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# Re-Thinking U.S.-Soviet Relations in 1956: Nikita Khrushchev's Secret Speech, the Poznań Revolt, the Return of Władysław Gomułka, and the Hungarian Revolt

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Re-Thinking U.S.-Soviet Relations in 1956:  
Nikita Khrushchev's Secret Speech, the Poznań Revolt, the Return of Władysław Gomułka,  
and the Hungarian Revolt

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## Introduction:

“Stalin had sanctioned in the name of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) the most brutal violation of socialist legality, torture and oppression, which led as we have seen to the slandering and to the self-accusation of innocent people.”<sup>1</sup> This statement reflects the controversial 1956 speech given in front of the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union by Nikita Khrushchev, the First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Khrushchev denounced the actions of Stalin, who used to be the face of the Soviet Union and Communism. The rareness of betrayal within the party caused the world and more specifically the United States to have questions.

“Why did Nikita S. Khrushchev, Soviet Communist party leader, take the offensive to destroy the Stalin legend?”<sup>2</sup> In her *New York Times* article, “Capital Debates Motives,” Dana Adams Schmidt asked the question that everyone in the United States government was asking after Khrushchev’s Secret Speech in February 1956. Within the realm of the Cold War, 1956 was a crucial year for Soviet-U.S. relations. Starting with Khrushchev’s Secret Speech on February 25, where he denounced Stalin’s crimes and ‘cult of personality,’ the United States government began to reassess the Soviet Union and Nikita Khrushchev.<sup>3</sup> Then, with the Poznań Revolt and the Polish October, Washington continued to evaluate the reactions of the Soviet Union to help determine its policies against Communist Russia. The

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<sup>1</sup> Nikita Sergeyevich Khrushchev, “Special Report to the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union,” February 24-25, 1956.

<sup>2</sup> Dana Adams Schmidt, “Capital Debates Motives,” *New York Times*, March 20, 1956.

<sup>3</sup> Dana Adams Schmidt, “Capital Debates Motives,” *New York Times*, March 20, 1956.

<sup>3</sup> Johanna Granville, “1956 Reconsidered: Why Hungary and Not Poland?” *The Slavonic and East European Review* vol. 80 no. 4, (October 2002): 664.

year ended with the Hungarian Revolution and its brutal suppression, causing the United States foreign policy makers to reevaluate the relationship with the Soviet Union.

Historians have thoroughly analyzed these events of 1956. Before delving into my argument, it is important to lay out the arguments of other historians to see the historiographical discussions revolving this topic. By presenting the opinions of other historians on this topic, it will become clear that I am offering a fresh perspective.

In Paul Lendvai's book *One Day That Shook the Communist World: The 1956 Hungarian Uprising and its Legacy*, he embodies his role as a Hungarian journalist, to take the position of zooming in on the specific day of October 23, 1956, the day the uprising in Hungary began. Through this decision, Lendvai assesses the situation between the government and the revolutionaries. He draws conclusions based on the causes and effects of the uprising by looking at the bigger picture of the situation. Lendvai acknowledges the disparity between the revolutionaries and the Hungarian government. Furthermore, Lendvai cites the miscommunication between the Hungarian government and the Soviet government, which he blames on Imre Nagy, Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the People's Republic of Hungary. Like many historians, Lendvai looks at the role of the United States within the realm of the revolt, and criticizes their contradicting involvement. However, Lendvai believes that despite any potential United States involvement, the Soviet Union would not have let Hungary be independent of Soviet control. Lendvai was one of many Hungarians who wrote about the revolt.

Another Hungarian, Charles Gati, takes his personal experience of the revolt and pairs it with a historical perspective to create a fresh approach in *Failed Illusions: Moscow, Washington, Budapest, and the 1956 Hungarian Revolt*. Gati's proximity definitely motives

him to question whether the revolution could have produced a different outcome if a few factors had been different. Gati looks at the revolutionaries, the Hungarian government, the Soviet Union, and the United States as the key components in analyzing the uprising. The lack of preparedness of the revolt, the divided government in Hungary, the lack of political astuteness of Imre Nagy, and the United States Radio Free Europe broadcasts receive the blame for the failure of the revolution. Gati looks to the examples of Yugoslavia and Poland to argue that it would have been possible to decrease Soviet influence in Hungary, if the revolt had gone properly. Gati and Lendvai both offer personal aspects. The other common approach is the reevaluation of the events after the opening of the archives in Eastern Europe and Russia, thereby releasing more information.

In the article, "The Soviet Union and the 1956 Crises in Hungary and Poland: Reassessments and New Findings," Mark Kramer uses the newly accessible archive materials from Russia and Eastern Europe. Kramer looks at the reactions of the Soviet Communist Party to the Polish October in 1956 and the Hungarian Revolt, where he concludes that the Hungarian crisis was not as easy to diffuse as the situation in Poland. Kramer argues that tensions between Poland and the Soviet Union reached its peak with the return of Władysław Gomułka to power in Poland. In immediate response, the Soviet Union mobilized troops towards Warsaw, very slowly however. Despite the disappointment expressed by the Soviet Union with this change of power, Khrushchev was willing to meet with Gomułka. While Khrushchev ordered the mobilization of troops initially, it was merely a play for leverage within negotiations. In fact, "at a meeting on 21 October, the CPSU Presidium unanimously decided to 'refrain from military intervention'

and to 'display patience' for the time being."<sup>4</sup> As a result of negotiations between Khrushchev and Gomułka, paired with the promise of Gomułka to stay in the Warsaw Pact and to remain communist, the Soviet Union and Poland worked to prevent a military outbreak.

Kramer contrasts this incident in Poland with the situation in Hungary in 1956. Unlike Poland, Hungary lacked a strong political leader that could negotiate the requests of the people with the CPSU Presidium and Nikita Khrushchev. Mátyás Rákosi was first in power with the outbreak of the situation in Hungary. Not only was he greatly disliked by the Hungarian public, but also he was not a favorite of the Soviet Union. As a result, Ernő Gerő replaced Rákosi, and eventually Imre Nagy replaced Gerő. Neither had success with diffusing the situation. Kramer points to the request of Hungary to withdraw from the Warsaw Pact and the fear that the situation in Hungary would spread to other Warsaw Pact countries as the rationale behind the Soviet Union's military intervention. More specifically, Kramer cites the Suez crisis as a motivation for the Soviet Union to suppress the crisis in Hungary quickly.

Johanna Granville's book *The First Domino: International Decision Making During the Hungarian Crisis of 1956*, also utilizes the new archival collections from the Eastern Bloc countries after the change of system in Hungary in 1989. Rather than focusing on internal factors, like Charles Gati and Paul Lendvai, Granville focuses on the international factors and decision-making. Granville looks at the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, Poland and the United States to place the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 in historical perspective.

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<sup>4</sup> Mark Kramer, "The Soviet Union and the 1956 Crises in Hungary and Poland: Reassessments and New Findings," *Journal of Contemporary History* vol. 33 no. 2 (1998), 171.



Granville points out that Hungary was the first satellite to challenge the Warsaw Pact directly.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, Granville argues that the events in Yugoslavia and Poland influenced the revolutionaries in Hungary. However, in contrast to Hungary, she argues that Yugoslavia and Poland were “two of the most independent ‘revisionist’ communist states that had each weathered their own battles with the Soviet Union and survived.”<sup>6</sup> Their prior independence and the weak Hungarian government help to explain the different outcomes between Hungary and Yugoslavia and Poland.

In terms of the United States and the Hungarian Revolution, Granville looks to the ‘Solarium’ study, which was conducted in the summer of 1953 to help explain their foreign policy towards the Soviet Union.<sup>7</sup> Granville argues that there were three task forces:

Task Force ‘A’, led by George Kennan, argued for a continuation of the containment policy, relying on economic aid; Task Force ‘B,’ led by Admiral Radford espoused containment, albeit with a heavier reliance on the nuclear deterrent; and Task Force ‘C,’ led by C.D. Jackson proposed the conduct of psychological warfare. This ‘rollback’ approach was designed to ‘increase efforts to disturb and weaken the Soviet bloc,’ overtly and covertly attacking the communist apparatus, and missing no opportunities ‘to confuse and unbalance’ the enemy. President Eisenhower decided to mix elements from all three task forces, i.e., to continue the containment policy but increase reliance on covert action and the nuclear deterrent.<sup>8</sup>

Granville further argues that Charles Bohlen, who was the U.S. ambassador to the USSR in 1956, believed that Khrushchev could be trusted, thereby allowing him to deem the containment policy sufficient.<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, Granville recognizes that the United States probably had zero intention of intervening militarily, but rather their strategy was

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<sup>5</sup> Johanna C. Granville, *The First Domino: International decision Making During the Hungarian Crisis of 1956*, (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2004), 3.

<sup>6</sup> Granville, *The First Domino*, 38.

<sup>7</sup> Granville, *The First Domino*, 158.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Granville, *The First Domino*, 160.

purely psychological with their Radio Free Europe broadcasts.<sup>10</sup> In fact, Granville states, “in any case, just as Washington lacked a plan of action should Stalin die, so also it lacked a concrete plan of response should a satellite try to withdraw from the Warsaw Pact and appeal for U.S. aid.”<sup>11</sup> Johanna Granville demonstrates her thorough knowledge of the 1956 events through her journal articles as well.

The preceding chapter lays out the historiographical background, in other words prior discussions about the events of 1956 and more specifically the Hungarian Revolt of 1956. By looking at the prior discussions, it helps to present the hopeful uniqueness of the argument laid out in this chapter. The trend revolving the discussion of these events are to discuss them through the perspective of the Soviet Union or the victimized country, for example Hungary. However, I wish to look at these events through the lens of United States foreign policy.

By looking at the internal discussions, memos, letters, reports and more of the United States government agencies it is possible to determine how the United States government interpreted these events. Unlike newspaper articles that are opinion pieces of reporters, these documents speak to the opinion of government officials. Government officials not only make policies, but also have access to different information than the general public, therefore making their opinions more interesting. Furthermore, previous historians have looked at the newly opened archives of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union as their main primary sources. Therefore, not only is my perspective fresh but the documents I am looking at have yet to have been applied in the manner I intend to use them.

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<sup>10</sup> Granville, *The First Domino*, 181.

<sup>11</sup> Granville, *The First Domino*, 194.

All of these historians analyze the Hungarian Revolt and the Soviet bloc events of 1956, however, from the perspective of Hungary or the Soviet Union. In contrast, I plan to examine these events through the perspective of the United States. More specifically, I wish to see how the United States government's perceptions of Nikita Khrushchev, the Soviet Union, and communism evolved through the year of 1956. I plan to analyze the presidential papers of Dwight David Eisenhower, United States Foreign Relations documents, which include memorandums, reports, and telegrams, and lastly personal testimonies from Hungarian refugees from Columbia University's Oral History Project. Unlike the approaches by the historians presented above, by looking through the lens of the United States government, I wish to offer a fresh perspective on the events of 1956 and the relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War.

Through the analysis of these sources, I wish to analyze the United States' understanding and reactions of the dramatic events of 1956. Furthermore, after all of these events, did the United States perception of the Soviet Union, Nikita Khrushchev, and communism evolve? If so, is this reflected within the foreign policy of the United States and to what degree is their evolution in the United States policy? What does this say about the United States' willingness to understand communism?

By answering these questions a narrative is developed about the United States' foreign policy between the Soviet Union and even larger, communism. The analysis of whether the United States Cold War foreign policy evolved as a consequence of the events of 1956 helps reveal the adaptability of the United States government and their policies in general, not just their Cold War foreign policy. By examining the intelligence and knowledge that the United States government had access to alongside the policies created

at this time, the United States government adaptability and efficiency can be analyzed. Therefore it is essential to look first at Khrushchev's Secret Speech, next the Poznań Revolt, then the return of Władysław Gomułka, and finally the Hungarian Revolt of 1956.

As of November 3, 1956, "Soviet tanks sealed the main crossings of the Austrian-Hungarian border Friday. This was regarded as a preliminary to dealing sternly with the insurgents."<sup>12</sup> In response to the Hungarian government denouncing the Warsaw Pact and thereby proclaiming Hungary a neutral state, the Soviet Union increased the militarization of the borders. How did a year that started with such promise with Khrushchev's Secret Speech close with a Stalinist style of suppression of Hungarian insurgents? The following chapters wish to answer this and where the United States stood throughout it all.

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<sup>12</sup> John MacCormac, "Premier Asks that U.N. Defend Neutrality of Hungary," New York Times, November 3, 1956.

Part One:  
The Chronology of the Events of the Cold War in 1956

## Chapter 1: Do As I Say Not As I Do: Nikita Khrushchev's Secret Speech

On the night of the last day of the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party, February 24, 1956, Nikita Khrushchev convened the Congress for a closed session. Without forewarning of what his speech would entail, the Congress waited anxiously. In the wee hours of the night and into the next day, Khrushchev spoke to a captive audience for four hours. No one was prepared to hear what he had to say. Most were silent; some fainted.<sup>13</sup>

Khrushchev's speech unprecedentedly pushed the boundaries of the Communist Party. With his speech, Khrushchev meant to accomplish a clear-cut direction divergent from Joseph Stalin and to reestablish a socialist legality. However, the unintended effects were confusion, the emergence of vulnerabilities in the Eastern Bloc, and the rise of discussion. He presented detailed accounts of Stalin's repressive nature as a leader, his arrest orders, his sanctioned murders, and the terror that he instilled throughout the Soviet Union. Khrushchev did not stop there. He condemned Stalin for his handling of foreign affairs and World War II. He harshly criticized every aspect of Stalin's reign before the Communist Party. Khrushchev tactically limited his attack to Stalin, never once attacking the Communist system or Party. Instead, he placed all of the blame personally on Stalin and presented the Party as a victim to Stalin's ruthless reign.<sup>14</sup>

Without hesitation, Khrushchev started his speech by immediately denouncing Stalin. Khrushchev acknowledged that Stalin portrayed himself as a godlike figure. Rather than giving a narrative of Stalin's reign, Khrushchev critiqued Stalin's specific actions.

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<sup>13</sup> Aleksandr Pyzhikov V., "The Cult of Personality During the Khrushchev Thaw," *Russian Studies in History* 50, no. 3 (Winter /2012 2011): 11, doi:December 2011.

<sup>14</sup> Karl E. Loewenstein, "Re-Emergence of Public Opinion in the Soviet Union: Khrushchev and Responses to the Secret Speech," *Europe-Asia Studies* 58, no. 8 (December 1, 2006): 1329-1345.

Khrushchev first raised concern for the “cult of the person of Stalin.”<sup>15</sup> He claimed that this evolved into the ‘cult of the individual,’ which directly conflicted with the ideology of communism. He attributed the cult’s creation to Stalin, thereby opening the door for criticism. Khrushchev tried to establish a distinction between Stalin’s actions and proper communist ideology, limiting his attack to just Stalin.

Khrushchev turned to the ideologies of Karl Marx and Vladimir Lenin as leaders who denounced the ‘cult of the individual’ to strengthen his critique. Quoting Lenin, he stated, “Only he who believes in the people, [he] who submerges himself in the fountain of the living creativeness of the people, will win and retain power.”<sup>16</sup> Khrushchev disapproved of Stalin’s philosophy and wanted to replace it with Leninist ideology instead. By further contrasting the philosophy of Lenin and the reign of Stalin, Khrushchev presented the importance of the Party as a unit. According to Khrushchev, Stalin diminished the Party’s power as a way to increase his own. Khrushchev portrayed Stalin as a dictator whose hunger for power corrupted him and caused him to distort the ideology of communism.<sup>17</sup> Despite this criticism on Stalin’s repressive nature, Khrushchev carefully avoided denouncing actions consistent with communist ideology, for example, collectivization and the five-year plan.

To further support his critique, Khrushchev referred to Lenin’s testament and characterization of Stalin:

Stalin is excessively rude, and this defect, which can be freely tolerated in our midst and in contacts among us Communists, becomes a defect which

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<sup>15</sup> Nikita, Khrushchev, “Speech to 20th Congress of the C.P.S.U.,” Speech, February 24, 1956, Nikita Khrushchev Reference Archive, Soviet Government Documents, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/khrushchev/1956/02/24.htm>.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

cannot be tolerated in one holding the position of General Secretary. Because of this, I propose that the comrades consider the method by which Stalin would be removed from this position and by which another man would be selected for it, a man who, above all, would differ from Stalin in only one quality, namely, greater tolerance, greater loyalty, greater kindness and more considerate attitude toward the comrades, a less capricious temper, etc.<sup>18</sup>

Despite this warning, Stalin retained his position. The pairing of this cautionary advice with Stalin's reign of terror, Khrushchev provided a basis for his argument, without losing the Congress and the Party.

Moving away from Lenin's warnings of Stalin, Khrushchev allowed his own negative opinion of Stalin to shine through. He condemned Stalin for acting as a dictator who expected absolute obedience from not only the Congress but from every citizen within the Soviet Union instead of acting as a leader of the Party. In order to achieve this submissiveness, Stalin instilled fear throughout the Union. Any form of defiance to Stalin could result in death, thereby preventing people from disobeying the orders of Stalin. Khrushchev reprobated this form of tyrannical rule.

Khrushchev further denounced Stalin for his concept of the 'enemy of the people.' According to Khrushchev, this designation allowed Stalin to abuse his power, by repressing any person within the Union by calling him an 'enemy of the people.' Khrushchev continued to criticize that this process of persecution was never just and was always cruel. Stalin's persecutions at their worst, "led to glaring violations of revolutionary legality and to the fact that many entirely innocent individuals—[persons] who in the past had defended the Party line—became victims."<sup>19</sup> Khrushchev's denouncement of the murders placed him in a

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<sup>18</sup> Khrushchev, "Speech to 20th Congress of the C.P.S.U."

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.



vulnerable position. By disagreeing with Stalin's policy, he implied that there would be a new way of dealing with opposition within the Soviet Union, yet he never clarified this.

Khrushchev strategically ended his speech on a positive note. He contrasted his critique of Stalin against the optimism for the future of the Communist Party and the Soviet Union;

Comrades! The 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union has manifested with a new strength the unshakable unity of our Party, its cohesiveness around the Central Committee, its resolute will to accomplish the great task of building communism.<sup>20</sup>

Khrushchev tactfully separated himself from Stalin while still supporting the Communist Party. Furthermore, he purposely concluded the speech with how the Party should move forward to re-establish his support of Communism and the Party.

Khrushchev explained his strategic decision to have an unpublicized session and expressed his desire to keep the speech secret for as long as possible;

We can not allow this question to leave party circles, especially to the press. That is why we discuss it here, at a closed meeting of the congress. We should know the limits, we should not give weapons to our enemies; we should not air our dirty laundry in front of their eyes. I think that the delegates to the congress understand and properly value of all these suggestions.<sup>21</sup>

The Congress responded with intense applause. Khrushchev understood that while his speech was a denouncement of Stalin and not a denouncement of the communist system, non-Communist countries like the United States could manipulate his speech. Fearful that his delicate critique might be used against him, Khrushchev tried to keep it a secret among the Communist Party for as long as he could.

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<sup>20</sup> Khrushchev, "Speech to 20th Congress of the C.P.S.U."

<sup>21</sup> Karl E. Loewenstein, "Re-Emergence of Public Opinion in the Soviet Union: Khrushchev and Responses to the Secret Speech," *Europe-Asia Studies* 58, no. 8 (December 1, 2006): 1334.

Khrushchev stunned the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress with his four-hour speech. Despite their shock, the Party rallied behind him. Khrushchev's Secret Speech speaks to his astuteness as a leader. Throughout he highlighted the mistakes Stalin made during his reign and never once criticized the Communist Party. By portraying the Party as a victim, it justified Khrushchev's attempt to refocus the Party. Khrushchev recognized the transitional state of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and capitalized on the opportunity to guide the Party away from Stalinist ideology and towards Leninist principles.

However, the speech created problems for Khrushchev. He wanted to guide the party in a new direction, but instead he created confusion. The denigration of Stalin shocked the Party. Despite Khrushchev's skillful separation of Stalin's actions from Communist ideology, Party members and followers still struggled to understand how the two could exist separately. For as long as Stalin was the dictator of Soviet Union, communists believed that he embodied and enacted the ideologies of communism. But Khrushchev was saying otherwise, thereby creating confusion within the Communist Party. The speech neglected to create a clear-cut direction for the Party, but rather opened the door for discussion among the Party. To provide people opportunities to ask questions about the "new" communist system, the Party held forums to discuss the speech.<sup>22</sup> In this manner, Khrushchev's Secret Speech failed. Rather than simply focus on Leninism, Khrushchev inadvertently created a dialogue to revise communist ideology.

In addition to complicating communist ideology, Khrushchev's speech presented a weakness. He clearly did not want to continue Stalin's legacy, but was never explicit about his policy's direction outside of a return to Leninism. De-Stalinization would affect the

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<sup>22</sup> Loewenstein, "Re-Emergence of Public Opinion in the Soviet Union," 1330.

Soviet Union's future and Khrushchev's actions, but he addressed neither issue. The new regime limited him in his reactions to problems of dissent, inadvertently creating the problem of governing Eastern Europe. The speech suggested that it would no longer be acceptable to use force and terror to solve these potential problems of conflict. Instead, Khrushchev would need to be more open to diplomatic negotiations. He clearly did not anticipate the events in Poland or Hungary later that year. The speech also implied that Khrushchev believed that the Soviet Union could transform its policy so abruptly.

Furthermore, denouncing Stalin meant disrupting the status quo. Stalinists ruled many of the Eastern Europe governments. The dissolution of Stalinism created points of vulnerability in the Communist bloc. He never addressed the problem of Stalinist rulers in the Eastern Bloc and how that would affect their relations. By making the distinction between Stalin's actions and the Communist Party, Khrushchev undermined the legitimacy of the satellite countries' governments. He opened up the possibility for the changing of rulers within the Bloc and therefore reform within the satellite governments. The Eastern European governments took full advantage of that opportunity.

Most importantly, Khrushchev insinuated that there was a socialist legality. If Stalin and his actions were wrong, then there must be a standard of socialist legitimacy. As a result, each socialist state would therefore have a legal responsibility and be required to answer for its actions. Once again, Khrushchev disrupted the status quo.

Khrushchev's speech sent shockwaves through the Eastern Bloc. Rumors swirled around Poland and Hungary about the future of their communist reigns. The absence of Bolesław Bierut, the leader of the PZPR Politburo, from Poland strained communication between Poland and the Soviet Union, fueling rumors. Bierut could not leave the Soviet

Union due to his poor health. On March 12, two weeks after the speech, Bierut died. One rumor supposed that Bierut had a heart attack because of shock from the speech.<sup>23</sup> The death came as a shock to the Poles because his deteriorating health was kept a secret, probably because the image of a sick leader is an image of a weak leader, which would allow people to believe even more that reform was possible. Bierut's death helped to change the dynamics of the Polish government. Unlikely candidates presented themselves as members of the Politburo. The absence of Bierut in the Politburo triggered discussion about redirecting of Polish politics. In an attempt to quiet the rumors about Bierut, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union told Poland that they would send speakers to explain Khrushchev's speech and to clear up any confusion.

The confusion that presented itself in the Soviet Union and Poland emerged in Hungary as well. In fact, Khrushchev's denouncement drew a further wedge between Hungary's dominant party, the Stalinist Muscovites, and the lesser communist party.<sup>24</sup> Politics in Hungary had begun to change. Just before Khrushchev made his Secret Speech, the Petofi Circle had been reinstated in Hungary. The Petofi Circle united intellectuals and workers, while also providing a forum to discuss their grievances. Khrushchev's speech spurred a meeting in May 1956 by the Petofi Circle with the title, "The Twentieth Soviet Party Congress and the Problems of Hungarian Political Economy." The meeting evolved from a discussion of Khrushchev's speech into an "all-out denunciation of Rákosi's megalomania."<sup>25</sup> The Petofi Circle convened again in July, to discuss freedom of the press, but again things quickly escalated. The meeting erupted into chants calling for the removal

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<sup>23</sup> Kemp-Welch, "Khrushchev's 'Secret Speech' and Polish Politics," 186.

<sup>24</sup> Granville, "Reactions to the Events of 1956," 269.

<sup>25</sup> Anne Applebaum, *Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe 1944-1956* (London: Penguin Group, 2012), 482.

of Mátyás Rákosi and the return of Imre Nagy.<sup>26</sup> The two meetings of the Petofi Circle set the scene for the Hungarian Revolt in October.

Khrushchev's Secret Speech electrified Eastern Europe, but especially Poland and Hungary. The speech's release had huge ramifications for the Soviet Union and their policy toward the Eastern Bloc. Poland and Hungary each capitalized on the speech's effect to freely discuss its grievances and to re-assess its situation and relationship with the Soviet Union. Both Poland and Hungary would attempt to reform, but only one would succeed.

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<sup>26</sup> Applebaum, *Iron Curtain*, 483.

## Chapter 2: The Eastern Bloc Begins to Crack: Poznań Revolt and Polish October

Bolesław Bierut, the leader of the Polish United Worker's Party (PZPR), attended Khrushchev's speech. Bierut ruled with two other leaders, Hilary Minc and Jakub Berman, known as the ruling troika of Poland. The speech puzzled the Stalinist triumvirate. Despite Bierut's failing health, he reported back to Poland about the speech and the developments surrounding it. The Polish party struggled to formally govern without Bierut in Poland. Instead of hosting a formal plenum, the Central Committee planned an unofficial one, where they were briefed on Khrushchev's speech.<sup>27</sup> Edward Osóbka-Morawski, who had been the first Prime Minister of Communist Poland, delivered the report, claiming, "The XX Congress was a unique chance to revive Polish communism, picking up the threads that had been dropped after the Third Plenum."<sup>28</sup> In other words, Khrushchev's speech impelled an evaluation of Poland's past and future. The Polish government began to question the country's new direction.

