in the respective native languages. There was no free flow of information inside the Eastern Bloc and even less from the outside since the borders were sealed off by the Iron Curtain. In short, the broadcasts’ goal was to disseminate anti-Soviet propaganda but without the open promise of ‘liberation’ and intervention by the West<sup>51</sup>. The therefore created Radio stations became notoriously known: Voice of America, Radio Liberty or Radio Free Europe. All of them intended to keep the resistance of the people against the communists alive by providing them with news, information and propaganda from the West since the communist monopoly over the media was complete and censorship was harsh. The radio broadcasts turned out to be a very effective (and cheap) tool to reach masses of people – even the illiterate ones – simultaneously.

In the context of the Hungarian Revolution the by far most important Radio station was Radio Free Europe (RFE)<sup>52</sup> which had set up its headquarters in Munich (Germany) in 1950. RFE which developed into a key tool of Eisenhower's liberation policy was financed by the CIA that established the guidelines and influenced daily business<sup>53</sup>. The goals of RFE were described in a publication by the European Council as follows:

They supply their listeners with truthful and impartial information, political arguments and moral support. They try to inspire them with hope and the courage to shake off the Soviet yoke ... To those unfortunate countries which have lived under the Soviet Regime since the Second World War, the Radio Free Europe broadcasts are a daily recurring evidence that we in the West have not lost interest in their fate<sup>54</sup>.

In addition to the broadcasts, RFE devised original means to reach the ordinary people using balloons carrying propaganda material<sup>55</sup>. The balloon operations which were in effect from 1951 to 1956 carried over 300 million leaflets onto Communist territory. The Soviet Union and the satellite states tried to shoot them down and vehemently protested against the balloon operations. The US government dismissed the accusations on the ground that they were all carried out by RFE, a 'private' organization. In addition to the fact that this was a lie there seemed to have been other balloons launched by American intelligence services in the disguise of weather research balloons<sup>56</sup>.

It is very hard to find evidence on the actual influence of these American propaganda offensives. In-depth interviews with Hungarian refugees in Austria showed that 70-90 percent of them had listened to the Western radio stations, above all RFE<sup>57</sup>. It is also a fact that Hungarian conspirators were influenced by American propaganda and planned to coordinate their actions with American help and that Soviet and Hungarian officials viewed the Western broadcasts as a key factor in the anti-Soviet sentiment in Hungary.

In the context of the 1956 Revolution, RFE was accused in the West as well as by disappointed Hungarians of having sent incendiary broadcasts to Hungary promising US military aid and was partly held responsible for the outbreak of the Revolution. While official announcement only spoke of 'misinterpretations', an unofficial inquiry acknowledged serious policy violations. On the basis of documents now available we know that at least sixteen scripts during the revolution were broadcasted that distorted US policy and misled the freedom fighters<sup>58</sup>. Former CIA-man Tom Polgar put it as follows: "Sure, we never said rise up and revolt but there was a lot of propaganda that led the Hungarians to believe that we would help"<sup>59</sup>.

Covert actions go *per definitionem* a step further than psychological warfare. In 1955, a NSC document stated that covert operations were designed to "develop underground resistance, and facilitate covert and guerrilla operations and ensure the availability of those forces in the event of war..."<sup>60</sup>

The US had been considering covert action behind the Iron Curtain since the early 1950s and such aggressive forms of rollback were backed by influential men such as Di-

rector of Central Intelligence Allen Dulles. After Stalin's death these people saw new windows of opportunity. C.D. Jackson told an émigré friend: "This Era of Uncertainty offers a golden opportunity for cold war operations. The satellites will be restless, their leadership uneasy..."<sup>61</sup> One of the ideas was the recruitment of refugees from the Soviet bloc for military service. Concepts of integration of such a force into NATO as well as Eisenhower's idea of a 'Volunteer Freedom Corps' surfaced but failed due to opposition both from within the US (the State Department) and also from the Western European allies<sup>62</sup>. Other discussed covert actions included varieties of penetration missions to collect intelligence in the Eastern bloc and to assemble paramilitary groups that could resist a possible Soviet intervention and the smuggling in of weapons<sup>63</sup>. Nevertheless, the directives of the NSC cited above clearly ruled out covert actions to incite revolts in the Eastern European countries starting with autumn 1953.

A special US program did in fact exist for Hungary: Frank Wisner, the chief of the 'Office of Policy Coordination', had set up a base near Munich and had been preparing operations in Hungary under the name RED SOX/RED CAP. Frank Wisner was in Vienna soon after the second Soviet intervention (he was on a routine trip visiting CIA-stations in Europe). He visited the Austro-Hungarian border, talked to refugees, and pressured Eisenhower and Allen Dulles to activate the underground elements in Hungary. According to Wisner, the West had been waiting for a long time for an uprising in the Eastern bloc<sup>64</sup>. In the crucial moment, Eisenhower did not allow them to get active. It is unclear whether RED SOX/RED CAP was ever implemented in Hungary, but there is no evidence to believe so<sup>65</sup>. There are, however, (unproven) claims that West Germany's (US supported) 'Gehlen organisation' did intervene<sup>66</sup>.

In sum, the American intelligence and psychological warfare activities described above (RFE broadcasts and balloons, the émigré armies, etc) did not cause or trigger the Hungarian Revolution. Nevertheless, their effects are not to be underestimated: as American scholar Johanna Granville argues, the CIA's activities greatly irritated Moscow and most likely encouraged Soviet leader's ambitions to maintain hegemony over its satellite states. She also argues that RFE's anti-Nagy broadcasts undermined and weakened the Nagy government<sup>67</sup>. In the aftermath of the Revolution, the American activities served the Kádár regime in constructing its theory of a counterrevolution triggered by the West.

When talking about American intelligence in the context of the 1956 revolution it also needs to be noted that poor intelligence was one of the reasons that the US government was totally caught of guard by the events in Hungary<sup>68</sup>. The reports of the US intelligence services did not expect any significant changes in Hungary and considered resistance against the communist's regime insignificant [See source]<sup>69</sup>. As the in-house history of the CIA admits, the station in Vienna was totally unprepared for a possible intervention in Hungary: "there were no weapons handy enough to commandeer hurriedly, we knew too little, we had absolutely no picture at all of who needed weapons, when, what kind, where ..." <sup>70</sup> There weren't even any Hungarian speakers among the case officers sent to Vienna.

As Peer de Silva, the top CIA man for Eastern Europe in Vienna wrote: “It is a well-known phenomenon in the field of intelligence that there often comes a time when public political activity proceeds at such a rapid and fulminating pace that secret intelligence, the work of agents, is overtaken by events publicly recorded”<sup>71</sup>. Such a case was Hungary in autumn 1956.

## INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AFTER THE DOUBLE CRISIS 1956

It seems surprising that the events in autumn 1956 did not generate a full-fledged crisis with lasting effects on world politics. The general public which had been imbued with the American propaganda for years believed that the events represented a serious threat to world peace that might result in conflict between East and West. For ordinary people, there was ample reason to believe so: The firm public stance of the Americans against the Soviet intervention, the debates and resolutions of the emergency session of the UN General Assembly, the concurrent Suez crisis, and the Soviet missile threats seemed daunting. The fact that the Western powers (“as uninterested observers”) only watched the Soviet Union squash the Revolution stunned many contemporaries.

Instead of grasping the most important point – namely the general acceptance of the post-Yalta status quo – the inertia of the of the West had been explained in the aftermath with the allegedly exceptional circumstances that only applied to the Hungarian Revolution in 1956. Almost mystical interpretations flourished: “that the crisis in the Middle East prevented the Western states from presenting a united front against the Soviet Union, or that the American leadership was occupied with the upcoming presidential election, or that Secretary of State Dulles was taken to hospital during the most critical days, or that the American troops were prevented from deploying to Hungary by geography alone”<sup>72</sup>.

As argued, the western world was in no position to go to war over Hungary but they could have raised the spectre of the political and economic cost of Soviet repression. The Suez crisis and the troubles among the Western powers are partly to blame for their inertia. It goes without saying that the double crisis Suez/Hungary in 1956 was in retrospect the application of a double standard: while Israel, France and Great Britain were castigated for their act of aggression and forced under UN and US guidance to comply, the Soviet Union got by with a reprimand<sup>73</sup>.

The Soviet policy towards its satellite states after the events in Hungary was characterized by a mixture of reform and control. Moscow strove to re-establish the old control in a more flexible environment. Khrushchev showed sensitivity for a reform of the regions’ economies and prevailed in the CPSU Central Committee meeting in June 1957 to pursue a more reform orientated policy in Eastern Europe. In addition to reforms in the economic sphere the military ties between the Soviet Union and its Eastern European satellites were put on a new basis by a series of bilateral treaties. This did not mean, however, that he was willing to relinquish control over his allies. It was clear that Moscow would not tolerate the Yugoslav model of following different roads to

socialism for its satellites and that repression would follow every deviation<sup>74</sup>. The Soviet Union's influence in Third World countries in Africa and Asia reached its peak after 1956, during the sixties. The missile threat during the Suez crisis greatly enhanced the stance of the Soviet Union in the Third World

Nevertheless, the year 1956 with the 20th CPSU congress and the Hungarian revolution was a watershed in the history of the world communist movement: Not only came the hitherto marginalized deviators from the Stalinist orthodoxy more openly into the public sphere and drove a wedge into the Moscow-centred international communist movement but the events in Hungary also greatly reduced the importance of the communist parties in Western Europe.