The death of Bierut, on March 12, stalled discussions about Khrushchev's speech and the future of Poland. Khrushchev stayed in Poland after Bierut's funeral, with the intention of influencing the PZPR Politburo elections. The division in Poland between the Stalinist Muscovites and the home communists was deepened by Khrushchev's speech. The Muscovites were the communist leaders within the satellite countries who remained in the Soviet Union during World War II, while the home communists were those who were in prison at home during Stalin's rule. Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin undermined the

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<sup>27</sup> Tony Kemp-Welch, "Khrushchev's 'Secret Speech' and Polish Politics: The Spring of 1956," *Europe-Asia Studies* 48, no. 2 (March 1, 1996): 183.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

Muscovites, which gave way to dominance of the home communists.<sup>29</sup> No longer did the triumvirate of Bolesław Bierut, Minc, and Berman control Polish politics, which placed the influence of the Soviet Union upon Polish politics into question.

On March 20, the Sixth Plenum of the PZPR convened. Khrushchev delivered a speech assuring the plenum that the years of Stalinist repression were over.<sup>30</sup> The meeting of the Sixth Plenum ended with the election of new members with reformist tendencies. Under the influence of the Politburo, Edward Ochab was elected First Secretary of the Polish United Worker's Party.<sup>31</sup> The change in leadership complicated Soviet-Polish relations. No longer were the leaders of the Polish government appointed by Soviet leaders but rather elected within the Polish government themselves, despite Khrushchev's attempt to influence the election.

The Twentieth Congress distributed original copies of Khrushchev's speech to the members and attendees, contrary to Khrushchev's desire for secrecy. Bierut received one of the copies before his death. These copies were originally made to help regional and local Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) organizations brief their membership. The Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR) circulated Khrushchev's speech throughout Poland intending to inform the inner party.<sup>32</sup> The distribution of the speech raised even more questions in Poland. Much of the confusion derived from the implausibility of Stalin acting alone. While Khrushchev tried to alienated Stalin from the Party, Polish communists found it difficult to believe that Stalin could act alone.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, the members were

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<sup>29</sup> Johanna Granville, "To Invade or Not to Invade? A New Look at Gomułka, Nagy, and Soviet Foreign Policy in 1956," *Canadian Slavonic Papers / Revue Canadienne Des Slavistes* 43, no. 4 (December 1, 2001): 440.

<sup>30</sup> Kemp-Welch, "Khrushchev's 'Secret Speech' and Polish Politics," 187.

<sup>31</sup> Kemp-Welch, "Khrushchev's 'Secret Speech' and Polish Politics," 188.

<sup>32</sup> Kemp-Welch, "Khrushchev's 'Secret Speech' and Polish Politics," 189.

<sup>33</sup> Kemp-Welch, "Khrushchev's 'Secret Speech' and Polish Politics," 192.

confused how the Party could have allowed Stalin to deviate from communist ideology so much. The dubious account made Polish leaders question the governing members of the Soviet Union.

The student population and the workers in Poland also reacted. The PZPR set out to inform the party membership of the speech and its potential implications, which included visiting the universities. For example, on March 26, forty party members convened at the Szczecin Technical University. Disgruntled party members shouted questions about Soviet domination within Polish society, such as, “Why are 90% of generals in the Polish Army Russians?” or “Why did Khrushchev stay on in Warsaw after Comrade Bierut’s funeral: didn’t he select our Central Committee First Secretary?”<sup>34</sup> Soviet suspicion began to brew among the Party membership.

The freedom granted to discuss and explain Khrushchev’s speech opened the floodgates for reevaluation about the past and questions about the future. The workers interpreted Khrushchev’s speech as a move towards greater freedom of expression, but that was not the intention.<sup>35</sup> In order to suppress open political dialogue, both the PZPR and the CPSU tried to end discussions about the speech.<sup>36</sup> The dissent that arose from the speech developed into a more general opposition towards the Soviet Union. An uprising began to develop within Poland. The anti-Soviet attitudes evolved into a Poland nationalist movement, with “calls for the ‘return to Poland,’” across the country.<sup>37</sup>

The youth was the powerful fuel behind this movement. *Po prostu*, a maverick Polish magazine, “published a signed editorial which rallied the young intelligentsia to social

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<sup>34</sup> Kemp-Welch, “Khrushchev’s ‘Secret Speech’ and Polish Politics,” 190.

<sup>35</sup> Kemp-Welch, “Khrushchev’s ‘Secret Speech’ and Polish Politics,” 196.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Kemp-Welch, “Khrushchev’s ‘Secret Speech’ and Polish Politics,” 197.



protest.”<sup>38</sup> In order to prevent a youth riot, a federation of ‘youth discussion clubs’ was created, which encouraged more political involvement;

Groups from Krakow, Poznań, Rzeszow and elsewhere empowered the Warsaw Club of Catholic Intelligentsia (KIK) to act as Secretary: (1) to organize and support existing groups and help new ones arise; (2) to represent their interests to the authorities and institutions (particularly where local authorities were being obstructive); (3) to further cooperation between clubs, exchanging experience and information.<sup>39</sup>

While these discussion groups evolved out of the political uproar in response to Khrushchev’s speech they also became places for discussions about apolitical topics such as music as well.<sup>40</sup> The development of discussion clubs led to a politically engaged and outspoken Polish population.

With a newly politically engaged society and new forums, like the discussion clubs’, people began to openly express opinions. While the intelligentsia dominated this newfound interest in meetings and freely discussing their opinions, it was not limited to them. Polish workers also began to meet as a way to express their discontent with industrial conditions, such as “arbitrary raising of production norms, poor organization of work which reduced their earnings, an unjust and (in their estimation) irrational tax system and poor working conditions.”<sup>41</sup> Despite the change in government after Bierut’s death, the new balance of members within the party did not make any significant changes to the economic situation. They planned to continue the Five Year Plan despite de-Stalinization efforts in Poland. Industrial areas were the first to experience the hardships of the poor economic conditions

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<sup>38</sup> Kemp-Welch, “Khrushchev’s ‘Secret Speech’ and Polish Politics,” 199.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Paweł Machcewicz, “Intellectuals and Mass Movements. The Study of Political Dissent in Poland in 1956,” *Contemporary European History* 6, no. 3 (November 1, 1997): 362.

of Poland.<sup>42</sup> Following this new trend, the workers of the Poznań Stalin Works (*Zakłady Imieniem Stalina Poznań*, or ZISPO) locomotive plant in met on Saturday, June 23, to discuss their complaints about the poor working conditions.<sup>43</sup> After consolidating their complaints into five demands, including a twenty percent wage increase, bonuses and repayment of taxes, they decided to send these complaints, along with a delegation from the locomotive plant in Poznań, to the central authorities in Warsaw.<sup>44</sup>

While the workers were anxiously waiting to hear from the delegation, rumors began to spread about what happened to the members who were sent to Warsaw. With more silence, came more confusion. Finally, after five days of waiting, on June 28, the workers decided to organize a demonstration, later known as “Black Thursday.” The day and night shift workers came together to total roughly 12,000. Ordinary citizens joined the strikers, creating an even larger demonstration. The rumor that the members of the delegation had been arrested added to the collective unrest among the workers.<sup>45</sup> The demonstration quickly became violent. The enraged ZISPO workers first stormed the city jail, following the rumors that the delegation had been arrested. Overwhelming the guards with their numbers, the workers succeeded in freeing all the prisoners. However, the strikers remained unsatisfied. Following their impassioned emotions, the workers seized the guards’ weapons, and thus dramatically changed the tone of the demonstration.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Adam Bromke, “Background of the Polish October Revolution,” *Canadian Slavonic Papers / Revue Canadienne Des Slavistes* 3 (January 1, 1958): 51.

<sup>43</sup> Johanna Granville, “1956 Reconsidered: Why Hungary and Not Poland?” *The Slavonic and East European Review* 80, no. 4 (October 1, 2002): 659.

<sup>44</sup> Johanna Granville, “Reactions to the Events of 1956: New Findings from the Budapest and Warsaw Archives,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 38, no. 2 (April 1, 2003): 264.

<sup>45</sup> Johanna Granville, “To Invade or Not to Invade? A New Look at Gomułka, Nagy, and Soviet Foreign Policy in 1956,” *Canadian Slavonic Papers / Revue Canadienne Des Slavistes* 43, no. 4 (December 1, 2001): 441.

<sup>46</sup> Granville, “1956 Reconsidered,” 660.

After failing to find their delegates at the jail, the workers charged on to the radio station, angry that they were blocking Western broadcasts. There were Westerners on the ground who were covering the story, yet the radio programmers were not broadcasting their reports. The Poznań workers wanted to capitalize on this publicity opportunity to explain why they attacked the radio station.<sup>47</sup> From there, the workers then stormed the building of the District Office of Security, still frantically looking for the ZISPO delegates. Here, emotions and violence escalated even further. The first shots were fired at the District Office of Security. The demonstration evolved into a violent antigovernment riot that spread from Poznań into other Polish cities.<sup>48</sup> Beginning with economic demands, the rioters changed their tune to more nationalistic demands such as, "Down with the Bloodsuckers," "Down with the Communists," and "Down with the Red Bourgeoisie."<sup>49</sup> All across Poland demonstrators raided government buildings, attacked symbols of the Party, and destroyed any physical symbol of the Party such as flags and propaganda.<sup>50</sup>

Reports of the riots reached the PZPR Central Committee in Warsaw almost immediately. The committee called an emergency session. The PZPR had to decide how to calm the riots and maintain order throughout the country. If played incorrectly, the PZPR knew that these riots could evolve into a political coup. They decided to make use of the Citizens' Militia (Milicja Obywatelska, or MO) and the Internal Security Corps (Kropus Bezpieczeństwa Wewnętrznego or KBW). At this point in time, there were only 329 soldiers, including 62 officers of the KBW, stationed in Poznań. These forces were busy

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<sup>47</sup> Granville, "To Invade or Not to Invade?" 442.

<sup>48</sup> Granville, "1956 Reconsidered," 660.

<sup>49</sup> Machcewicz, "Intellectuals and Mass Movements. The Study of Political Dissent in Poland in 1956," 363.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

protecting the key points of Poznań.<sup>51</sup> Despite very strong opposition in the PZPR to call in reinforcements from outside the city, the PZPR finally called upon the Polish Army to crush the riot.<sup>52</sup>

The Polish army, paired with the MO units, marched into Poznań on June 28 and 29 to suppress the protesters. The riots were suppressed in a day. The local police did little to help the military in part because the rioters seized their weapons preventing them from being able to support the suppression. However, it may also be hypothesized that the police did not want to cooperate with the MO troops for other reasons. Most of the officers in the MO units followed orders to fire at the insurgents with minimal resistance.<sup>53</sup> The Polish casualties amounted to around 100 deaths and 300 injured.<sup>54</sup>

The Poznań Revolt started as a demonstration of disgruntled workers reacting to economic distress, but escalated into an anti-governmental riot across Poland. In reaction to the events that occurred in Poznań, Secretary Edward Ochab and the PZPR Politburo sent their own delegation consisting of the Prime Minister Józef Cyrankiewicz and Central Committee secretaries Jerzy Morawski,<sup>55</sup> Edward Gierek,<sup>56</sup> and Wiktor Klosiewicz<sup>57</sup>.<sup>58</sup> The Polish government took the revolt seriously, working very carefully to assuage the workers and not to belittle the Poznań workers. Under close supervision from the Soviet Union, the Poles reacted quickly to prevent unwanted Soviet assistance.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Granville, "To Invade or Not to Invade?" 444.

<sup>52</sup> Granville, "To Invade or Not to Invade?" 445.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Granville, "To Invade or Not to Invade?" 446.

<sup>55</sup> In charge of propaganda

<sup>56</sup> In charge of heavy industry and transport

<sup>57</sup> Chairman of the Central Council of Trade Unions

<sup>58</sup> Granville, "To Invade or Not to Invade?" 442.

<sup>59</sup> Granville, "To Invade or Not to Invade?" 444.

Economic distress was the driving factor of the Poznań Revolt. The main demand from the Poznań workers was for an increase in pay. The nature of the demands and the careful handling of the demands made it easier for the Polish government to calm the workers. While demands did evolve to anti-Soviet sentiment, the Polish government could appease the protestors with the promise of economic reforms. Under pressure from the workers and under the watchful eye of the Soviets, Ochab and the PZPR carefully suppressed the revolt with minimal casualties. Ochab proved to the Soviets that the Polish government could manage their own internal affairs, which gave the Soviets confidence that they did not have to interfere.

The Poznań Revolt forced another reevaluation of the Polish government in the summer of 1956. Workers began to routinely voice their concerns through party and trade union independent worker councils. Threatened by the workers councils and the revolt, the Party was forced to reform the government. The Polish Politburo decided to rethink its relationship between Poland and the Soviet Union.<sup>60</sup>

The Polish Politburo convened the Seventh Plenary Meeting of the Central Committee in July. The meeting concluded with a liberal victory that resulted in the decision to not implement harsh punishments against the imprisoned Poznań rebels and to discuss the potential for a new direction of the Party. However, it was not sufficient.<sup>61</sup> The PZPR furthered the de-Stalinization campaign by dismissing Stalinist officials and focusing on fixing the economic failures.<sup>62</sup> Despite appeasing the workers in the Poznań Revolt, the

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<sup>60</sup> Bromke, "Background of the Polish October Revolution," 51.

<sup>61</sup> Bromke, "Background of the Polish October Revolution," 52.

<sup>62</sup> Granville, "Reactions to the Events of 1956," 266.

majority of Poland remained unsatisfied. Drastic change would need to be taken in order to appease the Polish population.

In the summer of 1956, Władysław Gomułka was resting in his home after his 1954 release from prison.<sup>63</sup> Gomułka's history made him an attractive candidate for the Polish Politburo. Despite his lack of formal education, in 1926, Gomułka was admitted into the secret Communist Party of Poland. In 1930, he was elected as national secretary of the Chemical Worker's Union. Unlike Bierut, Gomułka was a "home" communist, which caused problems for him under Stalin's reign. Gomułka was infamous in Poland for his revolutionary actions, which routinely landed him in jail.<sup>64</sup> In fact, he was imprisoned four times. First in 1926 for "revolutionary activity." Again in 1932 for organizing a textile strike in Lodz. In 1936, he was arrested for "revolutionary activity" in Silesia. Finally, in July 1951, Gomułka was arrested for nationalist deviationist crimes, including his opposition to the Cominform in September 1947.<sup>65</sup> The de-Stalinization campaign helped Gomułka rehabilitate his political career, priming him for the summer of 1956. His history made him a popular candidate to appease the workers and the anti-Soviet attitude of the Poles at this point in time.

After the Seventh Plenum, in popular response to repeated calls, Ochab arranged a meeting with Gomułka.<sup>66</sup> Conscious of both the problems in Poland and the PZPR's need for his return, Gomułka negotiated the terms of his return. Gomułka agreed to return to the Party if Khrushchev completed his withdrawal of Soviet officers and advisers from the

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<sup>63</sup> Granville, "Reactions to the Events of 1956," 266.

<sup>64</sup> Granville, "To Invade or Not to Invade?" 454.

<sup>65</sup> Johanna Granville, "1956 Reconsidered: Why Hungary and Not Poland?," *The Slavonic and East European Review* 80, no. 4 (October 1, 2002): 656–87.

<sup>66</sup> Bromke, "Background of the Polish October Revolution," 52.

Polish Armed Forces and security apparatus, and if Soviet Marshal Konstanty Rokossowski was removed from the PZPR Politburo.<sup>67</sup> With the agreement of these conditions

Władysław Gomułka returned to the Party in August, continuing Poland's de-Stalinization.

While Gomułka was re-admitted to the Party in August, he was not elected to the PZPR Politburo until October. To prepare the Party for the return of Gomułka, the Politburo explained the problems within the Party at the Politburo meeting of October 8 and 10.<sup>68</sup>

The issues were:

1) a lack of unity in the Politburo; 2) a lack of connections between the leadership and the Party activists; 3) a lack of authority among the leadership; 4) with regard to the spreading of anti-Soviet tendencies there is, aside from the propaganda of the enemy, an unfair situation in the relations between the PPR [Polish People's Republic] and USSR (such as the question concerning the price of coal, the highest officer cadres in the army often do not know the Polish language, do not have Polish citizenship, and the Soviet Ambassador interferes in the internal affairs of the country).<sup>69</sup>

The PZPR Politburo hoped that Gomułka's reinstatement to the Party would help to unify the Party as well as connect the Politburo with the workers better, thereby eliminating many of the problems. With the scene set, Gomułka attended his first official Politburo meeting on October 12, ready to guide Poland in its new direction.

Gomułka continued his tense return by immediately criticizing the relationship between Poland the Soviet Union. Pointing to the problem of Soviet advisers within the Polish security field and Soviet officers within the Polish army, Gomułka declared Polish-Soviet relations as "not an example of normal relations," and an issue that needed to be

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<sup>67</sup> Soviet Marshal Rokossowski joined the Politburo in May 1950 and became deputy premier in 1952, for more see: L. W. Gluchowski, "Poland, 1956: Khrushchev, Gomułka, and the 'Polish October,'" *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, Spring 1995, 38.

<sup>68</sup> Gluchowski, "Poland, 1956: Khrushchev, Gomułka, and the 'Polish October,'" 38.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

“normalized.”<sup>70</sup> Obviously, this statement caused Gomułka to clash with the Soviet Marshal Rokossowski, and further isolated Rokossowski within the Politburo.

With Rokossowski out of the way, Gomułka could speak about the necessity of uniting the party under his leadership. Gomułka boldly asked for the leadership’s recommendation to the PZPR Politburo. As agreed upon, Ochab nominated Gomułka, with the support of other members, for membership in the Politburo at the Eighth Plenum.<sup>71</sup> Ochab recognized that in order to maintain his political power he would need to support Gomułka’s rise to leadership.

The Politburo met privately before the Eighth Plenum convened, agreeing to not only add Gomułka but also his allies, Marian Spychalski, Zenon Kliszko, and Ignacy Logasowski, to the leadership of the PZPR. To help secure Gomułka’s position, the Politburo decided to publicly announce his return.<sup>72</sup> In preparation of the Eighth Plenum, the Politburo held elections for the Politburo and Secretariat membership. The elections demonstrated the division between Rokossowski and Gomułka within the Politburo.<sup>73</sup> Gomułka and three other Politburo members, Józef Cyrankiewicz,<sup>74</sup> Aleksander Zawadski,<sup>75</sup> and Edward Ochab,<sup>76</sup> were the last candidates. The role of the special election commission

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<sup>70</sup> Gluchowski, “Poland, 1956: Khrushchev, Gomułka, and the ‘Polish October,’” 38.

<sup>71</sup> Gluchowski, “Poland, 1956: Khrushchev, Gomułka, and the ‘Polish October,’” 39.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Gluchowski, “Poland, 1956: Khrushchev, Gomułka, and the ‘Polish October,’” 47.

<sup>74</sup> He had been a member of the PZPR Central Committee and Politburo since 1948, was Prime Minister from 1947-1952 and 1954-1970, and was deputy premier from 1952-1954. Gluchowski, “Poland, 1956: Khrushchev, Gomułka, and the ‘Polish October,’” 47.

<sup>75</sup> He had been a member of the Politburo since 1943, was the deputy chief political officer of the Polish Army from 1943-1944, was the head of the Central Council of Trade Unions from 1949-1951, was deputy premier from 1951-1952, and was the head of the Council of State from 1952-1964. Gluchowski, “Poland, 1956: Khrushchev, Gomułka, and the ‘Polish October,’” 47.

<sup>76</sup> Ochab’s history consisted of first deputy defense minister and chief political officer of the Polish Armed forces from 1949-1950, was currently First Secretary of the PZPR. Gluchowski, “Poland, 1956: Khrushchev, Gomułka, and the ‘Polish October,’” 47.



was to not only elect the Secretariat of the PZPR Politburo but also all the new members of the Politburo and the Presidium of the Council of Ministers.<sup>77</sup>

The day before the scheduled Eighth Plenum, Ochab convened the special election commission to present the proposals that needed approval by the members. The proposals were:

- 1) the Politburo would be limited to nine members; 2) the new Politburo would include Gomułka, Zawadski, Cyrankiewicz, Loga-Sowinski, Roman Zambrowski, Adam Rapacki, Jerzy Morawski, Stefan Jedrychowski, and Ochab; 3) the Secretariat would include Gomułka, Zambrowski (who was removed from the Secretariat by Khrushchev at the 6<sup>th</sup> PUWP [PZPR] Plenum of March 1956,) Edward Gierek, Witold Jaronsinski, and Ochab<sup>78</sup>

Rokossowski opposed all of the proposals, despite the majority approving them. The only change made to these proposals was the addition of Jerry Albrecht and Władysław Matwin to the list of candidates. Purposely, the commission did not include in the list of candidates former members of the Politburo who had close ties to the Soviet Union.<sup>79</sup> Despite opposition from Rokossowski, the Politburo abided Gomułka's request, and Rokossowski was removed from the Politburo. The need for Gomułka's re-admittance was too powerful.

The return of Gomułka and the expulsion of the pro-Soviet members from the PZPR Politburo raised immediate concerns in the Soviet Union. Reacting quickly, the CPSU Politburo sent a delegation to Poland to meet with the PZPR Politburo. The day before the planned meeting of the Eighth Plenum, October 18, Panteleimon K. Ponomarenko, the Soviet ambassador in Warsaw, informed Ochab that a Soviet delegation had been sent. Ponomarenko warned Ochab that current political conditions and actions within Poland had been causing anxiety among the CPSU Politburo. Ochab reacted just as quickly by

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<sup>77</sup> Gluchowski, "Poland, 1956: Khrushchev, Gomułka, and the 'Polish October,'" 39.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

gathering the PZPR Politburo at the Central Committee to discuss the potential options with Ponomarenko present. The PZPR Politburo decided that the Soviet delegation should be invited in the middle of the Eighth Plenum, but not on the first day. However, Rokossowski disagreed. Ponomarenko, a Soviet ambassador agreed with Rokossowski that the CPSU delegation should meet before the Eighth Plenum, clearly advocating Soviet interests.<sup>80</sup>

The CPSU delegation arrived on the day of the originally planned PZPR Eighth Plenum, October 19. The delegation consisted of Khrushchev, Lazar Kaganovich, Anastas Mikoyan, Molotov, Defense Minister, Marshal I. S. Zhukov, the commander of the Warsaw Pact, Marshal Konev, and the Chief of the Soviet general Staff, General Antonov.<sup>81</sup> Khrushchev's memoirs reveal the motivation and intention of the delegation visiting Poland, "We decided to send a delegation to Poland and have a talk with the Polish leadership. They recommended that we not come. Their reluctance to meet with us heightened our concern even more. So we decided to go there in a large delegation."<sup>82</sup>

Taking the offensive, the Polish leadership met the Soviet delegation at the airport upon their arrival. The Soviets greeted the Poles with hostility due to the new direction of the Polish government and the anti-Soviet attitudes within Poland. Despite the harsh accusations proposed by Khrushchev, Gomułka responded calmly by stating; "We do not want to break the alliance with the Soviet Union."<sup>83</sup> Gomułka boldly asserted to Khrushchev, "I understand that it is possible to talk in an aggressive tone, but if you talk with a revolver on the table you don't have an even-handed discussion. I cannot continue the discussions

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<sup>80</sup> Gluchowski, "Poland, 1956: Khrushchev, Gomułka, and the 'Polish October,'" 39.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Gluchowski, "Poland, 1956: Khrushchev, Gomułka, and the 'Polish October,'" 40.

under these circumstances.”<sup>84</sup> Strategically, Gomułka ended the heated discussion by reaffirming that he “didn’t want to break off Polish-Soviet friendship. I believe what we propose will strengthen the friendship.”<sup>85</sup> Immediately after meeting the CPSU delegation, the PZPR Politburo convened the first installment of the Eighth Plenum on October 19 at 10:00 am.

Secretary Ochab started the Eighth Plenum by presenting the changes to the PZPR Politburo and a recap of the initial early morning meeting with the CPSU delegation. The majority of the members of the PZPR supported Gomułka’s handling of the aggressive tone of the Soviets. Rokossowski was the only member to defend the Soviets when he refuted, “but you can see that there are reasons why the Soviet comrades talk like this, and why comrade Khrushchev vehemently exploded. I am of the opinion that four comrades should go to the discussions and listen to the arguments of the Soviet comrades. More cold bloodedness. It is unnecessary to aggravate the situation.”<sup>86</sup> Rokossowski only received support from one of his allies, Witold Jozwiak. Rokossowski’s other ally, Zenon Nowak, remarked, “I agree with comrade Gomułka. Let the Soviet comrades calmly explain what they want.”<sup>87</sup> Politburo member, Adam Rapacki, added, “We cannot continue talks under the threat of intervention and under the charge that we are less worthy than those comrades from the old leadership who were not selected to form the new composition. I am for maintaining the decisions of the Politburo.”<sup>88</sup> The new Politburo clearly did not have the previous blind loyalty to the Soviet Union.

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<sup>84</sup> Gluchowski, “Poland, 1956: Khrushchev, Gomułka, and the ‘Polish October,’” 40.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

There appeared to be confusion between Ochab and Rokossowski at the end of the first meeting of the Eighth Plenum. Ochab requested an explanation about the advancement of the army towards Warsaw. Rokossowski shadily replied, "I simply ordered, in any case with the agreement of comrade Ochab, that one military battalion from Legionowo be put on alert in order to ensure the security, from possible enemy provocation, for the unexpected arrival of the Soviet delegation."<sup>89</sup> However, the reality was that on October 19, many of the Soviet Northern Army Group stationed in Poland mobilized towards Warsaw.<sup>90</sup> The meeting ended with a unanimous acceptance of the reinstatement of Gomułka as leader of the PZPR Politburo and postponed the meeting until later that day, after the Politburo and Gomułka discussed with the Soviet delegation.

While the PZPR Politburo convened their Eighth Plenum, the Soviet delegation had their own private meeting. The delegation confirmed that Rokossowski's loyalty remained with the Soviet Union, but that his influence was dwindling. Khrushchev bluntly acknowledged, "of course, our own armed strength far exceeded that of Poland, but we didn't want to resort to the use of our own troops."<sup>91</sup> After the initial meeting with the Polish leadership, Khrushchev recognized Gomułka's ability to lead. More importantly, Khrushchev was comforted that Gomułka did not have an anti-Soviet mentality. Khrushchev reflected, "Here was a man who had come to power on the crest of an anti-Soviet wave, yet who could now speak forcefully about the need to preserve Poland's

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<sup>89</sup> Gluchowski, "Poland, 1956: Khrushchev, Gomułka, and the 'Polish October,'" 40.