The Eisenhower administration was in a much more uncomfortable position since it had been revealed that its 'liberation' and 'roll back' rhetoric did not parallel its possibilities. There was grim awareness that the United States simply could not do anything. As UN Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge stated "We have excited Hungarians for all these years, and now we are turning our backs to them when they are in a jam"<sup>75</sup>. In the West, the acceptance that the Soviet Union would not allow a modification of the system within its orbit finally prevailed and made it clear that liberation of Eastern Europe would only be a long haul goal. As we have seen, the Eisenhower administration limited its response to modest steps within the framework of the United Nations, where the Hungarian question remained on the agenda until 1962. The policy of the United States was fundamentally reviewed and instead of 'liberation' or 'rollback' the notion of evolution and a more peaceful and gradual process prevailed. Instead of supporting radio stations and using a stiff rhetoric the contacts with the 'dominated people' were to be intensified via programmes of economic aid, cultural exchanges and tourism. The covert actions in Eastern Europe were reduced. Since the Soviet Union tried quite successfully to expand its influence in the Third World with economic and financial aid, the US policy mainly focused on containing the Soviet influence there from 1956 on<sup>76</sup>.

Washington chose not to exploit the events in 1956 and chose to keep the superpower relations stable. The 'spirit of Geneva' was temporarily killed in the streets of Budapest but the need to engage the Soviet Union in order to contain global tensions soon prevailed. The Hungarian Revolution and the Soviet intervention disturbed only for a moment the *détente* process that had been developing since 1953, but on the long run did not halt the process nor even influence its later development. The fervent accusations in the realm of the UN did not influence the Western readiness for negotiations. In spring 1957 the United States was already reconsidering its tough stance due to the invasion.

Not even a year after the Hungarian Revolution the relationship between the two superpowers underwent a significant change because by summer of 1957 the Soviet Union had developed its first generation of intercontinental ballistic missiles and could therefore threaten for the first time not only Europe but also the territory of the United States of America. Shortly after, the first satellite ('Sputnik') was launched and demon-

strated the world that the Soviet Union had surpassed the United States in scientific and technological development. Needless to say, this was an enormous boost for the Soviet Union and the self-confidence of its leader Khrushchev who felt that he could now negotiate from a position of strength, as seen during the following crises over Berlin and Cuba.

For the Western world, the double crisis of 1956 had the consequence that the allies never fully believed in their perfect symmetry<sup>77</sup>. This also had an accelerating impact on the European integration project: The lessons in 1956 made the European leaders without any doubt conscious of their feebleness and pushed them to compromise. The Suez crisis not only proved the impotence of the former empires France and Great Britain but also showed the economic dependence of Western Europe. All this certainly influenced the conclusion of the Treaty of Rome signed on March 25, 1957 establishing the Common Market<sup>78</sup>. It was above all the French government which came to the conclusion in 1956 that the only way to prevent isolation and to preserve some political and diplomatic independence vis-à-vis the United States was to play the “European card”. As the federalist Denis de Rougemont put it: “Budapest a montré au monde que l’Europe divisée reste impuissante... Qu’il faille faire l’Europe est maintenant évident... Suez et Budapest n’auraient pas suffi? Faudra-t-il d’autres catastrophes?”<sup>79</sup>.

## CONCLUSION

Intensive research has been done on the Hungarian Revolution in the last decade. Scholars have found themselves in an extremely exciting situation: new findings from the gradually opening archives could be confronted with the memories of surviving participants. While a part of the true history of the Revolution has been written abroad since 1956 the intensive and serious research done in a free Hungary since 1989 did a lot to complete the picture. Fifty years onwards we have a fairly coherent overview of the events in October/November 1956.

The analysis of the events during the decades after the Second World War reveals that the sake of Central Europe was very much dominated by the situation that set in after 1945. The two superpowers could thus operate freely and resolve local difficulties within its spheres of influence. The United States was able to deal with Greece and Turkey when a dispute arose between them over Cyprus, and the Soviet Union was able to use military force to put down opposition in Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968. Both the United States and the Soviet Union had accepted this as a fact that only changed after 1989. Not even an event as tragic and dramatic as the heroic uprising of the Hungarians altered this paradigm.

American propaganda and clandestine activities notwithstanding, no real willingness existed in the West between 1953 and 1956 to liberate the Eastern European countries. This becomes clear when one looks at the operations of the CIA in Eastern Europe. Even the opposite can be stipulated: On the long run, a new phase of understanding and coexistence between the two antagonist camps was set in 1955/56. Concerning the

Eastern European countries a tacit consensus emerged between East and West which was only formally codified in 1975 by the Helsinki accords<sup>80</sup>.

One of the most important lessons to be learned from the episode in 1956 was that the system of spheres of interest was an intangible fact and that the end of the Cold War was out of reach<sup>81</sup>. It became obvious that the West – with its pragmatic political considerations – would not risk conflict for the ideal of liberty. This was a great consolation for the Soviet leadership since they were assured of having a free hand in the satellite states. The Western ‘liberation of the enslaved nations’ talk had proven to be nothing but propaganda and the buffer zone in Eastern Europe was uncontested<sup>82</sup>.

The events of 1956 can be seen as part of a cumulative learning process of Central European oppositions and governments starting with East Berlin in 1953, followed by Poland and Hungary in 1956, Czechoslovakia in 1968 and finally 1980/81 in Poland. The Soviet policy-makers of the late 1980s without any doubt remembered the political cost of the interventions in 1956 and 1968 and a clear line can be drawn between 1956 and 1989. It is uncontested that the legacy of the Hungarian revolution 1956 was of paramount importance for the overthrow of the communist regime in 1989/90 in Hungary.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Communists have never actually claimed to have reached communism, they described themselves as ‘socialist’. In addition, the term ‘communist state’ is technically an oxymoron since communism aims at a classless and stateless society. See R. Pipes, *Communism: A History*, London 2001 or E. Hobsbawm, *Revolution und Revolte. Aufsätze zu Kommunismus, Anarchismus und Umsturz im 20. Jahrhundert*, Frankfurt 1972.
- <sup>2</sup> M. Lasky (ed.), *The Hungarian Revolution: A White Book*, New York 1957; *Report of the Special Committee on the Problem of Hungary*, New York 1957; Further early publications are for example: P. Zinner, *National Communism and Popular Revolt in Eastern Europe*, New York 1956; P. Kecskméti, *The unexpected revolution. Social forces in the Hungarian uprising*, Stanford 1961; or F. Váli, *Rift and Revolt in Hungary*, Cambridge 1961.
- <sup>3</sup> See: G. Litván - J. Bak, *Die Ungarische Revolution 1956. Reform-Vergeltung-Aufstand*, Vienna 1994, pp. 179-183.
- <sup>4</sup> For example: F. Fejtő, *Budapest 1956. La Révolution hongroise*, Paris 1956; M. Molnár, *Victoire d'une défaite*, Paris 1968 or B. Lomax, *Hungary 1956*, London 1976.
- <sup>5</sup> For example: I. Bibó, *Bibó István összegűjtött munkái*, Bern 1993.
- <sup>6</sup> For example: J. Mindszenty, *Memoirs*, New York 1974.
- <sup>7</sup> For example: G. Pongrácz, *Corvin köz-1956*, Budapest 1989.
- <sup>8</sup> The book produced by a working group of scholars from the Institute of the History of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution has been translated in many languages and serves as a reference work. See: G. Litván - J. Bak, *The Hungarian Revolution of 1956: Reform, Revolt and Repression, 1953-1963*, New York 1996. Since the number of publications about the 1956 Hungarian revolution is overwhelming only a selection of the newest publications is mentioned here: C. Békés - M. Byrne - J. Rainer (eds.), *The 1956 Hungarian Revolution: A History in Documents*, Budapest-New York 2002; T. Cox, *Hungary 1956: Forty Years On*, London 1997; J. Granville, *The first Domino. International Decision Making during the Hungarian Crisis of 1956*, College Station 2004; W. Heinemann - N. Wiggerhaus (eds.), *Das internationale Krisenjahr 1956. Polen, Ungarn, Suez*,