<sup>90</sup> Gluchowski, "Poland, 1956: Khrushchev, Gomułka, and the 'Polish October,'" 47.

<sup>91</sup> Gluchowski, "Poland, 1956: Khrushchev, Gomułka, and the 'Polish October,'" 41.

friendly relations with the Soviet Union and the Soviet Communist Party.”<sup>92</sup> Gomułka shrewdly negated Khrushchev’s fear of an anti-Soviet rebel leading the Polish Politburo.

Khrushchev’s confidence of Gomułka increased in the second meeting when Gomułka asserted, “Poland needs friendships with the Soviet Union more than the Soviet Union needs friendship with Poland. Can it be that we failed to understand our situation? Without the Soviet Union we cannot maintain our borders with the West. We are dealing with our internal problems, our relations with the Soviet Union will remain unchanged. We will still be friends and allies.”<sup>93</sup> Gomułka quieted Khrushchev’s anxieties of Poland deviating from communism and the Warsaw Pact. As a result, Khrushchev stopped the mobilization of troops and allowed the removal of Rokossowski.<sup>94</sup> In fact, Khrushchev gave specific instructions to Rokossowski to command Marshal Konev of the Northern Army Group to stop his mobilization towards Warsaw.<sup>95</sup> After diplomatically dissolving the situation in Poland, the CPSU delegation returned to Moscow on October 20.

With the departure of the CPSU delegation, the Eighth Plenum returned to their sessions. Gomułka spoke as the new leader of the Polish United Workers’ Party (PZPR). Echoing Khrushchev’s speech and the de-Stalinization process, Gomułka denounced Stalinism and the effects it incurred on Poland’s politics and economy. Gomułka pushed this further by presenting the “Polish road to socialism.” The new path allowed the PZPR to separate itself from Stalinism and redefine yet maintain the pre-existing relationship with the Soviet Union. Gomułka wished to achieve a more equal relationship between Poland

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<sup>92</sup> Gluchowski, “Poland, 1956: Khrushchev, Gomułka, and the ‘Polish October,’” 41.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Gluchowski, “Poland, 1956: Khrushchev, Gomułka, and the ‘Polish October,’” 45.

<sup>95</sup> Gluchowski, “Poland, 1956: Khrushchev, Gomułka, and the ‘Polish October,’” 47.

and the Soviet Union, one of collaboration instead of oppression.<sup>96</sup> The new tone of the Polish government was reflected in the Eighth Plenum.

The plenum concluded with elections of the Politburo. The results for the members elected to the Politburo by the Central Committee were: Cyrankiewicz, Gomułka, Jedrychowski, Loga-Sowinski, Morawski, Ochab, Rapacki, Zambrowski, and Zawadski. Rokossowski did not get elected. The new members of the Secretariat were: Albrecht, Gierek, Gomułka, Jarosinski, Matwin, Ochab, and Zambrowski. Openly and unanimously, Gomułka was elected as the First Secretary.<sup>97</sup>

Two days after being elected, on October 22, Gomułka received a response from Khrushchev regarding his request to remove Soviet officers from the Polish Army. Khrushchev formally wrote, "In connection with this, the Presidium of the CC CPSU has decided to recall all Soviet advisers that have been sent, at the time at the request of the Polish Government, to assist the work of the PPR organs of security."<sup>98</sup> Khrushchev's actions demonstrate Gomułka's success at calming the Soviet Union's nerves and securing the relationship between Poland and the Soviet Union.

The Poznań Revolt and the return of Gomułka were the first problems of dissent that Khrushchev was forced to confront after his speech. The quick response of the Polish government in reaction to the Poznań Revolt prevented Soviet intervention. Furthermore, the sharpness of Gomułka as a leader, allowed him to negotiate with Khrushchev to achieve some concessions. More importantly, Gomułka understood his limitations. He knew that Poland independence was not an option, thereby constraining his requests to improving

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<sup>96</sup> Gluchowski, "Poland, 1956: Khrushchev, Gomułka, and the 'Polish October,'" 45.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Gluchowski, "Poland, 1956: Khrushchev, Gomułka, and the 'Polish October,'" 46.

relations between Poland and the Soviet Union, but also allowing him to gain success in reforms.

### Chapter 3: Khrushchev Goes Back on His Word: The Hungarian Revolt of 1956

The events of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union in 1956 help to track the path of the Hungarian Revolt. However, it is also essential to take a brief look at the history of the situation within Hungary prior to the revolt to further understand the events that took place in October. Hungary and the Soviet Union did not always have the best relationship. In fact, a strong anti-Soviet attitude was embedded in the history of their relationship.<sup>99</sup> To understand the reactions of both the Hungarians and the Soviets it is essential to comprehend that tension existed prior to the revolt in 1956.

A source of tension lay in the appointment and removal of Imre Nagy as the prime minister of Hungary by the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union essentially had control of the fate of Hungary's government. In 1953, Imre Nagy was selected by the Soviet Union as Prime Minister of Hungary with the agenda to implement the "New Course," which was a result of Stalin's death.<sup>100</sup> While Nagy was the Prime Minister, Mátyás Rákosi was the General Secretary. The joint power led to:

"two institutionalized centers of power: Nagy—heading the government apparatus in 1953-5, implemented changes in agriculture and in the justice system, and appealed to the nonparty attentive public for support, and Rákosi—in charge of the party apparatus, managed to undermine much of what Nagy had been instructed to do both by the Kremlin and the Hungarian party's (then unpublished) June 27, 1953, resolution."<sup>101</sup>

It was very clear that Rákosi's loyalty lay with the Soviet Union over Hungary. Nagy, meanwhile, placed Hungarian interests over those of the Soviet Union.

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<sup>99</sup> Johanna C. Granville, *The First Domino: International decision Making During the Hungarian Crisis of 1956*, (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2004), 10.

<sup>100</sup> Charles Gati, *Failed Illusions: Moscow, Washington, Budapest, and the 1956 Hungarian Revolt*, (Washington D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2006), 24.

<sup>101</sup> Gati, *Failed Illusions*, 54.



Rákosi's desire to be Prime Minister created constant tension between Nagy and Rákosi. Rákosi constantly interfered with Nagy and his policies.<sup>102</sup> This lack of cooperation made it extremely difficult for Nagy to be effective. Due to his ineffectiveness, the Soviet Union dismissed Nagy as Prime Minister and turned to Rákosi to govern Hungary in November 1955.<sup>103</sup>

Rákosi's loyalty to the Soviet Union helped his rise to power within Hungary. Even though Nagy was not removed from power until November 1955, Rákosi began taking over control as early as April 1955. Pressured by the Soviet Union, Rákosi repealed many of Nagy's progressive policies. Where Nagy opened opportunities for expression, Rákosi closed them by increasing censorship, limiting public discussions of economic and political problems, and putting a stop to the rehabilitation of political prisoners.<sup>104</sup> Rákosi immediately reversed the few reforms that Nagy was able to accomplish. Despite this reversal, Nagy had already opened the door to this world and there was no turning back;

By supporting and then dropping Nagy, the Soviet leaders awakened Hungary's intellectual elite and united it against Stalinism, paving the way for a furious challenge to the Soviet empire. By stifling within system reform, the Kremlin made revolution all but inevitable; by removing Nagy from power, the Kremlin made him the coming revolt's only conceivable, if altogether unlikely, inadvertent, and—sad to say—ill-equipped leader.<sup>105</sup>

While Rákosi gained popularity with the powers of the Soviet Union, his popularity in Hungary was very low, creating unrest within the Hungarian population.

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<sup>102</sup> Granville, *The First Domino*, 12.

<sup>103</sup> Granville, *The First Domino*, 13.

<sup>104</sup> Granville, *The First Domino*, 14.

<sup>105</sup> Gati, *Failed Illusions*, 67.

The day before the Poznań Revolt, the Petofi Circle of Hungary had a public debate. This debate became known as an “ideological Poznań without gunshots.”<sup>106</sup> Rákosi banned the Petofi Circle, in an effort to suppress the anti-Soviet attitude of the debate and any potential reactions to Poznań.<sup>107</sup> The Petofi Circle debate caused Rákosi to crack down on all anti-party views. The Poznań Revolt and the return of Gomulka stirred up discussions in Hungary. The repression of these discussions caused Hungarians hatred of Rákosi to deepen.<sup>108</sup> In fact, this animosity was expressed towards all four of the Hungarian Communist leaders: Mátyás Rákosi, Mihaly Farkas, Jozsef Revai, and Ernő Gerő.<sup>109</sup> As a result of this discontent among the Hungarian population, the Soviet Union was again forced to replace the leader of the government in July.

The Soviet Union relied on the Soviet ambassador in Budapest, Yurii Andropov, and a member of the Soviet Presidium, Anastas Mikoyan, to restore unity within Hungarian politics. Andropov and Mikoyan advocated for the replacement of Rákosi. Mikoyan elected Ernő Gerő as the successor, who received support from the Hungarian Workers Party (HWP) Politburo as the new First Secretary.<sup>110</sup> However, Gerő was just as unpopular with the general public in Hungary as Rákosi, displaying the Soviet Union’s misunderstanding of the situation in Hungary.<sup>111</sup> The appointment of Gerő did not ease any tensions within Hungary and the Soviet Union. In a desperate attempt to appease disgruntled Hungarians, the HWP Politburo readmitted Imre Nagy into the party on October 13, 1956.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Granville, “Hungarian and Polish Reactions to the Events of 1956,” 1058.

<sup>107</sup> Mark Kramer, “The Soviet Union and the 1956 Crises in Hungary and Poland: Reassessments and New Findings,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 33, no. 2 (April 1, 1998): 177.

<sup>108</sup> Kramer, “The Soviet Union and the 1956 Crises in Hungary and Poland,” 178.

<sup>109</sup> Granville, “Reactions to the Events of 1956,” 269.

<sup>110</sup> Kramer, “The Soviet Union and the 1956 Crises in Hungary and Poland,” 179-180.

<sup>111</sup> Kramer, “The Soviet Union and the 1956 Crises in Hungary and Poland,” 179.

<sup>112</sup> Kramer, “The Soviet Union and the 1956 Crises in Hungary and Poland,” 182.

While Andropov and Mikoyan were busy convincing Rákosi to step down, Soviet officers visited Hungary in July to inspect Soviet forces that were based in Hungary. During this time the Soviet officers organized a “Plan of Operations for the Special Corps to Restore Public Order on the Territory of Hungary.” The plan, which became nicknamed “Volna,” prepared thousands of Soviet troops to be mobilized at short notice to restore order in Hungary. This plan insinuates that the Soviet Union anticipated the possibility that the unrest in Hungary could explode into violence and that the Soviet Union did not want to separate.

The political upheaval in Hungary, paired with the events across Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, created a perfect foundation for a revolt. While the violence started on October 23, the ideology behind the Hungarian Revolt began with students on October 16. At the University of Szeged, students reinstated a banned organization called the Association of Hungarian University Students, or otherwise known as MEFESZ.<sup>113</sup> This independent organization allowed for free speech and expression of ideas that conflicted with the Soviet interests. However, the Hungarian government was censoring much of society, making MEFESZ a controversial organization. The empowering student movement spread rapidly throughout the country.<sup>114</sup>

A second meeting convened at the Budapest Technical University on the afternoon of October 22. A student in attendance reported that one student asked, “‘Why are the Russians still in Hungary?’ This question caused a great uproar. From then on the meeting was revolutionary in character. The students demanded that Imre Nagy come and speak to

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<sup>113</sup> Gati, *Failed Illusions*, 143.

<sup>114</sup> “Document No. 24: The ‘Sixteen Points’ Prepared by Hungarian Students, October 22-23, 1956,” in Janos Rainer, Csaba Békés, and Malcolm Byrne, eds., *The 1956 Hungarian Revolution: A History in Documents* (Budapest, Hungary: Central European University Press, 2002), 188.

them.”<sup>115</sup> While these meetings were only discussions, they paved the way for the anti-Soviet tone of the official demonstration. At the meeting of October 22, Hungarian students of the MESFESZ prepared the “Sixteen Points,” or complaints and demands for the Hungarian government.<sup>116</sup> The reestablishment of MESFESZ promoted the rest of the Hungarian public to express their own opinions.

When the news of the events in Poland infiltrated Hungary, it inspired Hungarians to reassess their situation and sparked a response in Hungary. For Hungarians, Gomułka symbolized de-Stalinization, freedom of expression, and a form of defiance and independence from the Soviet Union. His return motivated Hungarians to vocalize their complaints in regards to their relationship with the Soviet Union and Stalinism.<sup>117</sup>

Hungarians organized a march scheduled for October 23, to express their support of Poland. On the days leading up to the demonstration, the leadership of the Hungarian government was in Belgrade meeting with the Yugoslav President Jozep Tito. Ernő Gerő, joined by Prime Minister András Hegedüs and Minister of State János Kádár, returned to Hungary in the midst of the action. Upon return, Gerő called a meeting of the HWP Political Committee to present a summary of the Yugoslav negotiations. After the summary, a member of the Political Committee informed the leadership about the planned student demonstration for that afternoon, which led to intense discussion. The government decided

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<sup>115</sup> “Interview #17, March 15 & 16, 1957,” Box 2, Book 1. Hungarian Refugee Project, Bakhmeteff Archive Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Columbia University in the City of New York, 4.

<sup>116</sup> “Document No. 24,” in *The 1956 Hungarian Revolution: A History in Documents*, 188.

<sup>117</sup> Johanna Granville. “1956 Reconsidered: Why Hungary and Not Poland?” *The Slavonic and East European Review* 80, no. 4 (October 1, 2002): 665.

to ban the demonstration, while also agreeing to not authorize deadly force to be used in the instance of defiance.<sup>118</sup>

The Hungarian government announced the cancelling of the demonstration over the radio.<sup>119</sup> In response, student delegations were sent to the Minister of Interior with hopes of reversing the decision. The students also decided to ignore the ban and to meet at the Petofi statue at 3 PM.<sup>120</sup> A giant crowd convened at the statue, consisting of mostly students. From the Petofi statue, the crowd marched to the Stalin statue, where they tore the statue down.<sup>121</sup> En route to the statues witnesses “saw students tearing up the Russian books. At the \_\_\_ now called Stalin street, we stopped at every building in which Russians lived and shouted slogan, ‘out with you Russians.’ ‘We want Imre Nagy’ and such like.”<sup>122</sup> The demonstration developed a very nationalistic tone, with demonstrators only carrying the Hungarian flag with the Kossuth crest or removing the Communist crest out of other Hungarian flags.<sup>123</sup> The nationalistic tone evolved into anti-Soviet expression, with slogans like “‘Put out the Hungarian flags,’ ‘Russians go home,’ ‘We want freedom and independence.’”<sup>124</sup>

By sunset the demonstrations had grown with workers and other Hungarian citizens. The student-based demonstration marched from the Kossuth statue to the Rokus

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<sup>118</sup> Janos Rainer, Csaba Békés, and Malcolm Byrne, eds., *The 1956 Hungarian Revolution: A History in Documents* (Budapest, Hungary: Central European University Press, 2002), 191.

<sup>119</sup> “Interview #11, March 11 & 12 1957,” Box 2, Book 1. Hungarian Refugee Project, Bakhmeteff Archive Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Columbia University in the City of New York, 5.

<sup>120</sup> “Interview #17,” Hungarian Refugee Project, 4.

<sup>121</sup> Kramer, “The Soviet Union and the 1956 Crises in Hungary and Poland,” 182.

<sup>122</sup> “Interview #11,” Hungarian Refugee Project, 5.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

section of Budapest, where workers joined the students.<sup>125</sup> From here the students and workers continued to the theater in Szeged, where actors and theater attendees left in the middle of the show to enthusiastically join the demonstration, further increasing the crowd.<sup>126</sup> At the theater, the actor playing the character of St. Joan recited Petofi's famous poem about Hungarian freedom, from the balcony of the theater. Invigorated by the poem, the demonstrators gathered lit torches and headed to Kossuth Square, where the St. Joan actor performed the poem again. The demonstrators also declared the demands of the MESFESZ. Impulsively, a worker displayed a moment of passion by making an unprepared speech about the demands of the workers.<sup>127</sup>

The demands of the revolution derived from the October 22 MEFESZ meeting. The main basis of the demands consisted of withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact, withdrawal of Soviet troops, free elections, and replacing the political system.<sup>128</sup> A young woman who participated in the revolt expressed that;

The main things we wanted from the government were first, freedom of speech and press, second, the Russians must go home, third, an economy free and independent and otherwise complete independence from the Soviet Union. Also, we wanted to have back the Hungarian uranium mines. They were exploited and worked by the Russians. We also wanted the majority of politicians to be purged from the government.<sup>129</sup>

Another young student demonstrator further traced the evolution of these demands as the situation escalated;

When the demonstrations started our original demands were not identical with the demands which were late read over the radio. Our original demands did not go so far. But we did demand a change in our government, namely

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<sup>125</sup> "Interview #23, March 1957," Box 2, Book 1. Hungarian Refugee Project, Bakhmeteff Archive Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Columbia University in the City of New York, 5.

<sup>126</sup> "Interview #23, Hungarian Refugee Project, 6.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> "Interview #23, Hungarian Refugee Project, 5.

<sup>129</sup> "Interview #11," Hungarian Refugee Project, 6.

that Imre Nagy take over. We also demanded that teaching of Marxism, Leninism, and Russian language be abolished in all schools, that Hungarian flags and uniforms be resorted; and that foreign trade with Russia be conducted on the basis of equality.<sup>130</sup>

These demands embodied the anti-Soviet attitude of the Hungarian public.

Word spread that the fighting had started at the radio building, causing people to flock there to witness the scene. One witness recalled;

“We arrived there with the truck at the very moment when shooting started. The crowd got bigger and bigger. They were very angry and called for arms. We went, with the truck, to the Killian barracks to fetch arms. Here, at the barracks, the soldiers were looking out of the windows. We wanted to enter and couldn’t at first. We started shouting to the soldiers, ‘Come out! Help us!’ Finally, the crowd broke down the door and entered the building. The officer in charge denied that he had any arms in the building. We were told that only so-called labor brigades were stationed there.”<sup>131</sup>

Demonstrators frantically traveled from barrack to barrack desperately looking for arms and ammunition. Equipped with weapons, the demonstrators returned to the city to continue their fight.<sup>132</sup> The demonstrations spread throughout the country, also demanding a change in the government.<sup>133</sup>

Tensions intensified when the Hungarian State Security (Államvédelmi Hatóság, AVH) forces openly shot at the rebels storming the main radio station. These forces acted on their own merit, without the commands of the Hungarian government. While the rebels were enraged, they were unarmed. The rebels just wanted to broadcast their demands over the radio.<sup>134</sup> This unwarranted attack further impassioned the revolt. Rapidly, the

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<sup>130</sup> “Interview #17,” Hungarian Refugee Project, 5.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Kramer, “The Soviet Union and the 1956 Crises in Hungary and Poland,” 182.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

demonstration escalated into a revolt. The revolt evolved into chaos too large for the Hungarian security forces to manage on their own, causing more panic and chaos.<sup>135</sup>

In an attempt to minimize the casualties, the Hungarian government issued a curfew at 4:30 AM on October 24. Broadcasted over the radio, Hungarian citizens were instructed to stay off the streets, only allowed between the hours of 10:00 AM and 2:00 PM. Later that day, at 4:24 PM on October 24, the Hungarian government instructed citizens to remain in their homes between the hours of 6:00AM and 6:00PM of the following day, October 25. The morning of October 25, the government pleaded that all citizens return to work.<sup>136</sup> Budapest was in a state of chaos.

The lack of control forced the Soviets to take action. The Soviet Volna plan was put in place for this exact reason. Prepared to act on extremely short notice, the Soviet troops mobilized on the night of October 23, to Budapest. Soviet soldiers infiltrated Budapest in the early hours of October 24, immediately setting up a command center at the Hungarian National Defense Ministry. Rumors swirled the city about the arrival of Soviet troops. One demonstrator remembered, "The people decided that they would hold silent demonstrations by lining up along the routes that the Russian troops were supposed to come by."<sup>137</sup>

The Soviet Union mobilized troops based in other satellite countries, like Romania and the Ukraine.<sup>138</sup> Soviet forces amounted to 31,500 troops, 1,130 tanks and self-propelled artillery, 380 armored personal carriers, 185 air defense guns, and other

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<sup>135</sup> Kramer, "The Soviet Union and the 1956 Crises in Hungary and Poland," 183.

<sup>136</sup> Johanna Granville, "To Invade or Not to Invade? A New Look at Gomułka, Nagy, and Soviet Foreign Policy in 1956," *Canadian Slavonic Papers / Revue Canadienne Des Slavistes* 43, no. 4 (December 1, 2001): 469.

<sup>137</sup> "Interview #23, Hungarian Refugee Project, 7.

<sup>138</sup> Kramer, "The Soviet Union and the 1956 Crises in Hungary and Poland," 184.



weapons.<sup>139</sup> The force behind the Soviet military action was disproportionate to the chaos evolving in Hungary. The unnecessary size of Soviet forces exemplified their panic that the revolt created. Despite the shocking invasion of excessive Soviet forces, the Hungarian government had called upon their help.<sup>140</sup>

The arrival of the Soviet troops changed the tone of the demonstration and escalated the violence. Demonstrators became rebels. The goal evolved from political reform, to attacking Soviet troops and defending Budapest. Desperate to force the Soviets out, the Hungarian rebels attacked with Molotov cocktails and any weapons they could find or devise. When they did not have weapons, the rebels would attack with whatever they could find, such as frying pans.<sup>141</sup> At this point, the demonstrations were not secluded to Budapest, but rather infiltrated the rest of the country. The Hungarians expressed their anger through demonstrations, strikes, and violence.<sup>142</sup>

Despite the immense number of forces and weapons, the Soviets lacked cooperation from the Hungarian security forces, police, and army. Instead, the Hungarian forces either refused to offer support or worse, helped the demonstrators. The lack of organization between Hungarian and Soviet forces and the arrival of the Soviet forces only intensified the fighting. Only twenty-four hours into the revolt, by the afternoon of October 24, the casualties totaled to 25 dead protestors and more than 200 wounded.<sup>143</sup>

The Hungarian Working People's Party (Magyar Dolgozók Pártja, MDP) Central Leadership convened on October 25, to discuss the current situation in Budapest. One

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<sup>139</sup> Kramer, "The Soviet Union and the 1956 Crises in Hungary and Poland," 185.

<sup>140</sup> Johanna Granville, "Reactions to the Events of 1956: New Findings from the Budapest and Warsaw Archives," *Journal of Contemporary History* 38, no. 2 (April 1, 2003): 270.

<sup>141</sup> Rainer, Békés, and Byrne, eds., *The 1956 Hungarian Revolution: A History in Documents*, 198.

<sup>142</sup> Rainer, Békés, and Byrne, eds., *The 1956 Hungarian Revolution: A History in Documents*, 199.

<sup>143</sup> Kramer, "The Soviet Union and the 1956 Crises in Hungary and Poland," 185.

leader, Ference Nežval, expressed his outrage at the government urging the public to return to work, citing that it further fueled fighting and only put more people in danger, “Did the Political Committee know what the situation was like this morning when it informed people they could go to work? Fighting began after that!”<sup>144</sup>

On the morning of October 25, 25,000 unarmed Hungarians congregated outside the Parliament building demanding that Ernő Gerő be ousted from the Hungarian government. Panicked and unsure of what to do, Hungarian Secret Police (Államvédelmi Osztály, AVO) forces began shooting at these enraged demonstrators. Within forty to forty-five minutes, the AVO forces had killed 234 Hungarian citizens, quickly dispersing the crowd.<sup>145</sup>

Upon Soviet instructions, Gerő, the leader of the Hungarian government, was forced to step down as First Secretary of Hungary. The Soviet leadership replaced Gerő with János Kádár, hoping to appease to the Hungarian revolutionaries. Kádár was an intelligent choice, seeing as he was neither an enemy of the revolt but also not a reformer.<sup>146</sup> Despite this desperate attempt, the Hungarians were not satisfied. Hungarian rebels across the country continued to challenge the local authority.<sup>147</sup>

Kádár, with the help of Nagy, worked tirelessly with the Central Committee and Political Committee to establish a plan of action for the Hungarian government. The decisions made in the meetings of October 26 and October 27 exemplified the continuous misunderstanding of the situation. Eventually, the Hungarian government realized that the Hungarian rebels were not going to be satisfied with shallow reforms.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Granville, “To Invade or Not to Invade?” 469.

<sup>145</sup> Granville, “To Invade or Not to Invade?” 470.

<sup>146</sup> Rainer, Békés, and Byrne, eds., *The 1956 Hungarian Revolution: A History in Documents*, 197.

<sup>147</sup> Rainer, Békés, and Byrne, eds., *The 1956 Hungarian Revolution: A History in Documents*, 199.

<sup>148</sup> Rainer, Békés, and Byrne, eds., *The 1956 Hungarian Revolution: A History in Documents*, 200-201.

In response to the outrage and demands of the Hungarian public, Nagy was elected as Prime Minister of Hungary.<sup>149</sup> Acting quickly, Nagy proposed radical reforms and threatened to resign as Prime Minister if he did not receive approval from the Hungarian leadership.<sup>150</sup> His radical reforms included the demand that Soviet troops withdraw from Hungary on October 28. Nagy's government also implemented a cease-fire, a rise in salaries and pensions, a promise to suspend the AVO, and amnesty for the rebels, on October 28.<sup>151</sup> Nagy and Kádár both tried to convince the Soviet diplomats, Mikoyan and Suslov, of the desperate necessity of these reforms, which further fueled the anxiety of the Soviet leadership.<sup>152</sup>

Nagy broadcasted his reforms over the Hungarian radio. In addition to stating the reforms, Nagy declared the events a national democratic movement, rather than a counterrevolution. The reforms and the declaration raised serious concerns in the government of the Soviet Union.<sup>153</sup> While the reforms worried the Soviet leadership the reforms ignored the two main points of the demonstrators: a free multi-party system and Soviet troop withdrawal. Furthermore, the cease-fire failed to be enforced and violent outbreaks between Soviet troops and Hungarian civilians continued to exist.<sup>154</sup>

Due to the failed cease-fire and abandonment of reforms, the Hungarian demonstrators formed their own group. On October 30, the Revolutionary Committee of the Hungarian Intelligentsia was founded. This revolutionary organization incorporated many smaller organizations that emerged across the country. The Revolutionary

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<sup>149</sup> Granville, "Reactions to the Events of 1956," 271.