- Munich 1999. The bulletins of the *Cold War International History Project* and the yearbooks (*évkönyvek*) of the *Institute of the History of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution* are also extremely valuable sources.
- <sup>9</sup> See: E. Gál - A. Hegedűs - G. Litván (eds.), *A "Jelcin dosszié". Szovjet dokumentumok 1956-ról*, Budapest 1993. Although the documents did not contain sensational new findings the significance of the materials was considerable for the understanding of the decision taking during the Hungarian crisis.
- <sup>10</sup> See the institute's homepage: [www.rev.hu](http://www.rev.hu).
- <sup>11</sup> See the institute's homepage: [www.thu.hu](http://www.thu.hu).
- <sup>12</sup> Which did not mean that they gave up their bellicose rhetoric and the threats to use nuclear weapons.
- <sup>13</sup> E. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes. A history of the World 1914-1991*, New York 1994, p. 226.
- <sup>14</sup> Only the movement of the non-aligned and the neutral states got out of step while mostly still tending in one or the other direction.
- <sup>15</sup> Byrne - Rainer (eds.), *The 1956 Hungarian Revolution* cit., p. 2
- <sup>16</sup> H. Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, New York 1994, p. 552.
- <sup>17</sup> The Yugoslav leader Tito who had refused to align his country with the Soviet Union's directives had broken with Stalin as early as 1948 (but still remained committed to Marxism). The Soviet Union's relations with Yugoslavia remained very tense after that. After Stalin's death, the Soviet leaders accepted Tito's national course to socialism.
- <sup>18</sup> G. Bischof, *Eindämmung und Koexistenz oder „Rollback“ und Befreiung? Die Vereinigten Staaten, das Sowjetimperium und die Ungarnkrise im Kalten Krieg, 1948-1956*, in E. Schmidl (ed.), *Die Ungarnkrise 1956 und Österreich*, Vienna-Cologne-Weimar 2003, p. 106.
- <sup>19</sup> American officials by the way ruled out an armed intervention on this occasion. See: C. Osterman, *Uprising in East Germany 1953: The Cold War, the German Question, and the First Major Upheaval Behind the Iron Curtain*, Budapest 2001.
- <sup>20</sup> For Austria and the Hungarian Revolution see for example: M. Gehler, *The Hungarian Crisis and Austria 1953-58: A Foiled Model Case?*, in G. Bischof, *Neutrality in Austria*, New Brunswick 2001, pp. 160-213; M. Rauchensteiner, *Spätherbst 1956. Die Neutralität auf dem Prüfstand*, Vienna 1981; Schmidl (ed.), *Die Ungarnkrise* cit.; K. Sóos, *1956 és Ausztria*, Szeged 1999.
- <sup>21</sup> M. Gehler, *„L'unique objectif des Soviétiques est de viser l'Allemagne“. Österreichs Staatsvertrag und Neutralität 1955 als „Modell“ für Deutschland?*, in T. Albrich - K. Eisterer et al. (eds.), *Österreich in den Fünfzigern. Zwischen Bevormundung und Emanzipation*, Innsbruck-Vienna 1995, p. 272.
- <sup>22</sup> See: M. Kramer, *Khrushchev's CPSU CC Presidium Meeting on East European Crises*, 24 October, 1956, "CWIHPB", Issue 5, 1995.
- <sup>23</sup> Cit. in Kissinger, *Diplomacy* cit., 556.
- <sup>24</sup> Békés - Byrne - Rainer (eds.), *A History in Documents* cit., p. 8.
- <sup>25</sup> They were later smuggled out to the West and published in several languages. See I. Nagy, *On communism. In defence of the New Course*, New York 1957.
- <sup>26</sup> László Rajk, the interior and foreign minister of the immediate post-war government, was sentenced to death in a staged show trial and executed in 1949. He was falsely accused of Titoism and espionage.
- <sup>27</sup> This location was symbolically significant because the square was named after a Polish general who had fought with the Hungarians against the Habsburg and the Russian monarchies during the revolution and fight for independence of 1848/49.
- <sup>28</sup> Such a request was indeed signed by Prime Minister András Hegedűs but only several days later, when he had already been dismissed from this post.
- <sup>29</sup> See: G. Kecskés, *The Suez Crisis and the 1956 Hungarian Revolution*, [http://www.coldwar.hu/html/en/publications/kecskes\\_suez.html](http://www.coldwar.hu/html/en/publications/kecskes_suez.html), 25.12.2005 (also reprinted in "East European Quarterly", 35, 2001, pp. 47-58).