<sup>150</sup> Rainer, Békés, and Byrne, eds., *The 1956 Hungarian Revolution: A History in Documents*, 201.

<sup>151</sup> Granville, "Reactions to the Events of 1956," 271.

<sup>152</sup> Rainer, Békés, and Byrne, eds., *The 1956 Hungarian Revolution: A History in Documents*, 201.

<sup>153</sup> Kramer, "The Soviet Union and the 1956 Crises in Hungary and Poland," 186-7.

<sup>154</sup> Rainer, Békés, and Byrne, eds., *The 1956 Hungarian Revolution: A History in Documents*, 205.

Committee accepted Nagy's reforms from October 28; however, it also stated that the Hungarian government failed to push its reforms far enough. In fact, the Revolutionary Committee claimed that reconciliation was only possible by acceding to all of the demands of the demonstrators.<sup>155</sup> The Revolutionary Committee refused to recognize the present government, creating a giant obstacle for the Hungarian leadership.

The emergence of the Revolutionary Committee of the Hungarian Intelligentsia forced the police and security forces of Hungary to discuss the current situation. With the help of the Hungarian rebels, the Preparatory Committee of the Revolutionary Armed Forces Committee was established.<sup>156</sup> The formation of this committee symbolized the official police support of the revolt. In accordance with Nagy's reform to abolish the Hungarian secret forces, the Preparatory Committee of the Revolutionary Armed Forces Committee's goal was to create a National Guard, which would be a branch of Hungarian security forces.<sup>157</sup> This new rogue government left the members of the old government vulnerable.

At this point in time, many Hungarian leaders had fled to the Soviet Union, such as Gerő, or had gone into hiding.<sup>158</sup> In hopes to appease the Revolutionary Committee, on October 30, Nagy and Kádár returned Hungary to a multi-party state, which included the Smallholders Party, the National Peasant Party, the Social Democratic Party, and the Communist Party. Formerly banned political parties were now legal and welcomed in the political realm.

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<sup>155</sup> Rainer, Békés, and Byrne, eds., *The 1956 Hungarian Revolution: A History in Documents*, 205.

<sup>156</sup> Rainer, Békés, and Byrne, eds., *The 1956 Hungarian Revolution: A History in Documents*, 206.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

<sup>158</sup> Rainer, Békés, and Byrne, eds., *The 1956 Hungarian Revolution: A History in Documents*, 205.

In addition to the multi-party system, an “inner cabinet” was established, which consisted of Zoltan Tildy, Bela Kovacs, Ferenc Erdei, János Kádár, Geza Losonczy, Ann Kethly, and Imre Nagy himself.<sup>159</sup> The new members of the inner cabinet consisted of representatives from the newly legalized political parties. However, these representatives were not the leaders and had tainted their reputation within their corresponding parties by associating with the communist party back in 1945-48. This new inner cabinet became the center for decision-making within the Hungarian government.<sup>160</sup>

Even with Nagy’s dramatic reforms the violence continued. Slowly, on October 30, both Soviet and Hungarian military forces began their withdrawal from Budapest. At the same time the Hungarian secret forces, was in the process of being dissolved, which presented Hungary with a certain amount of vulnerability. Armed protestors exploited the lack of defense to siege of the HWP Budapest Committee building. This aggressive force compelled Hungarian officials to call upon the Soviet tanks and troops. With the Hungarian rebels inside, the Soviet forces fired upon them, forcing many of the Hungarian rebels to surrender. Three participating protestors were dubbed as negotiators: two army colonels and Imre Mezo (a secretary of the party committee who favored Nagy). The three negotiators were seized by the opposing forces and executed, enraging the crowded protestors to overtake the building again. However, this time the Hungarian protestors forced everyone outside of the building and into Koztarsasag Square where they proceeded to hang some of the people who were previously inside the building. More rational protestors interrupted the executions, but not until the death toll had already amounted to

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<sup>159</sup> Granville, “To Invade or Not to Invade?” 467.

<sup>160</sup> Rainer, Békés, and Byrne, eds., *The 1956 Hungarian Revolution: A History in Documents*, 207.

23.<sup>161</sup> The rest of the revolutionary organizations tried to create distance from this unorganized, mob violence, in hopes to maintain the integrity of the revolt.<sup>162</sup>

Continuing with the dramatic tone of events, the Hungarian Workers Party was disbanded and replaced by the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt, MSzMP). Interestingly, the Soviet diplomats, Mikoyan and Suslov, were in support of this reform-oriented government. However, their opinion did not match with the opinion of the Soviet leadership. With the new Hungarian party, previous reforms were revived. The Revolutionary National Defense Commission was also set up as part of the Minister of Defense. Many officers of defense were dismissed because Rákosi had appointed them. In addition, protestors were allowed to be members of the National Guard. All of these reforms helped to unify the Hungarian rebels and official Hungarian forces.<sup>163</sup> However, it did not stop the continued fighting with the Soviet troops.

Nagy hoped to negotiate the withdrawal of Soviet troops with the Soviet leadership. The Kremlin let the Hungarian government believe that they were willing to discuss this option. However, despite popular belief, the Malin notes revealed that the Soviets had decided to invade for the second time on October 31, the day before Nagy proclaimed neutrality.<sup>164</sup>

Regardless of the secrecy of the Kremlin, Nagy and the Hungarian government was informed of the mobilization of Soviet forces towards Budapest. When Nagy confronted Soviet Ambassador Andropov about the troops, Andropov lied and said that the troops were merely to act as protection for the troops being withdrawn. The Hungarian leadership

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<sup>161</sup> Rainer, Békés, and Byrne, eds., *The 1956 Hungarian Revolution: A History in Documents*, 208.

<sup>162</sup> Rainer, Békés, and Byrne, eds., *The 1956 Hungarian Revolution: A History in Documents*, 208.

<sup>163</sup> Rainer, Békés, and Byrne, eds., *The 1956 Hungarian Revolution: A History in Documents*, 211.

<sup>164</sup> Granville, "To Invade or Not to Invade?" 467.

decided to appeal to Andropov to call off the troops. While Andropov continued to lie, Nagy decided to call for neutrality and withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact, both unprecedented acts within the Soviet bloc. Furthermore, Nagy appealed to the United Nations for support.<sup>165</sup>

In addition to intervention, the Kremlin decided that Imre Nagy needed to be replaced. The Soviet leadership discussed two options: János Kádár and Ferenc Münnich. Both of these candidates met secretly with Soviet Ambassador Andropov, and then were secretly flown to Moscow. Neither told any of their colleagues where they were going, making them wonder about their mysterious disappearance. While in Moscow, Kádár discussed with the Soviet leadership the plan to implement the new regime. He argued for a peaceful solution. However, Khrushchev was adamant about invading Hungary and worked to convince Kádár of the necessity of the invasion. Khrushchev left Kádár with two choices: accept his plan and retain his position of power, or take his chances with the Nagy government and Hungarian rebels. Kádár decided to keep his position of power.<sup>166</sup>

The Hungarian government sent a formal request to Moscow, asking the Soviets to refrain from military intervention on November 2. While waiting for a response, the cabinet continued working and assigning tasks regarding their removal from the Warsaw Pact, their appeals to the United Nations, and Soviet troop withdrawal. As the government continued their efforts, the public began to resume to normal.<sup>167</sup> Unaware of what the future held, the Hungarians continued to recuperate after the damage from the revolt. Negotiations regarding Soviet troop withdrawal continued in Parliament. It was decided

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<sup>165</sup> Rainer, Békés, and Byrne, eds., *The 1956 Hungarian Revolution: A History in Documents*, 211.

<sup>166</sup> Rainer, Békés, and Byrne, eds., *The 1956 Hungarian Revolution: A History in Documents*, 214.

<sup>167</sup> Rainer, Békés, and Byrne, eds., *The 1956 Hungarian Revolution: A History in Documents*, 215.

that Soviet troops who were mobilized after October 23 would be ordered to leave Hungary by December 31. In regards to Soviet troops stationed in Hungary prior to the revolt, the discussion reached a stalemate and decided to postpone this decision.<sup>168</sup>

While the Hungarian government was discussing troop withdrawal, Soviet troops were busy moving towards Budapest. As of November 3, Soviet troops had control of the airfields, the borders of large cities, main roads and the Western frontier. Exploiting the strategy of surprise, the Soviet troops awoke Budapest with the noise of gunshots and tanks mobilizing at 4:15 AM. Kádár added to the shock factor by announcing over the radio at 5:00 AM to Hungarians about the creation of the Hungarian Revolutionary Workers' and Peasants' Government and his placement as the new first secretary. Kádár claimed that the revolt had evolved into a fascist uprising, which needed the assistance of the Soviet military.<sup>169</sup>

Reacting to Kádár's announcement, Nagy made a speech over the radio denying that he invited the Soviet troops. Unsure of how to read the events unfolding, Nagy quickly lost control of the situation. Realizing his dire situation, Nagy decided to take asylum in the Yugoslav Embassy. As his first point of order, Kádár commanded the Russian Committee for State Security (KGB) to arrest Nagy and the others at first opportunity.<sup>170</sup> With Nagy and his supporters taking refuge in the Yugoslav Embassy, Kádár and his government took official control of the Hungarian government on November 7.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> Rainer, Békés, and Byrne, eds., *The 1956 Hungarian Revolution: A History in Documents*, 216.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> Johanna Granville, *The First Domino: International Decision Making During the Hungarian Crisis of 1956*. (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2004,) 131.

<sup>171</sup> Rainer, Békés, and Byrne, eds., *The 1956 Hungarian Revolution: A History in Documents*, 364.



Kádár had a daunting task set forth for him in the wake of the second Soviet invasion and the Hungarian public still armed and fighting.<sup>172</sup> First and foremost, Kádár needed to focus on suppressing the armed forces. However, Kádár did not have strong support in the Hungarian public. In order to defeat the armed insurgents, Kádár called upon the small pro-Kádár forces in the Hungarian forces, the Red Army, and the KGB. After two days of brutal fighting, Soviet forces were able to disarm the Hungarian National Guard and Hungarian Army, thereby putting an end to the violent uprising. Many of the insurgents reacted by either hiding or finding refuge in Western countries, such as the United States.<sup>173</sup>

With the help of Soviet forces, Kádár was successful in ending the violence. Kádár had the difficult burden of both re-establishing communist authority in Hungary and rebuilding a broken economy. However, many members of the Hungarian public still resisted the Kádár government through nonviolent actions such as demonstrations, strikes, work slowdowns, and sabotage. These demonstrations consumed the Kádár government for months after the suppression of the violence. The Soviet forces and Kádár government provided a unifying hate for the Hungarian public, and continued their motivation to rebel.<sup>174</sup>

Despite Kádár taking power on November 7, he did not have the freedom to act independently. Rather, the Kremlin kept their hold on the Hungarian government through the three Soviet members who they sent to oversee the government transition: Georgii Malenkov, Mikhail Suslov, and Averki Aristov. The head of the KGB, Ivan Serov, and the

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<sup>172</sup> Rainer, Békés, and Byrne, eds., *The 1956 Hungarian Revolution: A History in Documents*, 364.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

Soviet Ambassador Andropov also carefully watched over Kádár. These five worked to guide Hungary through their first stage of post-Stalin “normalization.” In fact, Kádár did not have independent power until the end of December 1956.<sup>175</sup>

The Hungarian public still resisted the new reign of power, in which they created the Central Workers’ Council of Greater Budapest (KMT) on November 14. Although the KMT potentially threatened to undermine the Kádár regime, Kádár was forced to negotiate because he needed to rally the workers in order to revamp the economy. Kádár was forced to make several concessions in regard to economic reform. However, he drew the line at political demands and when the KMT formally threatened his power by establishing a National Workers’ Council. In response, Kádár used force to prevent the KMT from meeting and arrested many of the labor organizers. Furthermore, Kádár banned the Workers’ Council and declared martial law. Martial law allowed Kádár to make large-scale arrests and even execute Hungarian citizens, once again creating a state of chaos in Hungary and fueling resentment.<sup>176</sup>

Another unifying point for the Hungarian public was Imre Nagy. The Yugoslav Embassy created a challenge for the Soviet Union and the Kádár government by granting asylum to Nagy and his supporters. Nagy continued to undermine the legitimacy of the Kádár government by refusing to recognize the Kádár regime. To make matters worse, Josip Broz Tito, the President of Yugoslavia, only further aggravated the situation by not releasing Nagy but also condemning the Soviet invasion and brutality exhibited on the Hungarian insurgents.<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> Rainer, Békés, and Byrne, eds., *The 1956 Hungarian Revolution: A History in Documents*, 365.

<sup>176</sup> Rainer, Békés, and Byrne, eds., *The 1956 Hungarian Revolution: A History in Documents*, 367.

<sup>177</sup> Rainer, Békés, and Byrne, eds., *The 1956 Hungarian Revolution: A History in Documents*, 365.

After lots of discussions between the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, Kádár's Hungary, and even Romania, Nagy remained an obstacle for the new Hungarian government. The Soviet delegation of Georgii Malenkov, Mikhail Suslov, and Averki Aristov, convinced Kádár that the only way to solve the problem was to trick Nagy out of the Embassy and then proceed to arrest him and force him to recognize the new Hungarian government. On November 22, Nagy and eight of his colleagues, including their families, left the Yugoslav Embassy under the impression that they were being taken to their homes to be left unharmed. However, once on board of the bus, Soviet People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD) forces arrested the group and brought them to an unknown location. While in captivity, the Soviet forces tried to force Nagy to make a statement recognizing the Kádár government. However, Nagy refused. In response to their lack of success, the Soviets transported Nagy and his colleagues to Romania where they were placed in isolation.<sup>178</sup>

Kádár faced an unexpected amount of resistance among the Hungarian public. While he tried to compromise and negotiate with the resisters, he was compelled to suppress them and force their support. In fact, the lack of support behind Kádár led him to accept former Stalinist members to Kádár's new HSWP, as they were the only members of the Hungarian society willing to uphold Kádár's government. With time and the elimination of Nagy, Kádár was able to consolidate his power.<sup>179</sup>

The Soviet suppression of the Hungarian Revolt left the world stunned. After the incident in Poznań, the world gained confidence in Khrushchev's claimed new direction. Khrushchev offered optimism for the "free world" at the beginning of 1956, yet ended the

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<sup>178</sup> Rainer, Békés, and Byrne, eds., *The 1956 Hungarian Revolution: A History in Documents*, 366.

<sup>179</sup> Rainer, Békés, and Byrne, eds., *The 1956 Hungarian Revolution: A History in Documents*, 368.

year by reverting back to Stalinistic violence. The Hungarian Revolt proved that the socialist legality could never be reconciled with the implementation of communist ideology.

Part Two:  
The U.S. Reactions and Understanding of the Events of 1956

## **Chapter 4: Can Someone Please Turn on the Lights? It's Dark in Here: United States Reactions to the Khrushchev's Secret Speech**

In the wake of Joseph Stalin's death in 1953, the Soviet Union did not have a concrete leader. Nikita Khrushchev shrewdly secured his position as the leader of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. The change of leadership opened up the possibility for renegotiating the relationship between the Soviet Union and the United States. Uncertain of the direction in which Khrushchev would guide the Soviet Union and communism, the U.S. anxiously waited to see what the future would bring.

On February 25, 1956, Nikita Khrushchev informed the Communist Party of the direction he wanted to take the Soviet Union. However, it was not until mid March that the U.S. even heard about Khrushchev's speech. As of March 30, the United States still did not have a copy of the speech, only the information that United States Ambassador Charles E. Bohlen to the Soviet Union was relaying to them. Furthermore, the Soviet press was releasing minimal information about the speech, making it hard to glean much about the Secret Speech from the Soviet press, this forced the U.S. to look to other sources, such as Israeli Intelligence. The intelligence was coming from reports about the speech and not the actual text, which handicapped the United States' interpretations.<sup>180</sup> It was not until May 1956 that the United States obtained a copy of Khrushchev's speech.<sup>181</sup>

As a result, the U.S. was attempting to craft a policy about something that they did not even fully understand because they lacked primary information. The U.S. was in the

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<sup>180</sup> "Intelligence Brief Prepared by the Office of Intelligence Research, Washington, March 30, 1956," in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957: Soviet Union; Eastern Mediterranean*, volume XXIV, (Washington D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), 78.

<sup>181</sup> John Foster Dulles, "Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in the Soviet Union, Washington, May 18, 1956, 4:54 p.m.," in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957: Soviet Union; Eastern Mediterranean*, volume XXIV, (Washington D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), 104.

dark about Khrushchev's speech, forcing them to desperately grapple to obtain more information regarding what was said in the speech by the leader of the world's second superpower. Due to the lack of information, the U.S. was unable to formulate an accurate policy and to fully comprehend the new direction of the Soviet Union. The lack of information disabled the U.S. from creating a precise opinion about Khrushchev and his new vision for communism. Even worse, when the U.S. did obtain a copy of the speech, they were unable to interpret it because of their traditional skepticism towards the Soviet Union and communism.

In response to the change of leadership in the Soviet Union, a report was produced by the National Security Council about the "Exploitation of Soviet and European Satellite Vulnerabilities," and the United States' policies towards the Soviet Union and the Eastern European Bloc as of January 31, 1955. The council conveyed that the goal of U.S. policies was to further U.S. security interests. In the realm of the communist bloc, the goal of U.S. policy was to prevent further communist aggression or expansion and to prevent another total war. In addition to creating these preventative policies, the National Security Council announced that the U.S. policy included providing alternative options to communism and making these options more attractive. Lastly, U.S. foreign policy towards the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc included exploiting the tensions and discontent regarding, but not limited to, the intense police state, low standards of living, and interference with religion.<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> "National Security Council Report: Exploitation of Soviet and European Satellite Vulnerabilities, Washington, January 31, 1955," in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957: Soviet Union; Eastern Mediterranean*, volume XXIV, (Washington D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), 20.

Before any of the dramatic events took place, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles<sup>183</sup> and President Dwight Eisenhower had a conference where they discussed the progress of their foreign policy since 1953. Eisenhower wrote that the U.S.'s policy was to promote peace through disarmament. Contrastingly, Eisenhower also commented that, "in the meantime, and pending some advance in this direction, we must stay strong, particularly in that type of power that the Russians are compelled to respect—namely, destructive power that can be carried suddenly and en masse directly against the Russian economic structure."<sup>184</sup> While Eisenhower does not clarify what this "destructive power" was, it can be hypothesized that he was referring to nuclear power. The U.S. was publicly promoting disarmament, but clearly wanted to continue its nuclear race to maintain its role as a nuclear threat to the Soviet Union. Eisenhower wanted the security of being the stronger nuclear force if the Cold War ever changed to an actual war.

Despite President Eisenhower's nuclear preparation, at the beginning of 1956, the U.S. policy was very passive and non-invasive. The U.S. feared any active involvement could likely lead to a large-scale war, which they wanted to avoid. Furthermore, the U.S. did not see any promising change in the Soviet Union's control of Eastern Europe. The U.S. did not want to exert a large amount of time and energy on a perceived uphill struggle, yet the U.S.

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<sup>183</sup> John Foster Dulles was the grandson of John Watson Foster, who was the Secretary of state under President Benjamin Harrison. John graduated from Princeton University and then earned his law degree from George Washington University. He then became a lawyer in New York, specializing in international law. In 1918, President Woodrow Wilson appointed him as the legal counsel for the U.S. delegation to the Versailles Peace Conference. After his role in that delegation, John became a member of the War Reparations Committee. In the years 1946, 1947, and 1950, John was the U.S. delegate at the General Assembly of the United Nations. He was responsible for helping build up the North American Treaty Organization (NATO), as a defense against the Soviet Union. John was also responsible for the construct of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) in 1954. John was appointed the Secretary of State under President Eisenhower. For more see: "John Foster Dulles," Spartacus Educational, last modified June 2013, <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USAdulles.htm?menu=ColdWar>.

<sup>184</sup> Dwight David Eisenhower, "Diary, Secret, January 10, 1956," in *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower: The Presidency: The Middle Way*, volume XVI, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 1947.



closely monitored the situation and constantly reconvened and reassessed the status quo. As of January 1955, the outlook was not positive. Therefore, their reoccurring strategies were mostly psychological. This is the point where the U.S. approached the dramatic year of 1956.

A month and a half before Khrushchev's speech, on January 11, 1956, the Division of Research for USSR and Eastern Europe in the Office of Intelligence Research prepared a paper analyzing the new leader of the Soviet Union. The paper acknowledged that Khrushchev was the new leader and that he had secured a very strong power with the support of Party officials. While the United States clearly understood that Khrushchev was the singular leader of the party, they did not anticipate him to be another Joseph Stalin. The United States relied on the ideology of communism and "collective leadership" to keep Khrushchev in check. The division believed:

The rise of Khrushchevism influence does not mean, however, that 'collective leadership' has lost all significance. 'Collective leadership' never involved, and of course does not now involve, the equal sharing of power at the top level. Appreciation of Khrushchev's superior position should not lead, therefore, to the conclusion that he has secured, or is about to secure, a Stalin-type prominence.<sup>185</sup>

The U.S. misunderstood the current situation in the Soviet Union. The USSR was in a vulnerable situation post-Stalin, which allowed for Khrushchev to gain so much power and rule as an individual. Stalin had eliminated the collective leadership aspect of communist ideology, making it easier for Khrushchev to keep strong individual power. However, the U.S. government did not necessarily comprehend this and wanted to believe that the concept of "collective leadership" would prevail.

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<sup>185</sup> "Paper Prepared by the Division of Research for USSR and Eastern Europe, Office of Intelligence Research, Washington, January 11, 1956," in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957: Soviet Union; Eastern Mediterranean*, volume XXIV, (Washington D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), 38.

An announcement of the Soviet press informed the United States of the meeting of the Twentieth Party Congress. That being said, as of February 8, the U.S. was not anticipating Khrushchev's denouncement of Stalin. In fact, all the United States predicted was the announcement of Khrushchev as the party leader. They were not expecting any surprises.<sup>186</sup> Based on their analysis of the climate in January, the U.S. was blindsided by Khrushchev's speech. The shock of the speech positioned the U.S. in a state of catch up. The U.S. frantically tried to construct a policy in reaction to their new knowledge of the speech, unsure of how to adjust their policy to the reality of the situation

Unaware of Khrushchev's Secret Speech to the Twentieth Communist Party of the Soviet Union, the United States maintained their foreign policy in regards to the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. The U.S. continued to reassess the situation and reevaluate their policy completely unaware of the developing events. In a progress report submitted by the Operations Coordinating Board to the National Security Council in Washington on February 29, the National Security Council believed that the psychological warfare policy of the United States was bolstering the passive resistance that was taking place in the Soviet Union Eastern bloc.<sup>187</sup> The progress report described:

It is believed that the strategic controls on East-West trade have had an effect in limiting the satellite contribution to the Soviet bloc economy and war potential. These controls are regarded as a factor in retarding technological advance in the industry of the satellite areas to the extent that industry for the most part has been obliged to rely on equipment and processes which are becoming antiquated. The new communist domestic propaganda line stressing the need to learn technological know-how from

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<sup>186</sup> "Policy Information Statement for the United States Information Agency: 20<sup>th</sup> Congress of the CPSU, Washington, February 8, 1956," in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957: Soviet Union; Eastern Mediterranean*, volume XXIV, (Washington D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), 57.

<sup>187</sup> "Progress Report Submitted by the Operations Coordinating Board to the National Security Council, Washington, February 29, 1956," in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957: Eastern Europe*, volume XXV, (Washington D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), 122.

the West bears witness to the unsatisfactory condition of satellite technology.<sup>188</sup>

The U.S. was thus exploiting the damage caused by Soviet economic control of the satellite countries. Furthermore, the U.S. played up the technological disadvantages within the satellite countries and blamed them on the Soviet Union and communism. Additionally, The U.S. was encouraging the resistance as well as trying to tarnish the reputation of the Soviet Union to instigate anti-Soviet feelings within Eastern Europe through ways such as radio broadcasts. If the United States could find individuals unhappy under the Soviet yolk, they could try to prove the failure of the Soviet ideology.

The Western world was not even aware of the speech until a week or so later. On March 6, 1956, an Intelligence Report was prepared by the Division of Research for USSR and Eastern Europe within the Office of Intelligence Research in regards to the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). At this point, the United States had finally caught wind of Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin. The U.S. understood Khrushchev's speech to mean that:

The Congress has now marked a further distinctive step as the rulers took to open attack. Their criticism centered chiefly on the ill-effects of one-man rule, with its glorification of an all-wise leader. Beyond this, however, while they neither completely buried Stalin nor brought into question his basic state policies, they ranged critically over many fields, including economic development, ideology, law and foreign affairs.<sup>189</sup>

United States Intelligence interpreted this as a continued innovation of the 20<sup>th</sup> CPSU, by diminishing Stalin and refocusing on Lenin. While the 20<sup>th</sup> CPSU had been slowly working

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<sup>188</sup> "Progress Report, February 29, 1956," in *FRUS, 1955-1957*, volume XXV, 122.

<sup>189</sup> "Intelligence Report Prepared by the Division of Research for USSR and Eastern Europe, Office of Intelligence Research: The Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Washington, March 6, 1956," in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957: Soviet Union; Eastern Mediterranean*, volume XXIV, (Washington D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), 63.

to reduce the legacy of Stalin, Khrushchev's speech went a step further, with an open attack on Stalin's reign. Despite Khrushchev's denigration of Stalin, the U.S. believed that Khrushchev had failed to completely bury the legacy of Stalin. This could either be attributed to U.S. paranoia regarding Stalin and communism or that the U.S. was looking to the Stalinistic leaders that remained in power in the Eastern Bloc.

The report also presented an interpretation of Soviet policy towards the U.S. at this point. United States Intelligence understood that the policy of the Soviets was preventability and peaceful coexistence rather than nuclear war. The U.S. also understood that the Soviets were under the impression that communism would inevitably be victorious over capitalism.<sup>190</sup> Both the U.S. and the Soviet Union wanted to avoid war, but at the same time, they both believed that their respective ideology would win.

It was not until March 10, 1956, that U.S. Ambassador Charles E. Bohlen first heard about Khrushchev's speech. About a week later, March 16, Bohlen sent a telegram from Moscow reporting that Josip Broz Tito, the president of Yugoslavia, had possession of a detailed summary of Khrushchev's speech.<sup>191</sup> It took U.S. Intelligence two weeks to hear about Khrushchev's speech. At this point, the U.S. still had yet to obtain a copy of the speech, incredibly limiting their analysis and understanding of the situation. The U.S. was thus blindly creating foreign policy regarding the Soviet Union.

Although the U.S. heard about the speech, they were still in the dark about specifics, and how they fit into the picture.<sup>192</sup> They were constantly behind in terms of policy because of their lack of intelligence regarding the speech. Their intelligence was drastically

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<sup>190</sup> "Intelligence Report, March 6, 1956," in *FRUS, 1955-1957*, volume XXIV, 64.

<sup>191</sup> John P. Glennon, "Editorial Note," in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957: Soviet Union; Eastern Mediterranean*, volume XXIV, (Washington D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), 72.

<sup>192</sup> "Intelligence Report, March 6, 1956," in *FRUS, 1955-1957*, volume XXIV, 63.

delayed and as a result their policy was misinformed and late. All of their policy was reactive and shallow because they did not have all of the information. In other words, the U.S. was trying to form a policy regarding an event that they did not know about fully.

A week later, on March 22, the U.S. National Security Council held their 280<sup>th</sup> Meeting, in which they focused on Khrushchev's recent speech. The National Security Council grappled with the attack on Stalin and what it meant for U.S. security. One member called Joseph Stalin the "'Trojan corpse,' which was to be introduced inside the defenses of the free world."<sup>193</sup> In other words, the United States feared that the legacy of Stalin could stealthily infiltrate the free world and break down its defenses, like the Trojan horse of Troy. Interestingly, the U.S. feared the memory of Stalin, but the Soviet Union and Khrushchev were both trying to diminish his legacy. The U.S. preoccupation with Stalin's legacy, despite Khrushchev's speech, reflects their paranoia of communism spreading into the United States and the greater "free world." This speaks to the failure of U.S. Intelligence to fully understand the developments within the Soviet Union. This fixation on Stalin, despite Khrushchev's denunciation, raises questions regarding the U.S. Intelligence community. An obsessive fear of communism consumed U.S. policy makers and debilitated them from properly analyzing Khrushchev's speech without intense bias and thereby hindering their understanding of the new direction of Soviet communist ideology.

Despite not fully understanding Khrushchev's denouncement of Stalin, the National Security Council clearly understood his rationale for excluding foreign delegates from attending the February 25<sup>th</sup> session. Khrushchev wanted time before the speech would

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<sup>193</sup> S. Everett Gleason, "Memorandum of Discussion at the 280<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the National Security Council, Washington, March 22, 1956," in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957: Soviet Union; Eastern Mediterranean*, volume XXIV, (Washington D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), 73.

inevitably leak. Allen Dulles<sup>194</sup>, the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), understood the speech as Khrushchev's way to deal with Stalin's lingering legacy and further asserting his own power.

However, Director Dulles and the rest of the CIA did not believe that explained exactly why Khrushchev decided to unquestionably attack Stalin. The CIA not only questioned the rationale behind the attack, but also its timing. Speculations ranged from the trend of self-criticism within communism, the hope to gain respectability among Western power, Khrushchev's personality, or that Khrushchev was drunk.<sup>195</sup> The wide range of proposed reasons for the speech exemplifies the confusion the speech presented to the United States. They did not know how to interpret this condemnation of Stalin. The U.S. did conclude that Khrushchev most likely had ulterior political motives, although they could not necessarily decipher them. In other words, Khrushchev's speech raised more questions and confusion all over the world and not just within the Soviet Union and its satellites. The U.S. in particular was extremely confused because they did not know whether to trust Khrushchev, despite the initial temptation to believe him.

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<sup>194</sup> Allen Dulles was the grandson of John Watson Foster, the Secretary of State under President Benjamin Harrison. His brother was John Foster Dulles, Secretary of State under President Eisenhower. Allen Dulles graduated from Princeton University where he immediately went into diplomatic service abroad in Europe. In 1922, he was appointed as chief of Division of Near Eastern Affairs. After that he received his law degree from George Washington University where he worked at a law firm with his brother John. In 1927 Allen became the director of the Council on Foreign Relations and became the secretary of the Council in 1933. Allen further served as an adviser to the delegation on arms limitation at the League of Nations. With President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's creation of the American Intelligence System known as the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), Allen was placed as the head of the New York City Office, which then led to his transfer to Berne where he became the Swiss Director of OSS. When President Harry Truman dissolve the OSS and then created the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in 1947, Allen joined the agency and became the Deputy Director of the organization, which then led to his appointment as the Director of the CIA under President Dwight Eisenhower. For more see: "Allen Dulles," Spartacus Educational, last modified June 2013, <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USAdullesA.htm?menu=ColdWar>.

<sup>195</sup> Gleason, "Memorandum, March 22, 1956," in *FRUS, 1955-1957*, volume XXIV, 74.

Despite the confusion about Khrushchev's motives, Director Dulles and the CIA recognized the obvious potential problems that Khrushchev created for the Soviet Union. The council questioned which policies under Stalin would be retained or changed as well as the leadership of the Eastern Bloc, since many of the leaders were Stalinists. Director Dulles understood that Khrushchev was trying to make a break from the past, but failed to fully map out a plan for the future, creating an opportunity that the United States should exploit. Despite the constant fixation on Stalin's legacy, Director Dulles was able to stay focused and interpret the little intelligence he had to the best of his ability.

The meeting concluded with President Eisenhower and Secretary of State Dulles conveying that they thought Khrushchev's speech and the shockwaves it would create would be beneficial to the United States.<sup>196</sup> Secretary Dulles was convinced that the repercussions from the speech could lead to cracks within the Eastern Bloc. More importantly, these cracks could lead to liberation of the satellite countries, the eventual goal of U.S. policy.

Reacting to the recent speech, Eisenhower sent a letter to the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Winston Churchill, on March 29, discussing the recent Soviet developments. Eisenhower expressed his confusion of the new "sweet kind" nature of the Soviet Union exhibited at the Geneva conference and now with Khrushchev's speech. He wrote with suspicion, "It is amazing that so many people continue to believe, wholly or in part, the propaganda with which the Soviets cover the world. It seems to make no difference in many regions how often the Soviets reverse themselves or how often they are

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<sup>196</sup> Gleason, "Memorandum, March 22, 1956," in *FRUS, 1955-1957*, volume XXIV, 74.

guilt of self-contradiction.”<sup>197</sup> Eisenhower recognized the contradicting nature of the Soviet Union and communism and attributed it to propaganda efforts conflicting with desires. He realized that by denouncing Stalin, Khrushchev was positioning himself in uncharted territory. The usual skepticism towards the Soviet Union and Khrushchev was exemplified through Eisenhower’s letter to Churchill.

The following day, Eisenhower wrote a diary entry reflecting on a conversation regarding the progress of the guided missile field and the United States’ nuclear power. He reflected;

I pointed out that if our calculations are anywhere near correct, there is no question that in a matter of hours we could inflict very great, even decisive, damage upon the productive power of the Soviet union and its satellites. The guided missile is therefore merely another, or auxiliary, method of delivering over the Soviet union the kind of destructive force that is represented in the hydrogen bomb. Until we found the way to make a bomb of megaton size and put it in a small package, capable of being transported by ballistic methods, the ballistic missile was not even a serious threat. I further pointed out that the ballistic missile and its early production will have greater effect on world psychological reaction because people see it as the “ultimate” weapon, and have a picture of guided missiles raining out of the skies in almost uncounted numbers, it is extremely important that the Soviets do not get ahead of us in the general development of these weapons.<sup>198</sup>

The intense planning of the nuclear weapons demonstrated the U.S.’s fear of the Soviet Union as a world superpower. The U.S. took comfort knowing that they could destroy the Soviet Union within a matter of minutes with their nuclear weapons. Furthermore, the U.S. felt secure that their nuclear power was stronger than the Soviet Union’s was and

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<sup>197</sup> Dwight David Eisenhower, “Letter to Winston Spencer Churchill, March 29, 1956,” in *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower: The Presidency: The Middle Way*, volume XVI, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 2100.

<sup>198</sup> Dwight David Eisenhower, “Diary, Secret, March 30, 1956,” in *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower: The Presidency: The Middle Way*, volume XVI, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 2103.



Eisenhower wanted to make sure it stayed that way. Eisenhower's diary entry echoes his conference with Secretary Dulles about the security of having a strong nuclear force.

The U.S. Intelligence continued to monitor "The Desecration of Stalin." As of March 30, the U.S. perceived the public criticism of Stalin by Khrushchev as an event that sent psychological shock waves throughout the world, but the final outcome could not yet be predicted. The U.S. could not fully calculate the implications because they did not know the extent to which Khrushchev denounced Stalin. In fact, all of their information was alleged information regarding the speech. The CIA extrapolated that the speech caused confusion, anger, and disbelief throughout the Soviet Union and its satellite countries.<sup>199</sup>

The United States realized that Khrushchev must have fielded a risk analysis before making this speech and came to the conclusion that the Soviet Union would reap more benefits than harm through this speech. Khrushchev must have believed that breaking away from Stalin would portray the Soviet Union in a more favorable light when on the world stage, which seemed better than the confusion that would inevitably arise. It is also possible that Khrushchev might have hoped that by diminishing Stalin's legacy that it would help to further secure his power.

The essential risk Khrushchev took by attacking Stalin was the possibility of psychological repercussions. Stalinists existed within the CPSU and important leadership roles in the satellite governments. Furthermore, the rest of these members and citizens had been trained to listen and worship Stalin and his beliefs. As a result, the denouncement of Stalin angered the Stalinists and confused the rest of the society. The United States

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<sup>199</sup> "Intelligence Brief Prepared by the Office of Intelligence Research, Washington, March 30, 1956," in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957: Eastern Europe*, volume XXV, (Washington D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), 75.

understood this implication and recognized that the Soviet leadership would be required to explicitly guide communism towards their new desired path.<sup>200</sup> Within all the fear and paranoia, some U.S. policy makers were able to think lucidly about the implications that Khrushchev created for himself.

While the U.S. did not have a copy of the speech yet, they did know that the CPSU had started removing some of the public symbols of Stalin, such as statues and pictures, to help guide the communists. Additionally, the national anthem was no longer played on the radio because of the segment that portrays Stalin in a favorable light. The Soviet leadership took further measures to diminish the presence of Stalin to help move away from his ideologies and his memory. But moving away from Stalin was only half of the challenge when dealing with the aftermath of Khrushchev's speech, something that the U.S. Intelligence services recognized.<sup>201</sup> The U.S. anxiously waited to see where Khrushchev would lead the Soviet Union and the communist world, leaving the U.S. always on the defensive, blatantly not in control of the situation because they were reacting to the Soviet Union.

The United States interpreted the speech as a part of the new climate revolving around this new leadership. After Stalin's death in 1953, the new leaders wanted to change the atmosphere of Soviet society. In contrast to Stalin's strict regime, U.S. believed that the new leaders:

Have brought about a general relaxation in the atmosphere of tension that clouded Stalin's last years. They have shown an awareness of the need of Soviet elite groups for a feeling of greater personal security: to be able to carry out their work without the threat of police terror. They have succeeded in ending one-man control of the police and thus reducing the threat of

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<sup>200</sup> "Intelligence Brief, March 30, 1956," in *FRUS, 1955-1957*, volume XXIV, 76.

<sup>201</sup> "Intelligence Brief, March 30, 1956," in *FRUS 1955-1957*, volume XXIV, 78.

capricious coercion. They have sought to decentralize certain governmental and economic functions, distributing greater responsibility to the lower levels and to nits outside of Moscow. At the same time, however, they have maintained an undiluted monopoly of political power, reserving to themselves the prerogative of final decision.<sup>202</sup>

Despite this relaxation and de-Stalinization period, the Soviet leadership maintained unquestionable political power. The United States concluded that the post-Stalin Soviet leadership was not evolving into a totalitarian state, in which every individual is subordinate to the government because of the government's forceful control over every aspect of his or her lives.<sup>203</sup>

The brief continued by acknowledging that the speech was inevitably going to affect the relationship between the CPSU and the communist parties in the Eastern Bloc. In fact, the Eastern Bloc governments faced the same problems in regard to the confusion and anger, in addition to their own individual problems such as managing their Stalinist regimes and how to redefine their relationship with Moscow.<sup>204</sup> Khrushchev created many problems for himself and the United States was unsure of how he would handle new situations that might arise. They wished to gauge Khrushchev's reactions to these inevitable problems as a test of his sincerity. The U.S. wanted to believe that Khrushchev's claimed new direction was true, but they needed to see actions to validate the proposed new direction of the Soviet Union.

On April 3, a memorandum was sent from the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs Jacob D. Beam<sup>205</sup> to the Deputy Under Secretary of State for Political

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<sup>202</sup> "Intelligence Brief, March 30, 1956," in *FRUS 1955-1957*, volume XXIV, 80.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>204</sup> "Intelligence Brief, March 30, 1956," in *FRUS, 1955-1957*, volume XXIV, 82.

<sup>205</sup> Prior to being Deputy Assistant Secretary of State of European Affairs, Beam was Director of the Office of Eastern European Affairs, Bureau of European Affairs, Department of State from March 1955-October 1955. Beam became Deputy Assistant Secretary of State in October 1955.

Affairs Robert D. Murphy, regarding the anti-Stalin campaign and U.S. foreign policy. Beam explained that the anti-Stalin campaign was advantageous to the U.S. and required no further assistance. He also contended that the propaganda efforts should be minor and subtle, nothing too dramatic. For example, he supported the media provoking criticism and confusion by posing hypothetical questions that communists had as a result of Khrushchev's speech, but not suggesting a full-on rebellion.<sup>206</sup>

Beam expressed anxiety over the potential implications that the U.S. could entangle themselves in if they were not careful stating, "if the communists show that the US gloating over their present embarrassment, they might be able to close ranks and also discredit the US with some Socialist elements who would dislike a sensational 'capitalist' victory."<sup>207</sup> Rather than instigating any action, Beam only suggested further fueling present confusion caused by Khrushchev among communists.

Two days later, April 5, CIA Director Dulles spoke at the 281<sup>st</sup> meeting of the National Security Council. Director Dulles commented that the international press had definitely help to play up the anti-Stalin campaign more than the Soviet leadership probably intended, which was beneficial for the United States. Interestingly, Director Dulles also proclaimed that he did not believe the Soviet leadership's promotion of "collective leadership" to be sincere, which prevents a change in U.S. opinion and to the constant suspicion that the U.S. took when approaching the Soviet Union. Furthermore, Director Dulles predicted that there would have to be political problems and dissent within the

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<sup>206</sup> "Memorandum From the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs (Beam) to the Deputy Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs (Murphy), Washington, April 3, 1956," in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957: Soviet Union; Eastern Mediterranean*, volume XXIV, (Washington D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), 86.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

satellite countries because of de-Stalinization.<sup>208</sup> While this was an obvious implication of Khrushchev's speech, it shows that Dulles was able to interpret and focus on what the speech meant for the world and the U.S. without being completely consumed by the fear of communism. Despite Director Dulles focus on the implications Khrushchev created for himself in the Eastern Bloc, he was still guilty of being hampered by his fear of Stalin and communism like the rest of the U.S. policy makers.

In the beginning of April 1956, the Embassy in the Soviet Union sent two corresponding telegrams to the Department of State regarding the Soviet Union after Khrushchev's speech and post-20<sup>th</sup> Congress period. In the first telegram, sent on April 9, Walter N. Walmsley Jr., the Minister-Counselor at the Embassy in the Soviet Union, reported again on Khrushchev's criticism on Stalin and the conscious attempt to destroy Stalin's myth. Walmsley correctly attributed the destruction of the myth of Stalin to a party legality. Walmsley wrote, "It is as necessary to these people as to other societies that policy be based upon some standard of morality, ethics or faith; it is constitutional foundation which even most arbitrary of governments seem to need to justify itself."<sup>209</sup> Without this standard of morality, governments cannot justify their actions. Walmsley's deduction reveals a lot about the United States understanding of the communist system. While the U.S. openly disagreed with the collectivization and other aspects of communism, they expected that communist systems would uphold morality based on the fact that they are human beings and that every form of government needed to answer to a moral code. Walmsley

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<sup>208</sup> John P. Glennon, "Editorial Note," in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957: Soviet Union; Eastern Mediterranean*, volume XXIV, (Washington D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), 87.

<sup>209</sup> Walter N. Walmsley Jr., "Telegram From the Embassy in the Soviet Union to the Department of State, Moscow, April 9, 1956, 7 p.m.," in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957: Soviet Union; Eastern Mediterranean*, volume XXIV, (Washington D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), 89.

shrewdly recognized that Khrushchev's speech was a tribute to the fact that the communist system did care about party legality. The U.S. also understood that the Soviet Union would never be able to reconcile the party legality with the implementation of it. Walmsley and the U.S. cited Khrushchev's condemnation of Stalin as evidence of this.

Walmsley continued his telegram by trying to present possible explanations for both Khrushchev's speech and the continued effort to diminish the legacy of Stalin in the communist world. Internal reasons included economic problems such as agricultural and industrial productivity and as simple as a change in leadership within the Kremlin. For external factors, Walmsley argued that if the Soviet leadership continued on Stalin's path that nuclear war would be inevitable, which was an outcome that Khrushchev and the Kremlin wanted to avoid.<sup>210</sup> Walmsley insinuated that Stalin became a scapegoat for the problems within the Soviet Union and communist system.

Furthermore, Walmsley offered the first plausible explanation for Khrushchev's speech. It may have been his proximity to the action that allowed for him to speculate better than U.S. Intelligence community at home. Walmsley concluded his first telegram by commenting on how the Soviet leadership was taking great caution with each action they take and surveying the repercussions before making their next move.<sup>211</sup> Walmsley believed that the Soviet Union would not make any rash or dramatic decisions because the Soviet leadership was trying to guide the party in a new direction and did not want to overwhelm the population to a point of dissent. Walmsley helped to shed light on the developing situation in the Soviet Union.

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<sup>210</sup> Walmsley Jr., "Telegram, April 9, 1956, 7 p.m.," in *FRUS, 1955-1957*, volume XXIV, 89.

<sup>211</sup> Walmsley Jr., "Telegram, April 9, 1956, 7 p.m.," in *FRUS, 1955-1957*, volume XXIV, 90.

Two days later, April 11, Walmsley followed up with his second telegram. Walmsley believed that the Soviet leadership had three obvious goals: the promotion of Leninist ideals, wider support from the population, and to narrow the gap between Western social democracy or Titoism and Soviet Communism. The ideology of Leninism was to replace the ideology of Stalinism and help to guide the communist party a new direction. Walmsley reported, "By disassociating themselves from and condemning arbitrary acts of Stalin, party leaders probably hope to win wider active support from key groups in Soviet population (e.g. cultural, managerial, scientific, military). They seek to convince both these groups and ordinary citizen that 'democratic' party rule has replaced one man dictatorship forever."<sup>212</sup>

Through this new direction, the Kremlin hoped to prove to the population that the government was no longer a dictatorship. Khrushchev attempted to display that collective leadership had replaced the dictatorship; a move that the leadership hoped would gain more support from the communist population. Furthermore, the Kremlin wished to close the gap between Titoism and Soviet Communism to demonstrate a closer unity between the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia than was true. Titoism was the form of socialism in Yugoslavia created under the Yugoslav President Josip Broz Tito in 1948. It was an official split from Stalinism and the Soviet Union. Despite this division, Titoism borrowed elements from Stalinism, such as nationalism and a strong disciplined party leadership.<sup>213</sup> However, the third factor was anti-Stalinist Communist ideology. The Soviet leadership wanted to

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<sup>212</sup> Walter N. Walmsley Jr., "Telegram from the Embassy in the Soviet Union to the Department of State, Moscow, April 11, 1956, 7 p.m.," in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957: Soviet Union; Eastern Mediterranean*, volume XXIV, (Washington D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), 91.

<sup>213</sup> For further reading see: Roy Macridis, "Stalinism and the Meaning of Titoism," *World Politics* 4, no. 2 (January 1, 1952): 219-238, doi: 10.23.07/2009046.

improve the image of Yugoslavia dissenting from Soviet Communism because it made the Soviet Union and communism look weak.<sup>214</sup> Walmsley relayed these conclusions to the U.S., giving the U.S. further hope that Khrushchev was trying to be more lenient.

Walmsley recognized that these goals also presented further problems for the Soviet Union. By trying to gain more support from significant groups within the population such as cultural or scientific groups, the leadership might have encouraged too much freedom. According to Walmsley, the Kremlin was walking a fine line between gaining support and allowing too much freedom of expression, a freedom that had the potential to take down the communist system.<sup>215</sup> Walmsley displayed great insight into the problems that the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress had presented itself with. Through his knowledge and analysis the U.S. Intelligence better understood the current state of the Soviet Union and Soviet Communism.

On May 8, the Deputy Directory for Plans of the Central Intelligence Agency, Frank G. Wisner, wrote a memorandum to Director Dulles regarding the views of George F. Kennan, an advisor to the Eisenhower administration.<sup>216</sup> Prior to Kennan's opinion, the U.S. viewed the current Soviet leadership as "a group of amiable and mutually cordial person, welded together by their long apprenticeship under Stalin who have found a workable and

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<sup>214</sup>Walmsley Jr. "Telegram, April 11, 1956, 7 p.m.," in *FRUS, 1955-1957*, volume XXIV, 92.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid.

<sup>216</sup> George F. Kennan graduated from the St. John's Military Academy and then Princeton University. In 1926, he joined the Foreign Service where he served as the vice-consul in Geneva. Abroad he began his training as an expert on the Soviet Union. In 1929, he attended the University of Berlin to study Russian. In 1933, Kennan became the third secretary at the embassy in Moscow. In 1944, Kennan returned to the Soviet Union as the minister-counselor and the chargé d'affaires. After World War II, George Marshal appointed Kennan as director of the State Department's policy-planning staff, where he developed the policy of containment and his ideas were embodied in the Truman Doctrine and the European Recovery Program(ERP). In 1949, Kennan clashed with John Foster Dulles in which Kennan resigned from policy planning. In 1952, President Harry Truman appointed him as the U.S. ambassador in Moscow. Kennan was an advisor to the Eisenhower administration. The CIA was in constant contact with Kennan throughout the Cold War. Despite this constant contact, Kennan was critical of President Eisenhower and NATO. For more see: "George Kennan," Spartacus Educational, last modified June 2013, <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USAkennan.htm?menu=ColdWar>.



enduring solution the inherent difficulties of collective leadership.”<sup>217</sup> This opinion demonstrated that U.S. Intelligence clearly misconstrued the Soviet leadership. Kennan strongly disagreed. In fact, Kennan even hypothesized, ““that the members of the present leading group either killed Stalin, in 1953, or brought about his death as a side-effect of an effort to remove him from power.””<sup>218</sup> Being a close advisor to the Eisenhower administration, Kennan forced U.S. Intelligence to be skeptical of the positive opinion of the new Soviet leadership and to be suspicious of their actions.

Continuing to analyze the speech, on May 17, the Operations Coordinating Board’s Special Working Group on Stalinism presented a report with the subject headline of “Summary of U.S. Policy Guidance and Actions Taken to Exploit the Campaign.” Besides the obvious appeal of the anti-Stalinist campaign within the Soviet Union, the U.S. also saw the efforts as a distraction for the Soviet Union from their military efforts, thus giving the U.S. the upper hand.<sup>219</sup> Importantly, the report made a claim that there was a sharp distinction between the public U.S. policy and other strategies of U.S. policy to exploit the opportunities that the Soviet Union has presented for the United States. The U.S. decided to use the media to raise suspicion about the claims of the new direction of the Soviet leadership. Furthermore, “publicly, U.S. media are adopting a note of cautious skepticism, calling upon the Soviet leaders to demonstrate their professed attachment to reform by

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<sup>217</sup> “Frank C. Wisner, “Memorandum From the Deputy Director (Plans) of Central Intelligence (Wisner) to the Director (Dulles), Washington, May 8, 1956,” in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957: Soviet Union; Eastern Mediterranean*, volume XXIV, (Washington D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), 96.

<sup>218</sup> Wisner, “Memorandum, May 8, 1956,” in *FRUS, 1955-1957*, volume XXIV, 97.

<sup>219</sup> “Report by the Operations Coordinating Board’s Special Working Group on Stalinism: Part I: Summary of U.S. Policy Guidance and Actions Taken to Exploit the Campaign, Washington, May 17, 1956,” in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957: Soviet Union; Eastern Mediterranean*, volume XXIV, (Washington D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), 99.

correcting still outstanding major abuses in domestic and foreign politics.”<sup>220</sup> The U.S. exploited the public eye to put the actions of the Soviet Union on the world stage, pressuring them to live up to Khrushchev’s word.

On the other hand, the U.S. discreetly worked to continue to provoke confusion created by the Soviet leadership among the communist world. The U.S. presented the contradictions within communism as a way to sustain the existing confusion. The goal of the U.S. policy was to exploit the opportunities while also not directly engaging the Soviet Union.<sup>221</sup> While the U.S. was trying to create a policy and plan of action, it was still trying to react to something that they did not fully know about.