- <sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>31</sup> For Washington, the Middle East was far more important than Eastern Europe since Washington was trying to draw the Third World into its own political and economic sphere.
- <sup>32</sup> See for example: C. Békés, *Az 1956-os magyar forradalom a világpolitikában. Tanulmány és válogatott dokumentumok*, Budapest 1996; D. Calhoun, *Hungary and Suez, 1956: An Exploration of Who Makes History*, New York 1991; K. Kyle, *Suez*, London 1991.
- <sup>33</sup> Declaration by the Government of the USSR on the Principles of Development and Further Strengthening of Friendship and Cooperation Between the Soviet Union and Other Socialist States, October 30, 1956, in Békés - Byrne - Rainer, *The 1956 Hungarian Revolution* cit., pp. 300-302.
- <sup>34</sup> While the Polish government of Gomulka had at first supported Nagy's reforms, the events in Hungary had convinced the Polish leader that the Hungarians had gone too far. The same goes for Tito who supported the intervention as well in the beginning.
- <sup>35</sup> Although this was not publicly known at that time, Imre Nagy had advocated a Titoist way for Hungary as early as January 1956, in other words a socialist Hungary following a non-aligned foreign policy. These papers were published in the West in 1957. See Nagy, *On communism* cit.
- <sup>36</sup> On the question of Hungarian neutrality see: C. Békés, *A Magyar semlegesség 1956-ban*, in: *Semlegesség: Illúziók és Realitás*, Budapest 1997, pp. 111-130. The insurgents knew very well that the country could never be defended against the superior forces of the Soviet Union. An effective international support and pressure against the Soviet Union was thus the last hope.
- <sup>37</sup> Cardinal József Mindszenty (1892-1975), the primate of Hungary, was arrested in 1948 and sentenced to life imprisonment in a show trial. On November 4, he was given refuge in the US Legation in Budapest.
- <sup>38</sup> On the other hand, the UN was all the more successful in other areas such as institutionalizing international cooperation or the promotion of economic and social development.
- <sup>39</sup> On the treatment of the Hungarian question within the UN see: J. Radványi, *Hungary and the Superpowers. The 1956 Revolution and Realpolitik*, Stanford 1972; or Békés, *Az 1956-os magyar forradalom a világpolitikában* cit.
- <sup>40</sup> The Hungarian issue was also to be discussed at the Security Council meetings on October 28, November 2, 3 and 4
- <sup>41</sup> This was possible on the basis of the 'Uniting for Peace' resolution from 1950 which allowed the General Assembly to take up a pending issue from the Security Council
- <sup>42</sup> In addition, the new government of Kádár was asked to receive the Secretary General and UN observers. Since the Hungarian government refused to cooperate a special committee was set up in January 1957 to report on the events based on reports by refugees. This report was endorsed by an overwhelming majority in September 1957. See: *Report of the Special Committee on the Problem of Hungary. United Nations*, New York 1957
- <sup>43</sup> C. Békés, *Secret Negotiations by the Western Great Powers October 26th-November 4th 1956. British Foreign Office Documents*, in: <http://www.coldwar.hu/html/en/publications/hungquest.html#2>, 19.12.2005
- <sup>44</sup> See for example: S. Beer, *The Need for a Theory of Intelligence, as Exemplified in the Context of Austrian History 1918-1955. Towards an Agenda for Central European Intelligence Studies*, in G. Steinacher, *Im Schatten der Geheimdienste. Südtirol 1919-2000*, Innsbruck 2003, pp. 13-35
- <sup>45</sup> Cit. in J. Granville, "Caught with jam on Our Fingers": *Radio Free Europe and the Hungarian Revolution of 1956*, in "Diplomatic History", 29, 2005, pp. 811
- <sup>46</sup> It needs to be added that the 'Office of Policy Coordination' responsible for psychological warfare was only integrated in the CIA in 1950.
- <sup>47</sup> R. Cummings, *Ballons Over East Europe: The Cold War Leaflet Campaign of Radio Free Europe*, "The Falling Leaf Magazine", 15, 1999.