Finally, at the end of May, the U.S. finally possessed a copy of the speech, allowing for U.S. policy makers to truly assess the situation. In a conference, on May 28, President Eisenhower expressed his opinion on the situation with the Soviet Union and his goals for U.S. policy. While Eisenhower did not want to promote communism or the actions of the Soviet Union, he did want to present the Soviet Union with the opportunity to take actions that could lead towards a peaceful resolution and improve Soviet-U.S. relations. As a result, Eisenhower advised that policy makers take caution when deciding the direction of U.S. policy.<sup>222</sup> President Eisenhower also wondered how serious the Soviet Union was in terms of improving Soviet-U.S. relations and was anxiously waiting to see how flexible the Soviets would be in negotiations.<sup>223</sup> Even with a copy of the speech, the U.S. was still waiting to see

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<sup>220</sup> “Report, May 17, 1956,” in *FRUS, 1955-1957*, volume XXIV, 100.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>222</sup> Colonel Goodpaster, “Memorandum of a Conference With the President, White House, Washington, May 28, 1956, 11 a.m.,” in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957: Soviet Union; Eastern Mediterranean*, volume XXIV, (Washington D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), 105.

<sup>223</sup> Goodpaster, “Memorandum, May 28, 1956, 11 a.m.,” in *FRUS, 1955-1957*, volume XXIV, 107.

if Khrushchev's and the Soviet Union's actions would match the words of Khrushchev's speech.

On June 16, Bohlen sent a telegram from the Embassy in the Soviet Union to the Department of State reporting on his meeting with Khrushchev. Bohlen and Khrushchev discussed the tense Soviet-U.S. relations. Khrushchev was discouraged with the lack of progress in improving the Soviet-U.S. relations. Bohlen explained that as long as key points of contention, such as Germany and disarmament, were left unresolved that improvement in relations would be difficult. In fact, the U.S. needed concrete action and not just words regarding these issues.<sup>224</sup> Bohlen boldly said to Khrushchev:

That Soviet leaders seemed believe that they could have everything their own way and that the constant assault in their own statements and their propaganda against measures such as, for example, NATO, which US and it's associates felt to be vital to security seemed to me to be incompatible with the constantly reiterated thesis of desire for co-existence and normal relations.<sup>225</sup>

Without hesitation, Bohlen stressed to Khrushchev that while he was making claims that the U.S. was in support of, he needed to back up his words with actions. Furthermore, Bohlen pushed Khrushchev to be more open to compromise, otherwise U.S.-Soviet relations would not improve.

The meeting between Bohlen and Khrushchev continued with Bohlen commenting to Khrushchev that:

I did my best to keep my government informed but despite certain improvements the area of secrecy was so great in this country that it was very difficult for an Ambassador to obtain a clear picture of what was going on...that middle of March the whole world knew that he had mane very

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<sup>224</sup> Charles E. Bohlen, "Telegram From the Embassy in the Soviet Union to the Department of State, Moscow, June 16, 1956, 3 p.m.," in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957: Soviet Union; Eastern Mediterranean*, volume XXIV, (Washington D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), 114.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid.

important speech to a closed session of Congress but no reliable information on this subject had been available in Moscow.<sup>226</sup>

Bohlen criticized Khrushchev for the Soviet Union's treatment of him as an ambassador. He claimed that the secrecy revolving around the speech and within the Soviet Union was debilitating to his work as an ambassador and further strained relations with the United States.

Significantly, Bohlen reported that Khrushchev seemed genuinely concerned about Soviet-U.S. relations.<sup>227</sup> At this point, Khrushchev had yet to reaffirm his positive and appealing claims with actions, as a result, the U.S. did not know how to move forward. The U.S. wanted to improve relations with the Soviet Union and Khrushchev, but at the same time they also did not want Soviet or communist expansion. Again, Khrushchev left the U.S. nervously waiting to see what his next move would be.

On June 28, the National Security Council convened for its 289<sup>th</sup> meeting, where the U.S. Intelligence community was still concerned with Khrushchev's speech. Director Dulles commented that:

He believed that the men in the Kremlin certainly never intended that Khrushchev's speech should produce such far-reaching results as it had in fact produced...on the other hand, we must take into account the possibility that the speech was deliberately designed to confer a semblance of respectability and independence on the Communist Parties in countries outside the Soviet bloc, with the ultimate objective of producing popular front governments in these countries.<sup>228</sup>

He was concerned with uncovering Khrushchev's motives for making the speech. He questioned whether the intention was to place the Soviet Union in a favorable light in the

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<sup>226</sup> Bohlen, "Telegram, June 16, 1956, 3 p.m.," in *FRUS, 1955-1957*, volume XXIV, 114.

<sup>227</sup> Bohlen, "Telegram, June 16, 1956, 3 p.m.," in *FRUS, 1955-1957*, volume XXIV, 115.

<sup>228</sup> S. Everett Gleason, "Memorandum of Discussion at the 289<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the National Security Council, Washington, June 28, 1956," in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957: Soviet Union; Eastern Mediterranean*, volume XXIV, (Washington D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), 119.

public eye. Despite this cautionary theory, Director Dulles believed it caused greater repercussions than planned, thereby breaking down Khrushchev's risk analysis.

Secretary Dulles also commented on Khrushchev's speech and Khrushchev as the new leader. Interestingly, at this meeting Secretary Dulles argued that:

Khrushchev was the most dangerous person to lead the Soviet Union since the October Revolution. He was not a coldly calculating person, but rather one who reacted emotionally. He was obviously intoxicated much of the time, and could be expected to commit irrational acts. The previous Soviet leaders had been for the most part the chess-playing type. Khrushchev was the first top authority in the USSR who was essentially emotional and perfectly capable of acting without calculation of the consequences of his action. Stalin always calculated the results of a proposed action. Bad as he was, you at least knew what you were up against in dealing with him.<sup>229</sup>

He feared Khrushchev as the new leader of the Soviet Union. A point worth noting is that this was not the first mentioning of Khrushchev being drunk. Khrushchev being drunk was even a possible preliminary explanation for why the speech was initially given. The reiteration of Khrushchev as a drunk, confirms the opinion of the U.S. government viewing him as unpredictable. Whether his unpredictability was attributed to being a drunk or not, it affirmed that the U.S. had no idea what to expect from Khrushchev as a leader.

Furthermore, Secretary Dulles viewed Khrushchev as an emotional leader, which he viewed as far more threatening than a cold-hearted and calculated leader. Once again, Secretary Dulles analysis of Khrushchev as an emotional leader contributes to the fear of Khrushchev because of his capriciousness.

On May 8, there was evidence that the opinion of the new Soviet leadership was unthreatening. There must have been some confusion and disagreement within the U.S. Intelligence and government over the opinion of Khrushchev and the Kremlin. Moreover,

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<sup>229</sup> Gleason, "Memorandum, June 28, 1956," in *FRUS, 1955-1957*, volume XXIV, 119.

George Kennan may have influenced the government and intelligence agencies that these leaders cannot be viewed as cordial, but rather as evil. In regards to these men being evil, Secretary Dulles presented the question of whether the U.S. should isolate them or try to force them to change their criminal habits. Secretary Dulles believed that the U.S. should try to force the Soviet leaders to change, but not everyone agreed with him.<sup>230</sup>

Secretary Dulles carried on by arguing that the Soviet Union had opened the door for the Soviet society to end rule by terror. The reprimanding of Stalin caused Soviet communists to think and understand the true nature of Stalin's reign. By criticizing Stalin's rule, it allowed for the public to openly express their anger in regards to Stalin. Secretary Dulles believed this freedom of expression and realization would prevent the Soviet population from ever accepting another reign of terror. That being said, Secretary Dulles was under no impression that the Soviet population's freedom of expression would evolve to denouncing communism.<sup>231</sup> Secretary Dulles understood how entangled communism was in the culture of the Soviet Union. However, he did have optimism that the U.S. would not face another Stalinistic dictator in the Soviet Union.

The discussion regarding Khrushchev's speech continued on July 19, when Director Dulles spoke at the 291<sup>st</sup> meeting of the National Security Council. Director Dulles commented on the difficult situation that the Soviet Union presented itself in regards to its satellite states. On the one hand, the Soviet Union was promoting de-Stalinization. On the other, the Soviet Union was not reforming its liberalization policy for the satellite states. The de-Stalinization efforts caused an increase in freedom of expression, and the idea of independence cultivated within the Eastern Bloc. The Soviet Union had zero intention to

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<sup>230</sup> Gleason, "Memorandum, June 28, 1956," in *FRUS, 1955-1957*, volume XXIV, 121.

<sup>231</sup> Gleason, "Memorandum, June 28, 1956," in *FRUS, 1955-1957*, volume XXIV, 122.

loosen its grip on its satellite states and wanted to prevent any additional riots such as the June 28-29 Poznań Revolt in Poland.<sup>232</sup>

Prior to Khrushchev's speech, U.S. policy in regards to the Soviet Union was to prevent the expansion of communism. The U.S. was unwilling to intervene militarily for the fear of engaging the Soviet Union in war. The United States' plan was to contain communism. To help achieve this goal, the U.S. manipulated the media to conduct psychological warfare against communism and the Soviet Union. The U.S. was aware of Khrushchev's securement of his position as the leader of the CPSU. Before his speech, the U.S. Intelligence still believed that collective leadership was a potential option for governing the Soviet Union. The U.S. failed to recognize that Stalin had changed the direction of communism and despite Khrushchev wanting to create a new direction, he still believed in a totalitarian state with a single leader.

After the speech was leaked to the U.S. Intelligence agencies and the government analyzed the reasons and implications of Khrushchev's speech. While the U.S. was pleased with the denouncement of Stalin, they were still suspicious of the motives of Khrushchev and the greater Soviet Union. That being said, the U.S. still interpreted the speech as a chance to further their cause of containing and eventually eliminating communism. However, the U.S. did not change its strategy, and it still relied on the media to disrupt Soviet relations with their satellite countries. The U.S. just believed that they would have greater success with their strategy because of the problems that Khrushchev created for himself by attacking Stalin. United States policy remained passive and purely psychological after Khrushchev's secret speech. The U.S. was cautious and distrustful of the speech and

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<sup>232</sup> John P. Glennon, 'Editorial Note,' in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957: Soviet Union; Eastern Mediterranean*, volume XXIV, (Washington D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), 136.

needed further actions to validate it before they would believe Khrushchev to be sincere.

The events of 1956 would allow for the U.S. to see Khrushchev's true intentions.



## **Chapter 5: “When They Begin to Crack, They Can Crack Fast. We Have to Keep the Pressure On.”: United States Reactions to the Events in Poland**

The year 1956 kick started with Nikita Khrushchev’s Secret Speech on February 25, which left the U.S. government baffled and unsure of Khrushchev’s sincerity and its motives. Confused and in the dark, U.S. policy makers tried to formulate a policy to further their own interests. While they liked the promise of the speech, they were skeptical and wanted to wait to see how the Soviet Union would handle problems of dissent that would inevitably arise in response to Khrushchev’s speech.

Since the formation of the Soviet Union, the United States was concerned with the expansion of communism and its implications for the rest of the world. As a result, the U.S. intently watched Eastern Europe hoping that communism would never exceed the current line of the Iron Curtain. Even more importantly, the U.S. carefully watched the satellites of the Soviet Union, wishing they would pursue independence, which would lead to the end of their communist government.

After Khrushchev’s speech, the U.S. anticipated repercussions in the Eastern Bloc that would be favorable to the forces of democracy. As the U.S. anxiously awaited to see what the year would bring, they could never have anticipated the events. In late June, Poland cracked first within the satellites the Poznań riot, where economic demands evolved into anti-Soviet attitudes. The anti-Soviet chants from Poznań that spread throughout Poland excited the U.S. government because it was the first sign of dissent and demands for freedom within a satellite. Although the Polish government was able to successfully calm the riot without Soviet intervention, the seeds of liberation and discontent had been planted nonetheless.

Throughout the summer, the Poles remained unhappy, despite the mild concessions that were granted as a result of the Poznań riots. Discussions continued regarding their complaints. Events escalated in October, when the Polish Politburo was forced to readmit Władysław Gomułka, a figure regarded with great suspicion, into a position of leadership. While the return of Gomułka pleased the United States government, it frightened the Soviet Union. Immediately, the Soviet Union sent a delegation to determine if they would accept this change in leadership. Gomułka shrewdly navigated his way through the negotiations with the Soviet Union and calmed their worries regarding his return and the direction he planned to take Poland. Since Gomułka promised to remain an ally of the Soviet Union, U.S. policy makers interpreted the situation as progress. As the events unfolded in Poland, the U.S. continually reassessed Poland's condition, hoping for liberation but accepting what little victory they could.

Before the exciting events of 1956, the U.S. was keeping a finger on the pulse of the Eastern Bloc. On January 4, 1955, the Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs, Livingston T. Merchant sent a memorandum to the Under Secretary of State, Herbert C. Hoover Jr. concerning the assessment of the possible detachment of a satellite state from the Soviet Union. At this point in time, the U.S. believed that, "given the strength of the Soviet position, no major Soviet satellite presents vulnerabilities of such extent that their exploitation can be expected to result in its detachment from the Soviet bloc."<sup>233</sup> The Operations Coordinating Board believed that the only way for a satellite to be freed from the clutches of the Soviet Union was through war, an action that the U.S. was not willing to

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<sup>233</sup> Livingston T. Merchant, "Memorandum From the Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs (Merchant) to the Under Secretary of State (Hoover), January 4, 1955," in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957: Eastern Europe*, volume XXV, (Washington D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), 4.

pursue.<sup>234</sup> The U.S. continually reassessed the Soviet Union's grip on the Eastern Bloc, with the hope that there would be liberation without direct U.S. involvement. To the United States, greater freedom for the satellites meant growing closer to an end of communist rule. Despite the tight hold of the Soviet Union and its ideology over Eastern Europe, the U.S. remained optimistic that the Free World would prevail over communism.

Over a year later, on February 29, 1956, the United States reassessed their policy toward the Soviet satellites in Eastern Europe. Although it was four days after Khrushchev's speech, the U.S. was unaware of this development, therefore, these following assessments do not reflect this incident. The progress report submitted by the Operations Coordinating Board to the National Security Council reiterated the long-term goal of the U.S. policy of eventual freedom of the satellites from Soviet control and freedom to choose their own government.<sup>235</sup>

While the U.S. claimed they wished for these countries to have the freedom to choose their own government, there was never a mention of the goal of these countries being democratic societies. Obviously, the U.S. was not hoping that even free of Soviet domination that these countries would choose communism, but they left this stipulation out. There are two plausible reasons for why the U.S. would omit this from the policy. First, the U.S. thought it was obvious and unnecessary to clarify that the adoption of a democratic society would succeed communism. The other is that the U.S. did not want to give the impression of forcing a form of government on an oppressed society. At this point, the U.S. believed independence was in the distant future, so they focused on more immediate goals.

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<sup>234</sup> Merchant, "Memorandum, January 4, 1955," in *FRUS*, volume XXV, 4.

<sup>235</sup> "Progress Report Submitted by the Operations Coordinating Board to the National Security Council, Washington, February 29, 1956," in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957: Eastern Europe*, volume XXV, (Washington D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), 122.

These goals of U.S. policy were to prevent overt aggression and damage the bad relationship between the Soviet Union and their corresponding satellite countries. While the U.S. believed that their actions were disrupting this relationship, it was not substantial enough to pressure the Soviet Union to release their control. The U.S. was not predicting another situation like the Yugoslav-Soviet split in the near future.<sup>236</sup>

That being said, the U.S. did believe that their psychological warfare tactics were contributing to passive resistance within the Eastern Bloc. The mere result of this resistance was the evidence of the U.S. propaganda efforts working. The U.S. strategically used, "The Voice of America," "Radio Free Europe," and the "Crusade for Freedom" as a means to connect with the citizens in Eastern Europe and remind them of so-called Free World ideals.<sup>237</sup> The radio was an easy way for the U.S. to infiltrate democratic ideas as well as negative ideas about the Soviet Union without directly involving themselves in Soviet-Eastern Europe relations. The broadcasts helped to provoke anti-Soviet ideas and free world ideology without putting any Americans within harms way, or implicating the U.S. in active subversion.

Another straightforward tactic that the U.S. employed to help further the immediate goals was the use of speeches and statements by President Eisenhower and Secretary of State Dulles. Both Eisenhower and Secretary Dulles made public proclamations that confirmed their position of refusing to agree to anything that would keep the status quo in Eastern Europe. In other words, they often pronounced their desire for things to change. President Eisenhower and Secretary Dulles both even went as far to reveal the goals of U.S. policy to be eventual independence of the satellite countries. The report revealed that this

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<sup>236</sup> "Progress Report, February 29, 1956," *FRUS, 1955-1957*, volume XXV, 122.

<sup>237</sup> "Progress Report, February 29, 1956," *FRUS, 1955-1957*, volume XXV, 123.

tactic “was greatly enhanced by the violent reaction of the Soviet bloc authorities.”<sup>238</sup> In other words, by continuing to crack down, Soviet forces were driving their own wedge between themselves and the Bloc countries. However, speeches were just speeches. Just like the Soviet Union, the U.S. was only willing to talk about solutions and offer moral support through radio broadcast and public statements but not willing to back it up with real action.

The U.S. recognized that the only option to achieve their goal was war, which neither the U.S. or the Soviet Union wanted. It is important to remember that 1956 was just over ten years after World War II and three years after the Korean War. Many countries were still recovering and the entire world did not want a third world war. More specifically, the American people did not want another war and Eisenhower was nearing an election and did not want to risk the presidency with breaking the tenuous peace. The Soviet Union and U.S. both feared that if they were to engage militarily that a third world war would be inevitable because tensions were so high already between the communist and capitalist worlds, also fearful of nuclear war.

The Operations Coordinating Board acknowledged the difficulty in creating any effective U.S. policy that could result in concrete gains in the 280<sup>th</sup> meeting of the National Security Council on March 22. The challenge was for the United States’ policy to carry any merit and weight because they were not willing to engage militarily. Their policy action was merely psychological and containment. Recognizing the presented challenge, President Eisenhower expressed that the U.S. should not get discouraged to the point that the policy

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<sup>238</sup> “Progress Report, February 29, 1956,” *FRUS, 1955-1957*, volume XXV, 123.

reflects defeat. The fact that U.S. even developed such seemingly hopeless policy reflected the extent in which the U.S. cared about ending communism.

In fact, Eisenhower advised that, “constant searching might conceivably reveal possible courses of action to achieve our objectives. We mustn’t be less aggressive in pursuing our objectives simply because we had thus far not achieved the progress we would like to see.”<sup>239</sup> CIA Director Dulles echoed Eisenhower’s encouragement by pointing out that despite achieving minimal progress in their goals, they have succeeded in preventing the Soviet Union from increasing their control in Eastern Europe and from expanding into any new country.<sup>240</sup> The U.S. government understood the intense hold that the Soviet Union communist control had over Eastern Europe. Furthermore, U.S. policy makers recognized the problem it presented for the free world because the Soviet Union had total control of their satellites. United States leaders believed that the liberation of these countries was important enough for them to accept this challenge. The U.S. feared communism and its spread so much that it was an essential part of their foreign policy to terminate communist rule. The U.S. was trying to find the right balance between preventing the spread of communism while still not engaging in war.

On March 28, the Department of State sent instructions to the Embassy in Poland in connection with American relations with Poland and Soviet-Poland relations. Secretary Dulles believed that it would be very unlikely for Poland to gain independence. He presented, “it is the Department’s present belief that until or unless some basic and drastic change occurs, either in the nature of Soviet policies or in the power relationship between

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<sup>239</sup> S. Everett Gleason, “Memorandum of Discussion at the 280<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the National Security Council, Washington, March 22, 1956,” *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957: Eastern Europe*, volume XXV, (Washington D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), 129.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid.

the Free World and the Soviet Bloc, Poland will continue to be ruled by men whose decisions are based primarily on their understanding and interpretation of the desires and intentions of the Kremlin.”<sup>241</sup> Secretary Dulles understood that Polish governmental decisions were made with the influence of the Soviet Union leadership. In fact, Secretary Dulles even went so far as to disagree with a British Ambassador’s opinion that there was a Polish policy independent of Soviet influence. United States policy makers believed that the Soviet Union had its proverbial hooks in every aspect of the Polish government.<sup>242</sup>

Poland provided the U.S. with a particularly interesting situation, different from the rest of Eastern Europe. Secretary Dulles understood the situation in Poland to be as follows:

Not only is Poland the Soviet Union’s most important East European satellite, politically and strategically, but it is also closely linked to our relations with the USSR and can affect and influence these relations in many ways. For exactly this reason it is essential that the shadow of the recent “thaw” in Poland not be accepted as the substance of a genuine Soviet withdrawal.<sup>243</sup>

The U.S. not only viewed Poland as the most significant satellite to the Soviet Union, but also a key pawn in U.S.-Soviet relations. The thaw that Secretary Dulles was referring to was the domestic and foreign de-Stalinization efforts of the Soviet Union. Secretary Dulles also warned against being too optimistic about the thaw because the Soviet Union would never release Poland from its control because of its importance to the Soviet Union.

Despite Soviet control in Poland, Secretary Dulles did not see Poland as “frozen.” By that, Secretary Dulles meant that U.S. policy should not give up hope that Poland may

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<sup>241</sup> John Foster Dulles, “Instruction From the Department of State to the Embassy in Poland, Washington, March 28, 1956,” in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957: Eastern Europe*, volume XXV, (Washington D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), 131.

<sup>242</sup> Dulles, “Instruction, March 28, 1956,” *FRUS, 1955-1957*, volume XXV, 132.

<sup>243</sup> Dulles, “Instruction, March 28, 1956,” *FRUS, 1955-1957*, volume XXV, 133.

eventually be released from the claws of communism and the Soviet Union. In fact, he encouraged U.S. policy to reflect the nature of inspiring evolutionary change in Poland. He wanted policy that galvanized any signs of activity that might lead to Polish independence.<sup>244</sup> Secretary Dulles also instructed that U.S. policy should help to stimulate activities that would lead to the weakening of Soviet hold on Poland.<sup>245</sup>

An important aspect of indirect U.S. policy that Secretary Dulles mentioned in his instruction was the use of radio broadcasts. Secretary Dulles conceded that he was against any softening of radio broadcasts. In fact, he stated, "The present VOA [Voice of America] policy is to inform and encourage the Polish people, in vigorous, expressive and explicit language, without deliberate misrepresentation or incitement to open and fruitless resistance."<sup>246</sup> The Department of State remained insistent on applying pressure on the Eastern Bloc in hopes that with pressure, cracks would ensue. United States policy makers believed that the more they prodded and broadcasted, the greater possibility for free world ideas to infiltrate the satellites. Furthermore, the U.S. hoped that these cracks would eventually lead to these satellites breaking off from the Soviet Union and becoming independent countries.

It is also important to recognize the limitations of the U.S. policy in regards to Polish independence. Secretary Dulles explained that U.S. policy should both help to instigate any activities that would loosen the Soviet grip as well as to help the cause of any activities that occur on their own will in Poland. Both of these policies were passive and avoided the U.S. from having to directly engage with the Soviet Union. At the same time, it left the U.S.

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<sup>244</sup> Dulles, "Instruction, March 28, 1956," *FRUS, 1955-1957*, volume XXV, 133.

<sup>245</sup> Dulles, "Instruction, March 28, 1956," *FRUS, 1955-1957*, volume XXV, 134.

<sup>246</sup> *Ibid.*



waiting for developments and forced the U.S. to be on the defensive. Despite the U.S.'s fear of communist rule, the fear of being responsible for another world war was greater.

While Secretary Dulles clearly understood the Soviet hold on Polish politics, he seemed to misconstrue the situation among the Polish population. The Department of State was under the impression that a large majority of the Polish population was anti-Communist and potential allies of the free world.<sup>247</sup> Secretary Dulles opinion reflects the U.S. tendency to project their anti-Communist ideas upon the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Secretary Dulles and the U.S. government had the inclination to interpret anti-Soviet attitudes as anti-communist, which was not always the case.

A few months later, on May 18, Joseph E. Jacobs, the U.S. Ambassador to Poland, reassessed the situation in Poland and reported back to the United States. Jacobs wrote:

Great changes are taking place in Poland, other Soviet orbit countries which West and particularly USA should recognize as warranting adjustments in their policies and attitudes toward Poland; that Poland Government is sincerely desirous improving relations with USA; that Poland cannot and should not sever its friendly ties with USSR; and that there can be no return to status quo ante conditions in Poland.<sup>248</sup>

Jacobs welcomed the progress in U.S.-Polish relations, hoping that it would lead to greater progress in the future. Furthermore, Jacobs understood the effects of the de-Stalinization program on Poland and even other satellite countries. At the same time, while Jacobs recognized that it was improvement, he also understood that it did not mean that Poland wanted to end its friendly relations with the Soviet Union. The proximity of Jacobs

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<sup>247</sup> Dulles, "Instruction, March 28, 1956," *FRUS, 1955-1957*, volume XXV, 133.

<sup>248</sup> Joseph E. Jacobs, "Telegram From the Embassy in Poland to the Department of State, Warsaw, May 18, 1956, 4 p.m.," in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957: Eastern Europe*, volume XXV, (Washington D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), 168.

contributed to U.S. Intelligence's greater understanding of the situation and to its ability to gauge the climate of Poland at such a tense time.

A week later, Jacobs sent a more thorough assessment of the situation in Poland as of late May 1956. Jacobs believed that Poland was the most likely satellite to break off, but he did not predict that to happen soon. Jacobs recognized that there were some changes in Poland. These changes were all shallow, most major Polish policies had actually remained the same. Jacobs wrote, "surface changes have been quite numerous and, to casual observers, neutral-minded individuals, and visiting correspondents, probably impressive."<sup>249</sup> These changes consisted of a slight increase of Western information, a little less police control, more contact with Westerners, and the freedom to criticize the regime.<sup>250</sup> All of these changes were significant in that they were at least improvement, but Jacobs cautioned that the U.S. should curb its optimism. However, the U.S. Department of State might have interpreted the situation better than Jacobs.