- <sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>49</sup> NSC 162/2 thereby took back more aggressive types of rollback (including subversive and covert actions in the case of unrest) as mentioned by NSC-158 from June 1953.
- <sup>50</sup> Bischof, *Eindämmung und Koexistenz oder „Rollback“ und Befreiung?*, cit., pp. 118-124.
- <sup>51</sup> “RFE Handbook” 30 November, 1951, NS Archive, SFC, Record no. 66 367, cited in L. Borhi, *Rollback, Liberation, Containment, or Inaction? US Policy and Eastern Europe in the 1950s*, in: *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 3, 1999, pp. 67-110 (also in: <http://www.coldwar.hu/html/en/publications/rollback.html>).
- <sup>52</sup> For more on RFE see: Granville, *Caught with jam on Our Fingers* cit., pp. 811-839; R. Holt, *Radio Free Europe, Minneapolis 1958*; A. Michie; *Voices through the Iron Curtain: The Radio Free Europe Story*, New York 1963; or G. Urban, *Radio Free Europe and the Pursuit of Democracy: My War between the Cold War*, New Haven 1997.
- <sup>53</sup> The financing of RFE by the CIA was only admitted in 1971. Instead, American citizens were made to believe that the station lived of private donations which were collected all over the US under the name of ‘Crusade for Freedom’. In 1956, RFE’s annual budget was \$21 million, of which \$16 million was furnished by the CIA. See Granville, *The first Domino* cit, p. 165.
- <sup>54</sup> Report approved by the Committee on non-represented Nations, 27.4.1957, in: *Österreichisches Staatsarchiv* [Austrian State Archive, hereafter ÖStA], AdR, BKA/AA, II-Pol 1957/Ungarn 11, GZl. 215.149-Pol/57, Zl. 220.282-Pol/57.
- <sup>55</sup> The idea of distributing leaflets from balloons was not new – Germany used this method in World War I and the Bolsheviks in the Russian Civil War – but RFE excelled in their technique and coordinated the drops with radio broadcasts.
- <sup>56</sup> As supposed by the Austrian military. See: Amtsvermerk, 25.2.1956, in ÖStA, AdR, BKA/AA, II-Pol 1956/Österreich 9, GZl. 511.335-Pol/56, Zl. 512.068-Pol/56.
- <sup>57</sup> RFE Press Release, 23.12.1956, in ÖStA, AdR, BKA/AA, II-Pol 1957/Ungarn 11-49, GZl. 215.149-Pol/57, Zl. 228.175-Pol/57.
- <sup>58</sup> Granville, *The first Domino* cit., p. 159.
- <sup>59</sup> Cit. in E. Thomas, *The Very Best Man. Four Who Dared: The Early Years of the CIA*, New York 1995, p. 147.
- <sup>60</sup> Cit. in Borhi, *Rollback, Liberation, Containment, or Inaction?* cit.
- <sup>61</sup> Granville, *The first Domino* cit, p. 163.
- <sup>62</sup> Borhi, *Rollback, Liberation, Containment, or Inaction?* cit. See also Granville, *The first Domino* cit, pp. 182-187. When Eisenhower left office, the project was abandoned.
- <sup>63</sup> P. Grose, *Gentleman Spy. The Life of Allen Dulles*, Boston 1994, p. 322. Rákosi declared in July 1956 that each month, Hungary’s state security forces uncovered an average of two counterrevolutionary underground conspiracies, whose strings lead to the imperialists. Between 1949 and 1953, the regime investigated 120 cases of foreign intelligence, 41 of which were US sponsored. It is hard to say how much of Rákosi’s pronouncement was invented propaganda. See Borhi, *Rollback, Liberation, Containment, or Inaction?* cit.
- <sup>64</sup> Thomas, *Very Best Men* cit., p. 142.
- <sup>65</sup> It is also clear that the US refused to support Spanish plans for covert assistance to be rebels.
- <sup>66</sup> See: E. Cookridge, *Gehlen: Spy of the Century*, London 1971. The German General Reinhard Gehlen, former head of the Abwehr’s Foreign Armies East (*Fremde Heere Ost*) offered his skills and knowledge to the US intelligence after World War II. The ‘Gehlen organisation’ was the nucleus of *Bundesnachrichtendienst* founded in 1955. See C. Whiting, *Gehlen: Germany’s Master Spy*, New York 1972.
- <sup>67</sup> Following the directives received, the RFE had been criticizing Nagy and his New Course since 1953 and did not reverse this policy during the Revolution. See Granville, *The first Domino* cit, p. 200.
- <sup>68</sup> Neither did the intelligence services provide any hints of the events in Poland and Suez. At a meeting of