On June 28, at 5:55 PM, Director Allen Dulles informed Secretary John Foster Dulles that there had been a riot in Poznań. Secretary Dulles commented excitedly, "When they begin to crack, they can crack fast. We have to keep the pressure on."<sup>251</sup> The Poznań riot was the break the U.S. was waiting for. It was a prime opportunity for the U.S. to promote anti-Soviet and anti-communist sentiments. All the U.S. had to do was broadcast their opinions over the radio and publicly support the riot. The Polish people had carried out all the actions and attacks, which presented the U.S. with a perfect opening to exploit the

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<sup>249</sup> Joseph E. Jacobs, "Telegram From the Embassy in Poland to the Department of State, Warsaw, May 29, 1956, 8 p.m." in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957: Eastern Europe*, volume XXV, (Washington D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), 172.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid.

<sup>251</sup> "Memorandum of a Telephone Conversation Between the Secretary of State and the Director of Central Intelligence (Dulles), Washington, June 28, 1956, 5:55 p.m.," in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957: Eastern Europe*, volume XXV, (Washington D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), 181.

discontent in the Eastern Bloc. The Poznań riots did not force the U.S. to go beyond its self-imposed restraint on the conduct of foreign policy.

The U.S. continued discussions regarding the turning of events in Poland and the Soviet Union. As part of their psychological warfare, Secretary Dulles encouraged spreading prior Soviet actions in its foreign aid programs in hopes that it would force the Soviets to either confirm or deny. Either way, it would further damage the reputation of the Soviet Union and possibly drive a wedge in Soviet-Polish relations.

Furthermore, Secretary Dulles and his staff reassessed the Soviet Union and their economic situation. Secretary Dulles commented “that the Soviet economy is overextended: they are trying to match and indeed surpass the U.S. military effort; they are trying to increase their capital development; they are trying to develop their foreign aid program. All of this in the face of a bad agricultural situation.”<sup>252</sup> The U.S. Department of State took confidence in the fact that the U.S.’s economic situation was far better comparative to the Soviet Union. Not only did that help in terms of the arms race between the two countries, but it would also significantly hinder the Soviet Union when confronted with dissent. Due to the poor economic situation in the Soviet Union, when a problem of a riot or revolt would arise, the U.S. believed that it would not have the necessary resources to completely suppress it. The U.S. was also hopeful that the economic problem would distract the Soviet Union from problems of dissent and the arms race.

The most interesting conclusion of this meeting was Secretary Dulles asserting that if the U.S. wanted to be on the offensive, their policies needed to take more risks. He argued,

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<sup>252</sup> “Notes of the Secretary of State’s Staff Meeting, Department of State, Washington, June 29, 1956, 9:15 a.m.,” in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957: Eastern Europe*, volume XXV, (Washington D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), 182.

“Nothing is achieved that does not have some risk to it and we should not seek to make all our programs riskless...the coordination process often is deadening in this regard as each participant seeks to remove possible dangers.”<sup>253</sup> The tone of the policy makers was beginning to change along with the relations between the Soviet Union and its satellites. United States Intelligence acknowledged the slow cracking of the Eastern Bloc and wanted to switch from the defensive to the offensive, or at least that was what Secretary Dulles wanted to happen.

Only days after the riots, on July 2, Jacobs reported from Warsaw about the events. He confirmed that the workers of the ZISPO factory had sent a delegation with reasonable demands to the government in Warsaw, regarding the poor economic conditions in Poland. Despite the justified demands, the delegation went so far as to threaten the government with a demonstration if the government did not make changes. In response, the PZPR Politburo did not move quick enough to satisfy the workers of ZISPO. As a result, on the morning of June 28, an initially peaceful demonstration of workers had begun. Their voices rang in unison demanding for the freedom of the delegation. Students and children soon joined the crowd, curious about the demonstration.<sup>254</sup>

According to Jacobs, the demonstration quickly escalated to a violent mob. He attributed the size of the crowd, the fact that the crowd was emotionally and nationally charged, authorities shooting over the crowd, and the death of children from warning shots to explain how the peaceful demonstration evolved into an aggressive riot. Jacobs reported:

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<sup>253</sup> “Notes, June 29, 1956, 9:15 a.m.,” in *FRUS, 1955-1957*, volume XXV, 182.

<sup>254</sup> Joseph E. Jacobs, “Telegram From the Embassy in Poland to the Department of State, Warsaw, July 2, 1956, 6 p.m.,” in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957: Eastern Europe*, volume XXV, (Washington D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), 185.

When crowd became mob, militia, troops and tanks appeared but took no immediate effective action. Regime says reason was orders were issued deal peacefully with crowd; contrarily, other sources claim many militia and soldiers refused fight, soldiers left tanks, because they sympathized with crowd. Some said abandoned tanks subsequently manned by Russians in Polish uniform.<sup>255</sup>

The mob started to attack government buildings, burned documents, expressed anti-Soviet slogans, released prisoners from jail, and tore down Soviet flags. At this point in time, the Polish Politburo confirmed 48 dead, while the U.S. Embassy was convinced that the death toll was much higher, somewhere in the hundreds.<sup>256</sup>

Jacobs relayed accurate information regarding the Poznań riot to the U.S. government. More importantly, his report was very timely, allowing the U.S. to respond in a diligent manner to exploit the situation in their favor. The flow of information was so quick that the strong anti-Soviet sentiment was still prevalent in Poland when the U.S. reacted, which allowed for the U.S. to further fuel this emotion. Unlike in the case of Khrushchev's speech, the U.S. was reacting in real time and developing plans of action for events of which they were fully aware.

A day after receiving the telegram from Jacobs, on July 3, the Operations Coordinating Board met to discuss further U.S. action. The first step the U.S. took was the publication of the events of the Poznań riot in the American press. The U.S. highlighted the fact that the Polish workers were discontented with the Communist Soviet and Polish regime. By publishing the events of Poznań, the U.S. hoped that the world would negatively judge the Soviet Union and the communist system. Furthermore, the U.S. also broadcasted that they were willing to provide the Poles with food to help relieve their economic

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<sup>255</sup> Jacobs, "Telegram, July 2, 1956," in *FRUS, 1955-1957*, volume XXIV, 186.

<sup>256</sup> Jacobs, "Telegram, July 2, 1956," in *FRUS, 1955-1957*, volume XXIV, 185.

distress.<sup>257</sup> Not only was the U.S. encouraging Western association, but also their offering of aid implied that the Soviet Union could not provide for its own people. While the U.S. was acting, it was limited relief efforts and publicity for propaganda purposes. Again, the U.S. did not dare breach its limitations of avoiding war. The U.S. government helped to create a divide between the Poles and communism and the Soviets as best it could within the constraints of passive action.

After the Poznań riots in the end of June, the U.S. reevaluated Soviet control over their satellite countries. United States Intelligence recognized that the Soviet still dominated the satellites unquestionably. The U.S. still believed that the majority of the Eastern Bloc was unhappy with the communist system and the Soviet control. The U.S. also understood that the satellite countries were in no position to actively resist Soviet domination. At this point in time, Soviet troops were stationed all throughout Eastern Europe, leaving a constant reminder of the threat they posed and that the Kremlin was always watching.

The National Security Council understood the Polish nationalist movement as anti-Soviet movement, and was encouraged that these nationalist attitudes would eventually lead to independence. The National Security Council argued:

In many respects it is the strongest leverage available for strengthening the morale of the satellite populations, sustaining their spirit resistance to Soviet imperialism, and encouraging their opposition to servile Communist regimes. Nationalism is, however, a double-edged weapon, raising a number of operational problems, as we have discovered in our propaganda work and

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<sup>257</sup> S. Everett Gleason, "Notes on a Meeting of the Operations Coordinating Board, Washington, July 3, 1956," in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957: Soviet Union; Eastern Mediterranean*, volume XXIV, (Washington D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), 189.

dealings with the refugees. Besides arousing anti-Soviet feeling, nationalist sentiment also creates division among these people themselves.<sup>258</sup>

As a standard movement, U.S. Intelligence interpreted nationalism as a positive because it was not pro-Soviet. Furthermore, nationalism also opened the possibility for any new government to be different from communism. While nationalism was usually a unifying movement, the National Security Council also feared that it could lead to a rift between the different populations within the satellites. The anxiety that nationalism could divide Poland indicated that the U.S. did not overlook the fact that not everyone in Poland was pro-Poland and anti-Soviet. The U.S. understood that it would be inaccurate to paint with a wide brush by calling everyone in Poland rabid anti-Soviet. Some may have been against the Soviet Union but recognized the security it brought. After World War II, Poland gained territory in western Germany and many Poles recognized that they could not maintain that territory without Soviet forces. As a result, many Poles did not want to end their relationship with the Soviet Union, while others may have welcomed the socialist system but with desired reforms. Therefore, the nationalist movement had the potential to create a divide within Poland between the anti-Soviet Poles and the pragmatic Poles who wanted reform but not an end to the Soviet-Polish relationship. However, the U.S. did believe that Polish nationalism was a positive as a whole.

Despite this understanding, it is possible that the U.S. Intelligence may have misinterpreted the grievances in the Eastern Bloc. While the satellite populations were very unhappy, they were mostly angered over their leaders of their governments or economic conditions. These grievances only evolved into anti-Soviet sentiment when

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<sup>258</sup> "National Security Council Staff Study, Washington, July 6, 1956," in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957: Soviet Union; Eastern Mediterranean*, volume XXIV, (Washington D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), 200.

demonstrations escalated. The U.S. may have been reading too much into grievances and may have projected their own optimism onto the situation to twist the reality. It was possible that the U.S. should have approached the protests more cautiously, understanding how easy it was to misinterpret complaints within a satellite as anti-Soviet.

The National Security Council took the time to pause and analyze the post-Stalin leadership and change in their approach to the Eastern Bloc. United States Intelligence saw the new Soviet leadership alter its view of the Eastern Bloc from a single unit to individual satellites. The Soviet Union began to deal with problems of each state separately. Additionally, the U.S. knew that the Soviets were promoting socialist legality, tourism, and encouraging cultural relations. The change in opinion of the Soviet Union and its leadership reflects the handling of Poznań. Khrushchev's decision to not immediately intercede at the outbreak of the riots helped to develop the image of progression in the Soviet Union, and greater trust in the provincial governments.

The National Security Council continued the report with the economic changes between Soviet-Polish relations. The council commented:

In the economic sphere the USSR has gradually cut down its direct participation in the satellite economies by liquidating all but a few of its holdings of satellite industrial properties both in and outside of the Soviet-satellite joint companies. The satellites have been allowed to relax their previous over-emphasis on heavy industrial development and devote more resources to agriculture. They have been encouraged both to develop more economic interdependence through coordination of planning and development of regional specialization among themselves, and to expand trade with the free world.<sup>259</sup>

U.S. Intelligence acknowledged further changes that developed in the Soviet's policy towards the satellites. They construed that the new approach was the Soviets attempt to

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<sup>259</sup> "National Security Council Staff Study, July 6, 1956," in *FRUS, 1955-1957*, volume XXV, 201.



boost confidence in their control and communism.<sup>260</sup> In other words, the U.S. did not see this economic loosening as the Soviets releasing their control but rather a confidence in their re-affirmed control over Poland. While at first glance it only appears that the Soviet Union was granting further economic independence, U.S. Intelligence understood that the Soviet Union would not grant this freedom unless it was confident in its control over the satellite.

The National Security Council continued their analysis of the developments within Eastern Europe by analyzing the effects of Titoism and the changes in Yugoslav-Soviet relations. The study reported that;

the denigration of Stalin and Moscow's acceptance of Titoism have created difficulties in Soviet relations with the satellites; they have raised questions as to the infallibility of Soviet leadership among important elements of the satellite Communist parties; they have aroused varying degrees latent popular aspiration for relaxation of oppression, restoration of national independence, and the establishment of governments responsive to popular will.<sup>261</sup>

The U.S. understood the implications of Yugoslavia's new independence on the other satellites. Titoism brought hope to the satellites that they might gain independence someday, and that day may be sooner than they ever imagined. United States policy makers were obviously satisfied with the liberation of Yugoslavia, but more importantly with the repercussions it presented for the Soviet Union.

In September, months after the Poznań riots, Jacobs sent an evaluation of the Polish government's response to the uprising. He credited the Polish government with recognizing the discrepancy that had occurred between the government and the people

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<sup>260</sup> "National Security Council Staff Study, July 6, 1956," in *FRUS, 1955-1957*, volume XXV, 201.

<sup>261</sup> "National Security Council Staff Study, July 6, 1956," in *FRUS, 1955-1957*, volume XXV, 201-202.

and contributed to Poznań.<sup>262</sup> The Polish government reacted by conceding to simple demands from the workers in an attempt to relieve some of the burden on the workers and to calm their anger. Jacobs criticized the Polish leadership for promising things before actually implementing them.<sup>263</sup>

Jacobs continued to scrutinize the effects of Poznań on the Polish leadership, claiming that the “Moscow stooges” were still powerful in Polish politics. He reported that there were rumors that the riots caused a schism among the Polish leadership regarding liberalization. He admits that this had yet to be confirmed, but that it was very possible.<sup>264</sup> This potential divide within the Polish leadership would lead to a stall in the liberalization plans, something that the U.S. did not desire. The U.S. understood that despite the fact that the Polish government managed their own affairs in regards to the Poznań riots, Soviet troops were still prepared to mobilize. Furthermore, the Polish leadership was still under Soviet influence, to the extent that their actions would reflect Soviet interests as well. Despite this, Polish politics were on the verge of an incredible drastic change.

In the summer, Władysław Gomułka, the controversial leader in Poland, began his return to the Polish Politburo. However, Gomułka did not officially return until October. Gomułka’s return was so dramatic that it raised questions among the U.S. government. Specifically, the U.S. Intelligence community was aware that, immediately after the Central Committee of the Polish Communist Party convened Friday morning, a Soviet delegation had landed in Warsaw. The Soviet delegation consisted of Khrushchev, Mikoyan,

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<sup>262</sup> Joseph E. Jacobs, “Telegram From the Embassy in Poland to the Department of State, Warsaw, September 21, 1956, 4 p.m.,” in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957: Soviet Union; Eastern Mediterranean*, volume XXIV, (Washington D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), 244.

<sup>263</sup> Jacobs, “Telegram, September 21, 1956,” in *FRUS, 1955-1957*, volume XXV, 245.

<sup>264</sup> Jacobs, “Telegram, September 21, 1956,” in *FRUS, 1955-1957*, volume XXV, 246.

Kaganovich, and Molotov. Discussions commenced immediately between the Soviet delegation and the Polish Politburo, including Gomułka. The topic of the discussions was cooperation between Poland and the Soviet Union.<sup>265</sup>

Thanks to the United Press, the U.S. was granted greater accessibility to information beyond Jacobs and the Research Division's knowledge. The United Press reported that Gomułka had been named as First Secretary of the Party, thereby replacing Ochab, and that the Soviet Union had mobilized troops from East Germany in the direction of Poland. Other international papers confirmed the Soviet mobilization of troops and tanks into Poland. U.S. Intelligence concluded:

On the basis of present information, a picture emerges of increased Soviet concern over the trend of developments in Poland, a sudden decision to go to Warsaw, a possibly heated discussion with Polish Communist leaders, an agreement to continue discussion in Moscow presumably on the grounds of permitting the entire Soviet Presidium to participate, the formation of a new party leadership under Gomułka, and a wave of popular reaction in Poland against the USSR. The size and composition of the Soviet delegation obviously underlines the seriousness of Moscow's concern and, if Yugoslav reports of a split in the Soviet party Presidium are true, marks an effort to display unity of the Soviet leadership before the Poles.<sup>266</sup>

The U.S. interpreted the mobilization as an expression of Soviet anxiety over the return of Gomułka and the anti-Soviet feelings arising in Poland. The U.S. knew that the Soviet Union would not allow Poland to be independent. The anxiety exhibited by the Soviets proved to the U.S. the drastic change of climate within Poland. United States Intelligence did take note of the different approach exhibited by Khrushchev and the Kremlin. Rather than exerting

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<sup>265</sup> "Memorandum by the Chief of the Division of Research for the USSR and Eastern Europe (Klosson), Washington, October 20, 1956," in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957: Soviet Union; Eastern Mediterranean*, volume XXIV, (Washington D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), 253.

<sup>266</sup> "Memorandum, October 20, 1956," in *FRUS, 1955-1957*, volume XXV, 254.

force to secure Polish loyalty, Khrushchev negotiated diplomatically, though aggressively, with the Polish government.

On that same day, the Department of State discussed the unfolding events in Poland. Robert D. Murphy, the Deputy Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, stressed that the U.S. was deeply interested in the outcome of Poland. Deputy Murphy used news report to give details regarding the discussions between the Polish Politburo and the Soviet delegation. According to the news reports, Khrushchev leveraged the Soviet defense of Poland against the Germans in the discussions, something that Poland was very invested in. Reportedly, Khrushchev asserted that he would “never permit Polish leaders to turn their country over to ‘American imperialists.’”<sup>267</sup> Deputy Murphy also reported that Khrushchev made other threats, confirming the aggressive approach Khrushchev took in these discussions with the Polish leadership.<sup>268</sup> The assertiveness of Khrushchev embodied his panic about the future of Poland being in the hands of the controversial Gomułka.

Interestingly, Deputy Murphy criticized Khrushchev’s assertion that the U.S. had plans to take control of Poland. Deputy Murphy claimed, “Poland’s destiny is for the people of Poland alone to decide.”<sup>269</sup> While he may have believed that this was true, the U.S. government did not hide their desire for Poland to become a democratic country. The U.S. policy was designed to eliminate Soviet control over Poland. However, they under the impression that once Soviet power was relinquished that Poland would inevitably choose a more democratic system and eliminate their communist system.

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<sup>267</sup> “Memorandum of a Conversation, Department of State, Washington, October 20, 1956, 5 p.m.,” in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957: Eastern Europe*, volume XXV, (Washington D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), 256.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid.

The conversation continued when Henryk Jaroszek, the Counselor of the Polish Embassy, cautioned that the source of the U.S. information was the news, and reporters usually dramatized situations. That being said, he did commend them for being so prompt with their reports since they had direct quotes. Although he attended the meeting, the Polish Ambassador, Romuald Spasowski, could not confirm any of these reports. Spasowski was confident that Gomułka had been reelected to the Central Committee of the Polish Communist Party, but he was unsure whether or not Gomułka was appointed as First Secretary of the Party. Furthermore, as far as Spasowski knew Marshal Rokossowski was still a member of the Politburo. Spasowski did report that elections were to be held that day or the following day so the status of these positions could change.<sup>270</sup> The U.S. received an influx of information in a very timely manner thanks to international news reports. Unfortunately, the Polish Ambassador could neither confirm nor deny most of the claims. That being said, the number of different news reporting the same information helped to validate the stories being reported.

A few days later, on October 23, the Policy Planning Staff of the Department of State convened to further discuss the situation in Poland. The U.S. Department of State understood that the Polish leadership readmitted Gomułka as a way to appease the residual discontent from the Poznań riots. With the new leadership of Gomułka, the U.S. government saw an opportunity to help Poland gain independence from the Soviet Union. The new plan of action under U.S. policy was to discreetly inform the Polish government that the U.S. was willing to provide economic aid to Poland if it continues its position of increased independence from Moscow. Shrewdly, the U.S. cautioned that they should

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<sup>270</sup> "Memorandum of a Conversation, October 20, 1956, 5 p.m.," in *FRUS, 1955-1957*, volume XXV, 257.

inform the Polish leadership that the U.S. did not insist on a complete break from Moscow, merely just that Poland remain on the track of increasing its independence.<sup>271</sup> United States policy makers also emphasized that the U.S. should stress to Poland that they did not want to replace the Soviet Union with the sphere of influence. Lastly, the U.S. decided that drafting an appeal to the United Nations would be a good bargaining chip to prevent or at least hinder Soviet intervention in Poland.<sup>272</sup>

The following day Philip H. Trezise of the Policy Planning Staff presented further thoughts on Poland. Trezise commented, “We are much too prone to forget that Communists are human too. It must have been difficult in Poland to be the agent of a regime subservient to the Russians and responsible for a miserable economic situation as well.”<sup>273</sup> Trezise recognized how easily Americans dehumanized communists in their fight against the Soviet system as a whole. He was probably one of a few people who paused to step back and remember that the Poles were people, not just communists who needed to be shown reform. Trezise also used this mentality to help explain the emotions of the Poles and the hardships that they must have experienced under the tight grip of Soviet control.<sup>274</sup>

Trezise offered an interesting interpretation of Gomułka as a Polish politician. He understood Gomułka to be an anti-Stalinist, yet a nationalist-Communist, thereby inferring that Gomułka would not be moving Poland away from a communist system. That being said,

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<sup>271</sup> “Report of a Meeting of the Policy Planning Staff, Department of State, Washington, October 23, 1956,” in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957: Eastern Europe*, volume XXV, (Washington D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), 259.

<sup>272</sup> “Report, October 23, 1956,” in *FRUS, 1955-1957*, volume XXV, 260.

<sup>273</sup> Philip H. Trezise, “Memorandum From Philip H. Trezise of the Policy Planning Staff to the Director of the Staff (Bowie), Washington, October 24, 1956,” in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957: Eastern Europe*, volume XXV, (Washington D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), 266.

<sup>274</sup> *Ibid.*

Trezise had confidence that eventually Poland would succeed in releasing itself from the grasp of the Soviet Union.<sup>275</sup>

That same day, on October 24, a new policy note regarding the developments in Poland was produced. The U.S. decided that it should broadcast the reports of the events in Poland to help inform, and potentially transform Eastern Europe. However, they also made the conscious decision to not make the effort to directly encourage revolt. Importantly, U.S. Intelligence believed that the broadcasts:

Should emphasize that we regard the present situation as between Poland and the Soviet Union as a test of Soviet intentions with respect to the promises made by the Soviet leadership at the 20<sup>th</sup> party Congress and the discussion last June with President Tito of Yugoslavia to recognize the principle various roads to socialism. Without speculating on the course of future developments, we should indicate that the outside world will be watching to see whether the Soviet Union will intervene in internal Polish affairs.<sup>276</sup>

The U.S. was regarding how the Soviet handled this tense situation with Poland as a test to see if Khrushchev would uphold his speech from February and to see if Khrushchev would uphold his theory that there are different roads to socialism.

The events in Poland were the first problems of dissent that Khrushchev and the Soviet Union faced after his speech in February. This conflict was the exact test that the U.S. was waiting for to decide if he was sincere in his efforts to move away from terror tactics to uphold communism. The events of Poland in June and October helped to flush out the confusion from Khrushchev's speech that clouded over the world.

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<sup>275</sup> Trezise, "Memorandum, October 24, 1956," in *FRUS, 1955-1957*, volume XXV, 266.

<sup>276</sup> "Memorandum From the Chief of the News Policy Staff of the Office of Policy and Programs of the United States Information Agency (Edman) to the Assistant Program Manager for Policy Application of the United States Information Agency (Zorthian), Washington, October 24, 1956," in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957: Eastern Europe*, volume XXV, (Washington D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), 270.

While the U.S. favored the Poznań riot and wanted to further its cause, it was not willing to offer any concrete support. The U.S. saw that their hands were tied and their options were limited. If they offered concrete support, that would further strain U.S.-Soviet relations and place the U.S. in a position of further direct opposition. If conflict began, the U.S. could have been implicated. Even more drastically, if the U.S. sent military reinforcements, then the event could lead to a war between the U.S. and Soviet Union and potentially a total war or nuclear war, an outcome that the U.S. desperately wanted to avoid.

On the other hand, the U.S. greatly wanted the liberation of Poland, in hopes that once a satellite gained independence the rest would follow shortly. To help fuel the anti-Soviet attitudes, the U.S. exploited their limited options of the media. The U.S. prolonged the anti-Soviet sentiments through radio broadcasts that encouraged anti-Soviet and anti-communist opinions while also promoting the independence of Poland. Through moral support, the U.S. maintained its psychological warfare policy against communism.

Despite the suppression of the Poznań riot by the Polish government, the U.S. was hopeful to see that the Soviets did not intervene. The U.S. recognized that the Soviets allowed the Poles to deal with their own internal problems internally without the manipulation of the Soviet Union. While the Soviets were on edge and ready to step in at any moment, they refrained from any activity, beyond sending an official delegation. The lack of Soviet involvement in the resolution of Poznań helped validate Khrushchev's new direction in the eyes of U.S. policy makers. Although the actual outcome was not exactly what the U.S. hoped for, it was progress in the right direction. Furthermore, it contributed to the United States' understanding of Khrushchev as a leader. While the U.S. government feared Khrushchev as emotional and volatile, his handling of Poznań portrayed that he was



trying to change the management of the satellites and truly wanted to redirect the Soviet Union and communism away from associations with the Stalin-era. The U.S. began to have a little bit more trust in Khrushchev's management of discordance. It is also important to note that Gomułka understood his limitations of negotiations.

Even more telling, were the negotiations conducted between Gomułka and the Soviet delegation itself. Rather than immediately interceding in the dealings of the Polish Politburo after the re-admittance of Gomułka, the Kremlin sent a delegation to convene discussions. With the help of Gomułka political astuteness, the delegation's concerns were eased and they decided to allow the decisions made to remain as long as the Polish government pledged to remain an ally to the Soviet Union and communism. Once again, the Soviet Union demonstrated, intentional or otherwise, to the U.S. government that they were diverging from Stalin's path and willing to resolve problems diplomatically rather than viciously through terror and violence. Khrushchev's handling of the return of Gomułka helped confirm his claims, a further sign that the U.S. wanted to see before truly trusting the claims in his speech.

As of October 1956, the U.S. was much more trusting of Khrushchev. While their paranoia and skepticism remained, the events in Poland helped to curb them, at least temporarily. The events in Poland did not prepare them for what was about to transpire in the end of October in Hungary. In the eyes of the U.S. government, Poland was a precedent for how Khrushchev and the Soviet Union would conduct problems of dissent within a satellite. However, Khrushchev destroyed the little trust that he had built up with the crushing of the Hungarian Revolt.