- senior state department officials on 2 November, Robert Murphy complained that in all three crises, US intelligence agencies had failed to anticipate events. See: *The Acting Secretary's Meeting*, 2 November 1956, FRUS, 1955-1957, Vol. XXV, p. 364, cited in: Borhi, *Rollback, Liberation, Containment, or Inaction?* cit.
- <sup>69</sup> National Intelligence Estimate 12-56, "Probable Developments in European Satellites", January 1956, in Békes - Byrne - Rainer, *The 1956 Hungarian Revolution* cit., pp. 69-85 or *Study Prepared for US Army Intelligence, "Hungary: Resistance Activities and Potentials"*, January 1956, in Békes - Byrne - Rainer, *The 1956 Hungarian Revolution* cit., pp. 86-105.
- <sup>70</sup> Thomas, *Very Best Men* cit., p. 146.
- <sup>71</sup> P. Silva, *Sub Rosa. The CIA and the Uses of Intelligence*, New York 1978, p. 120.
- <sup>72</sup> See: G. Kecskés, *The Suez Crisis and the 1956 Hungarian Revolution*, in: *East European Quarterly*, 35, 2001/1, pp. 47-58 (also in: [http://www.coldwar.hu/html/en/publications/kecskes\\_suez.html](http://www.coldwar.hu/html/en/publications/kecskes_suez.html), 25.12.2005).
- <sup>73</sup> G. Schmidt, *Die Auswirkungen der internationalen Vorgänge 1956*, in Heinemann - Wiggerhaus, *Das internationale Krisenjahr* cit., p. 640.
- <sup>74</sup> After 1968, the right of the Soviet Union to intervene in its satellite states when socialism was threatened became notoriously known as the 'Brezhnev doctrine'.
- <sup>75</sup> Memorandum of Telephone Conversation between President Eisenhower and Henry Cabot Lodge, 9.11.1956, in Litván - Bak, *The Hungarian Revolution of 1956* cit., p. 406.
- <sup>76</sup> This is also the reason why the US was keen on keeping the Hungarian question on the UN agenda for such a long time. The non-aligned countries were the aim.
- <sup>77</sup> Kissinger, *Diplomacy* cit., p. 550.
- <sup>78</sup> See: M. Bitsch, *Histoire de la construction européenne*, Paris 1999, p. 102. Maurice Couve de Murville, at that time ambassador in Rome, claimed that the consensus of the most litigious points concerning the Common Market was reached between Guy Mollat and Konrad Adenauer under the impression of the double crisis on November 6. See B. Bruneteau, *Histoire de l'unification européenne*, Paris 1996, p. 115.
- <sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 127. "Budapest showed to the world that a divided Europe rests weak ... It is now self-evident that Europe has to be constructed ... Did Suez and Budapest not suffice? Are more catastrophes necessary?" (translation by the author).
- <sup>80</sup> C. Békés, *Die ungarische Revolution und die Großmächte*, in Heinemann - Wiggerhaus, *Das internationale Krisenjahr* cit., p. 353.
- <sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 373.
- <sup>82</sup> Békés, *The 1956 Hungarian Revolution and World Politics*, in <http://www.coldwar.hu/html/en/publications/bcs5.html>, 17.12.2005 (reprinted in "The Hungarian Quarterly", 36, 1995, pp. 109-121).

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## SOURCE

National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) 12-56

“Probable Developments in the European Satellites through 1960”

January 10, 1956 (Excerpts)

The military, political, and economic significance of the Satellites to the USSR is so great that Moscow almost certainly regards the maintenance of control over the area as an essential element of its power position. The Satellites provide the Soviet Union with a defence in depth and an advanced position for launching attacks on western and southern Europe. The Satellite regimes themselves are valuable to the USSR as instruments in the conduct of Soviet foreign policy, propaganda, and economic and subversive operations. The Satellites represent an important element of overall Bloc economic strength....

The USSR now has, for all practical purposes, complete control over the Satellites regimes and will almost certainly be able to maintain it during the period of this estimate ... We believe that it will remain firm Soviet policy to retain such control. This control rests fundamentally on the USSR's military capability of maintaining domination over the area... Moscow has made clear that the status of the Satellites is not a matter for international negotiations...

The maintenance of effective Soviet control over the Satellites does not preclude policy modifications calculated to take greater account of local conditions, to promote smoother economic development, and to diminish the impact of Soviet rule on the Satellite national sensibilities...

Despite Moscow's firm control of the Satellites, there are a number of local factors which hamper the execution of Soviet policy. In some of the Satellites factionalism has become evident in the party leadership and has caused confusion in the program. Some elements privately resent dictation by Moscow and favour a reduction of political terror and an increase in consumer goods. There are many party members with nationalist tinge who constitute a potential for “deviation”... We believe, however, that non of these difficulties will jeopardize either the control by Moscow-orientated Communists or the implementation of the Soviet policy...”

Source: *NARA*, published in Richelson J., *The Soviet Estimate*, Alexandria 1955, Document no. 00185, reprinted in Békes C. - Byrne M. - Rainer J. (eds.), *The 1956 Hungarian Revolution: A History in Documents*, Budapest-New York 2002, pp. 69-85.