## **Chapter 6: We Were Caught With Our Hands Tied: United States Reactions to the Hungarian Revolt**

After Khrushchev's speech, the Poznań Revolt, and the Polish October, United States policy was incoherent and confused. Khrushchev's speech presented the U.S. with potential optimism but the U.S. approached it with suspicion. The Poznań Revolt validated the U.S.'s opinion that there was discontent within the satellites and the return of Gomułka gave the U.S. confidence that Khrushchev was genuinely trying to implement a new Soviet strategy. However, the U.S. was always skeptical of the Soviet Union. It is at this position that U.S. was confronted with the situation in Hungary. Once again, the U.S. was hopeful that a satellite would be able to break from the Soviet Union sending resounding cracks through Eastern Europe, beginning the inevitable decline of communism. United States policy continued to be marked by confusion of how the Soviet Union was going to react.

The ripples that started the Hungarian Revolt began with the resignation of Mátyás Rákosi and the appointment of Ernő Gerő as the new CC First Secretary in Hungary. The Legation in Hungary reported back to Washington in the middle of July, that the Hungarian government tried to claim that Rákosi's resignation was due to poor health and his failure to uphold the socialist legality. While this may have been true, the U.S. was not convinced. The Department of State claimed that the main cause for the change in leadership was extremely low party support. Even more importantly, the Department of State recognized that the removal of Rákosi was a symbolic move; they did not expect much change in the direction of the Hungarian government with the appointment of Gerő. The U.S. still believed

that despite the Hungarian population's initial disappointment with Gerő being the replacement, they would appreciate the removal of Rákosi.<sup>277</sup>

Later that night, the U.S. Hungarian Legation followed up their initial report with more information regarding the appointment of Gerő. The Legation relayed that the replacement of Rákosi created a mild sense of relief among the Hungarian population. However, the Legation pointed out that Gerő was an old pro-Russian Stalinist, which helped to explain why the Soviet Union supported him, but this did not make sense.<sup>278</sup> Khrushchev was trying to direct the Soviet Union away from Stalin and his ideology, thus making it questionable whether the U.S. understood the appointment of Gerő correctly. The confusion of Gerő as Rákosi's replacement demonstrates the constant misperception among the U.S. Intelligence community. There was either still a misunderstanding over Khrushchev's speech or a lack of belief in Khrushchev's words, which caused them to completely dismiss it.

About a month later, on August 30, the U.S. Department of State received an updated assessment of the political climate in Hungary since the removal of Rákosi. The dispatch was full of optimism concerning the Hungarian situation. N. Spencer Barnes, the Counselor of the Mission in Hungary, reported positively that János Kádár seemed to exert a considerable amount of influence on Gerő. Furthermore, Barnes was happy that there was developing support for Imre Nagy. The U.S. viewed Nagy as a potential ally and a leader who could guide Hungary towards independence.

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<sup>277</sup> "Telegram From the Legation in Hungary to the Department of State, Budapest, July 19, 1956, 1 p.m.," in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957: Eastern Europe*, volume XXV, (Washington D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), 222.

<sup>278</sup> "Telegram From the Legation in Hungary to the Department of State, Budapest, July 19, 1956, 10 p.m.," in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957: Eastern Europe*, volume XXV, (Washington D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), 224.

Barnes also informed the Department of State that the Hungarian government was more lenient towards intellectuals.<sup>279</sup> This new leniency developed from the emergence of discussions about Khrushchev's speech. The satellites were granted limited liberty to clarify the speech, which they used as leverage to gain other freedoms and demands from the country. Khrushchev wanted to promote confidence in the communist system by encouraging a happy population, explaining the acceptance of these limited freedoms. Barnes recognized Khrushchev's strategy, but also alluded to this as evidence that Khrushchev's speech had some validity.

Barnes even claimed that the "regime had adorned itself with a new halo of democracy, progressiveness and freedom."<sup>280</sup> He reported that there was an increased openness to contact Westerners that did not exist before. Barnes believed that the progress was further than anticipated with the removal of Rákosi.<sup>281</sup> Quicker than envisioned, Hungary began to be viewed as a potential satellite that could remove itself from the Eastern Bloc. As a result, the U.S. watched closely and waited patiently.

Barnes sent another telegram reporting the turn of events in Hungary on October 23. According to Barnes, there had been two meetings held since October 16 in Hungary. The first one was in Jokai Theater of Győr, which was attended by one thousand people. Gyula Hay, a Hungarian writer, conducted the meeting. The meeting was one of the first times Hungarians could express their grievances openly without fear of the ramifications.

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<sup>279</sup> N. Spencer Barnes, "Despatch From the Legation in Hungary to the Department of State, Budapest, August 30, 1956," in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957: Eastern Europe*, volume XXV, (Washington D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), 231.

<sup>280</sup> Barnes, "Despatch From the Legation, August 30, 1956," in *FRUS, 1955-1957*, volume XXV, 239.

<sup>281</sup> Barnes, "Despatch From the Legation, August 30, 1956," in *FRUS, 1955-1957*, volume XXV, 241.

Hungarians complained about Soviet military bases in Hungary and Rákosi's policies.<sup>282</sup>

Through Barnes, the U.S. was able to track the progression of events in Hungary. Optimism towards Hungary continued with the practice of free speech in these meetings.

The other meeting was held on October 22 in the Aula of Technical University, where four to five thousand students attended. Again, this meeting consisted of Hungarians expressing their grievances.<sup>283</sup> Students passionately called for changes in Hungary, including the return of Nagy, reorganization of the economic system, freedom of expression and press, and a non-interfering economic and political relationship with the Soviet Union.<sup>284</sup> The ability to openly express their complaints helped to shape the notorious sixteen points.

Hours later, the U.S. Department of State received another telegram with an update on the situation in Hungary. The frantic tone in Barnes telegram embodied the chaotic situation in Hungary that was developing. Barnes reported on the progression of the demonstrations and the build up of the crowds. The three main meeting points were Parliament, Stalin Ter,<sup>285</sup> and the Central Office Budapest Radio Brody Sandor Building.<sup>286</sup> Barnes reported that both Nagy and Gerő's speeches were not received well by the crowds. Barnes said:

Probably around 10 p.m. fighting broke out in radio area after tear gas and/or stink bombs used on crowd, and fighting and killing continued between students, populace on one hand and AVH and Army troops on other.

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<sup>282</sup> N. Spencer Barnes, "Telegram From the Legation in Hungary to the department of State, Budapest, October 23, 1956, 2 p.m.," in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957: Eastern Europe*, volume XXV, (Washington D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), 260.

<sup>283</sup> Barnes, "Telegram, October 23, 1956, 2 p.m.," in *FRUS, 1955-1957*, volume XXV, 261.

<sup>284</sup> Barnes, "Telegram, October 23, 1956, 2 p.m.," in *FRUS, 1955-1957*, volume XXV, 262.

<sup>285</sup> The location of where the Stalin statue was pulled down by trucks.

<sup>286</sup> N. Spencer Barnes, "Telegram From the Legation in Hungary to the Department of State, Budapest, October 23, 1956, midnight," in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957: Eastern Europe*, volume XXV, (Washington D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), 263.

Students seized trucks and are moving about in streets. Two Legation officers personally witnessed young man shot in face lying dead in street, covered with Hungarian flag. Ambulances moving about carrying away others. Security forces in evidence this area with at least one known instance of crowd freeing arrestee. Tanks also in evidence radio area around 10:45. Large number truck loads troops moved in area around 10:30. No Soviet forces yet seen. Anonymous telephone call stated around 60 killed, although rumors in area reached 30-40; second such call requested Legation call on government halt killing. Legation also received second-hand report that Hungarian troops refused fire on public, and fire initiated on unarmed public by Russian-speaking men in AVH uniforms.<sup>287</sup>

Barnes clearly wanted to relay as much information to the U.S. and as quickly as possible.

The proximity of the Legation allowed the U.S. government to understand the escalation and analyze the options in live time, unlike with Khrushchev's speech.

The following day the U.S. received another telegram with updates about Hungary.

The Legation suggested the U.S. government to submit a statement regarding the situation.

Furthermore, the Legation specifically stated what should be printed:

US considers intervention Soviet forces and ruthless killing unarmed Hungarians as yet another example of continuing occupation Hungary by alien and enemy forces for their own purposes and employment these troops to shoot down Hungarian people breaks every moral law and demonstrates that Hungary is to Soviet Russia merely a colonial possession, the demand of whose people for democratic liberty warrants the use of naked force. What has happened in Hungary amounts to armed aggression by army of one power against people of another. United States and world await outcome with intense interest.<sup>288</sup>

The Legation continued by urging diplomatic protest to the Soviet Union and Hungary. It

insisted protest towards the Hungarian government demonstrated that it understood the

Hungarian government was an entity of the Soviet government. The pleading of the

Legation demanding that the U.S. government make statements reveals the horrors that the

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<sup>287</sup> Barnes, "Telegram, October 23, 1956, midnight," in *FRUS, 1955-1957*, volume XXV, 264.

<sup>288</sup> "Telegram From the Legation in Hungary to the Department of State, Budapest, October 24, 1956, 3 p.m.," in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957: Eastern Europe*, volume XXV, (Washington D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), 272.

Legation witnessed. The Legation failed to inspire the same urgency in the U.S. government at home. Instead, the U.S. government grappled to understand the Soviet Union's side of the situation, preventing the U.S. from acting quickly.

Later that day, Secretary of State Dulles and Henry Cabot Lodge Jr., the U.S. Representative at the United Nations, discussed by phone the situation in Hungary. Secretary Dulles talked about bringing the conflict in Hungary to the Security Council. He expressed that he was "worried that it will be said that here are the great moments and when they came and these fellows were ready to stand up and die, we were caught napping and doing nothing."<sup>289</sup> When Lodge mentioned Poland in response, Secretary Dulles commented, "that was different and there is more excuse to take this to the SC."<sup>290</sup> Secretary Dulles clearly wanted to help the Hungarians and saw this conflict as a prime opportunity for the U.S. to intervene and break down in the Eastern Bloc. Secretary Dulles was obviously disturbed by the situation in Hungary but also at a loss of how to act. He did not have confidence that the U.S. would act alone, which explains why he was pleading to the United Nations. More importantly, Secretary Dulles had the foresight to know that the U.S. and the world would be embarrassed if they just stood by and watched as Hungarians died fighting for liberation from the grasp of the Soviet Union. However, the U.S. was uncertain of how to prevent the suppression of Hungarians.

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<sup>289</sup> "Memorandum of a Telephone Conversation Between the Secretary of State in Washington and the representative at the United Nations (Lodge) in New York, October 24, 1956, 6:07 p.m.," in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957: Eastern Europe*, volume XXV, (Washington D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), 273.

<sup>290</sup> Ibid.

That same day, the U.S. government received another telegram with a suggested statement for President Eisenhower regarding the recent developments in Hungary. The suggested statement read as follows:

The people of the United States are deeply shocked to learn that the armed forces of the Soviet Union are being used against the civilian population of Hungary, on the eve of what we had hoped would be better days for that unhappy country. Gunfire cannot be a final answer to the legitimate demands of a people for a decent standard of living and the restoration of the basic freedoms which are the birth right of the people of Louis Kossuth. We shall follow with deepest concern the tragic events that are even now continuing in the hope that the aspirations of the Hungarian people for a better life shall not be denied.<sup>291</sup>

U.S. diplomats all over Eastern Europe were consumed by the events in Hungary and concerned for the Hungarian people. Diplomats expressed their shock and demanded that the U.S. publicly condemn the actions of the Soviet Union. The continued suggestions of statements demonstrate how the U.S. was at a loss of what to do. It would be naïve to think that the U.S. believed that these pleading statements would prevent the Soviet Union from acting.

The following day the Hungarian Legation and the Department of State had a conversation concerning the events in Hungary. The Legation reported that was still heavy gun fire and Soviet tanks were encompassing the city. In fact, it believed that there were now even more Soviet troops, meaning that the Soviets mobilized troops that had not been stationed in Hungary. It was also reported that much of the fighting was conducted by the Soviet troops. Even more dramatic, the Legation informed the Department of State that

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<sup>291</sup> Aldo D'Alessandro, "Telegram From the Director of the Munich Radio Center of the International Broadcasting Service (D'Alessandro) to the Assistant Program Manager for Policy Application of the United States Information Agency (Zorthian), Munich, October 24, 1956," in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957: Eastern Europe*, volume XXV, (Washington D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), 275.



some Hungarian troops have even joined forces with the insurgents.<sup>292</sup> The U.S. understood the deep tension between Hungarians and the Soviet Unions by the force being exerted by both sides. Furthermore, the defecting of Hungarian troops attested to the lack of control within Hungarian government and military.

The Department of State stayed on the phone with the American Legation in Budapest for hours, receiving live updates as the events unfolded in Hungary. The Legation notified the Department of State of the radio announcement, which stated that János Kádár had replaced Gerő, expressing the instability of the Hungarian government at a time when stability was desperately needed. The Legation commented on the scene that, “numerous ties we thought this whole mess was over but it starts up very suddenly without any warning as you can well imagine.”<sup>293</sup> In fact, the Legation was placed in danger while in Budapest:

Earlier this morning I had the printer on floor typing from prone position with many more typing errors than appearing o this later transmission...was afraid of bullets coming in the window since this Telex room is facing the crowd and would have more protection on floor. Fortunately no shells or the like came this direction...Have also been informed that my apartment is all shot up, windows broken and fire broke out in the empty apartment adjacent from mine.<sup>294</sup>

The dedication of the Legation reporting to the U.S. speaks to the importance and emphasis placed on this event in terms of the world and U.S. relations. The U.S. Legation in Hungary was morally appalled by the development of events between Hungarians and Russians.

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<sup>292</sup> “Transcript of a Teletype Conversation Between the Legation in Hungary and the Department of State, October 25, 1956,” in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957: Eastern Europe*, volume XXV, (Washington D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), 281.

<sup>293</sup> “Transcript, October 25, 1956,” in *FRUS, 1955-1957*, volume XXV, 282-283.

<sup>294</sup> “Transcript, October 25, 1956,” in *FRUS, 1955-1957*, volume XXV, 283.

The Department of State inquired about the situation of Nagy, optimistically hoping that the situation could result in him leading the Hungarian government. The Legation responded:

This is a battle situation and we have no idea what is going to happen. Our impression yesterday was that in view of he [*him*] being blamed for calling Soviet troops, that he lost a great deal of popularity; where he stands today and how the people would view a further retreat from Kadar to Nagy, we do not know. We presume Nagy is to all intents and purpose Premier. Should the blame for the calling of Soviet troops now be placed on Gerő and he made a scapegoat for all this is going on now, and if he made further concessions, he might have a chance. But we do know enough to anything very certainly.<sup>295</sup>

This influx of live information was crucial for U.S. Intelligence. The proximity of the Legation to the situation also helped to inform the U.S. government with valuable information. The information and the turn of events were too rapid to allow the U.S. government to ever truly pause and assess the situation to formulate a policy. Every time the U.S. tried to develop a plan of action regarding the situation, the Legation sent a telegram reporting new developments, disrupting the previous plan of action. While the information was helpful to keep the U.S. informed, the proximity and constant flow of information also crippled the U.S. from ever being able to devise a plan of action and policy towards the Hungarian Revolt and the Soviet Union. Every hour the U.S. was receiving new updates that changed the political climate within Hungary.

The Legation continued to report live. In fact, Barnes reported to the Department of State, "In speech just delivered on radio, Imre Nagy has promised, inter alia, that as soon as arms laid down, Soviet troops now fighting will be withdrawn to former position in Hungary and that negotiations will be started to have all Soviet troops withdrawn."<sup>296</sup> The

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<sup>295</sup> "Transcript, October 25, 1956," in *FRUS, 1955-1957*, volume XXV, 284.

<sup>296</sup> "Transcript, October 25, 1956," in *FRUS, 1955-1957*, volume XXV, 285.

Legation reported crowds gathering outside their building and calling for the removal of Soviet troops and calling upon the United States for help. While they claimed that the crowds never got violent, there was still some fear among the members of the Legation.<sup>297</sup>

The revolt in Hungary had finally calmed down enough to allow the U.S. government to pause and assess the situation and decide what they should do in response to the revolt and violence. Three days after the outbreak of violence in Hungary, on October 26, the National Security Council held its 301<sup>st</sup> Meeting. Director Dulles prefaced that while it was too early to draw any conclusions, that it was possible to create speculations.<sup>298</sup> Naturally, the National Security Council was inclined to compare the situation in Hungary with the prior events of Poland that year.

Director Dulles proposed that “Soviet intervention in Hungary may have been due to Soviet unwillingness to submit to a second humiliation after Poland. On the other hand, the Hungarian Revolt had from the outset exhibited much clearer anti-Soviet and anti-Communist bias than had the Polish disorders.”<sup>299</sup> Director Dulles comprehended the difficult and embarrassing situation that the Soviet Union placed themselves in with Khrushchev’s speech and its repercussions. Khrushchev arrogantly attempted to allow greater freedom within the Eastern Bloc to prove the security of the communist system, however, it immediately backfired. It became clear that force would be needed to insure both the Soviet Union’s control and communist control in Hungary.

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<sup>297</sup> “Transcript, October 25, 1956,” in *FRUS, 1955-1957*, volume XXV, 285.

<sup>298</sup> S. Everett Gleason, “Memorandum of Discussion at the 301<sup>st</sup> Meeting of the National Security Council, Washington, October 26, 1956, 9-10:42 a.m.,” in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957: Eastern Europe*, volume XXV, (Washington D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), 295.

<sup>299</sup> “Memorandum, October 26, 1956, 9-10:42 a.m.,” in *FRUS, 1955-1957*, volume XXV, 296.

Furthermore, Director Dulles recognized “that the revolt in Hungary constituted the most serious threat yet to be posed to continued Soviet control of the satellites. It confronted Moscow with a very harsh dilemma: Either to revert to a harsh Stalinist policy, or to permit democratization to develop in the satellites to a point in which risked the complete loss of Soviet control of the satellites.”<sup>300</sup> The influx of information from the Legation in Budapest obviously contributed to Director Dulles understanding of the situation. Based on the rapid response from the Legation, the U.S. government was able to react to events while they were still unfolding, something very different from their reaction to Khrushchev’s secret speech back in February.

The meeting continued and Director Dulles anticipated “that the Soviet leaders in Moscow would try to convey an outward impression of continued unity of belief and action.”<sup>301</sup> President Eisenhower expressed his fear that, “In view of the serious deterioration of their position in the satellites, might they not be tempted to resort to very extreme measures and even to precipitate global war?”<sup>302</sup>

While President Eisenhower and the U.S. government stood firmly against engaging in war with the Soviet Union, it is apparent that they did not have confidence in the Soviets feeling the same based on recent developments. It took the revolt in Hungary to shake the U.S. government’s confidence that war could be avoided. Now, with Hungary revolting right after the events in Poland, the U.S. feared that the Soviet Union would panic and act desperately, potentially leading to another world war. The United States’ opinion and assessment of the situation had drastically changed. Their confidence in Khrushchev and

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<sup>300</sup> “Memorandum, October 26, 1956, 9-10:42 a.m.,” in *FRUS, 1955-1957*, volume XXV, 296.

<sup>301</sup> “Memorandum, October 26, 1956, 9-10:42 a.m.,” in *FRUS, 1955-1957*, volume XXV, 297.

<sup>302</sup> “Memorandum, October 26, 1956, 9-10:42 a.m.,” in *FRUS, 1955-1957*, volume XXV, 299.

the Soviet Union to avoid war had been deflated, which caused the U.S. to be at a standstill even more than before. The U.S. options to react to the events became more limited with this turn of opinion. While the U.S. never wanted to engage military it definitely would not even consider acting in any way that would lead to a war or directly engage the Soviet Union for fear of them acting irrationally. The fate of the Hungarians changed without the potential promise of military support from the U.S.

Governor Harold Stassen<sup>303</sup>, who was in attendance at the National Security Council meeting:

Wondered if it would not be prudent to try to get some message to marshal Zhukov indicating that the achievement of freedom in the Soviet satellites should not be considered by the Soviet Union as posing any real threat to the national security of the USSR. We should make clear that this development would not impel the Western powers to make any warlike move against the Soviet Union.<sup>304</sup>

Despite President Eisenhower expressing his concern previously, he did not agree with Governor Stassen.

The 301<sup>st</sup> meeting of the National Security Council documented a change in opinion of the Soviet Union and their opinion of the Eastern Bloc. Director Dulles understood the Soviet and communist embarrassment of two satellites revolting within months of each other. Despite this understanding, U.S. Intelligence was still at a loss of how the Soviet Union would react. The U.S. now feared that the Soviet Union would do anything in its power to prevent Hungary from seceding, including actions that would risk another world war. The U.S. lost its confidence and grew wearier over how this revolt would end.

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<sup>303</sup> Director of the Foreign Operations Administration until June 1955; Special Assistant to President Eisenhower from March 1955 and U.S. Deputy Representative to the United Nations Disarmament Commission and Subcommittee from August 1955.

<sup>304</sup> "Memorandum, October 26, 1956, 9-10:42 a.m.," in *FRUS, 1955-1957*, volume XXV, 299.

On October 27, the Legation in Budapest sent another telegram updating the U.S. government. They informed the Department of State that the revolt had spread from outside of Budapest into Szeged, Pecs, Miskolc, Debrecen, Komarom, Magyarovar, Gyor, and much of Trans-Danubia.<sup>305</sup> The spread of the uprisings revealed the Hungarian and Soviet failure to gain control over the Hungarian population. In response to this lack of control, the Legation reported that,

It can be summed up in proposition that Soviets under legal cover of Hungarian Communist Government will engage in ruthless suppression if insurgents don't surrender; and insurgents have complete lack of confidence in government carrying out promised concessions if they do capitulate. Insurgents thus faced with following narrow range of alternatives. (A) Fight to end and die and in process see many of unarmed population also suffer; (B) fight and die in hope hold out long enough for some outside intervention or pressure to modify regime and Soviet intention and/or capability of ruthless suppression; (C) accept government's acting in good faith in promised concessions, and surrender.

Interestingly, the Legation expected the Soviets to use Stalinistic force to bring an end to the Hungarian Revolt, thus validating President Eisenhower's fear from the 301<sup>st</sup> National Security Council meeting that the Soviet Union would risk the potential of general war to maintain control in Hungary. The Legation kept the U.S. government very well informed. United States Intelligence members recognized the political and moral predicament that they were faced with. The Legation advocated for U.S. material support within the realm of their limitations to avoid war.

At a loss of how to proceed, U.S. policy makers continued to make statements exposing the horrors of the Soviet Union and the Hungarian Revolt. On October 27, Secretary Dulles addressed the Dallas Council on World Affairs where he said:

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<sup>305</sup> N. Spencer Barnes, "Telegram From the Legation in Hungary to the Department of State, Budapest, October 27, 1956, 11 a.m.," in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957: Eastern Europe*, volume XXV, (Washington D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), 310.

The Polish people now loosen the Soviet grip upon the land they love. And the heroic people of Hungary challenge the murderous fire of Red Army tanks. These patriots value liberty more than life itself. And all who peacefully enjoy liberty have a solemn duty to seek, by all truly helpful means, that those who now die for freedom will not have died in vain. It is in this spirit that the United States and others have today acted to bring the situation in Hungary to the United Nations Security Council. The weakness of Soviet imperialism is being made manifest. Its weakness is not military weakness nor lack of material power. It is weak because it seeks to sustain an unnatural tyranny by suppressing human aspirations which cannot indefinitely be suppressed and by concealing truths which cannot indefinitely be hidden.<sup>306</sup>

Secretary Dulles expressed the concerns of the U.S. government and exploited the opportunity to inform many important people on the situation thereby hoping to gain support for Hungary.

The U.S. government continued its assessment of its role within the Hungarian Revolt. On October 29, the Special Committee on Soviet and Related Problems convened for their 40<sup>th</sup> meeting. The Committee was concerned over what they should be broadcasting over the radio to the Hungarian people. Jacob D. Beam, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs, expressed that their first priority was to get the Soviets out of Hungary. After that, they wanted to reassure the Hungarian people that the Hungarian government was still a puppet of Soviet control and to brace themselves for disappointment in terms of their demands.<sup>307</sup> Beam further argued that the most U.S. broadcasts could do for the insurgents was to keep them informed.<sup>308</sup> It was very apparent that during this meeting there was disagreement of whether the U.S. should verbally

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<sup>306</sup> John Foster Dulles, "Address by the Secretary of State Before the Dallas Council on World Affairs, October 27, 1956," in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957: Eastern Europe*, volume XXV, (Washington D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), 317.

<sup>307</sup> PCB, OCB Staff Representative, "Notes on the 40<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Special Committee on Soviet and Related Problems, Washington, October 29, 1956," in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957: Eastern Europe*, volume XXV, (Washington D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), 324.

<sup>308</sup> PCB, OCB Staff Representative, "Notes, October 29, 1956," in *FRUS*, volume XXV, 325.

support the Hungarian rebels and to encourage them to keep fighting. The argument against the broadcasts was the moral implications that would present itself if the revolt failed. The fear was that the U.S. would encourage the Hungarians to continue fighting, while knowing that the U.S. was not going to militarily intervene.

Later that night Barnes reported from Budapest regarding the current situation in Hungary. Barnes stated that the, "Soviets have Budapest under control with three Soviet mechanized divisions, although there are a few hard core resistance centers still in city proper. Soviet units at moment sitting in concentrations various key areas and blocking bridges. Appear in defensive posture."<sup>309</sup> He was unsure of what the Soviet's next move would be. In another telegram later that night, Barnes insisted that the Hungarian rebels would not survive much longer without Western support, both negotiating assistance and military support, either supplies or men.<sup>310</sup>

The following day, on October 30, the Special National Intelligence Estimate<sup>311</sup> produced a report assessing the "Probable Developments in East Europe and Implications for Soviet Policy."<sup>312</sup> The National Intelligence Estimate viewed the Soviet Union situation as follows:

Soviet policy is now confronted with serious dilemmas: (a) the need to make some accommodation with the increasing pressures of nationalism in the Satellites without losing the essential minimum of control over them; (b) the

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<sup>309</sup> N. Spencer Barnes, "Telegram From the Legation in Hungary to the Department of State, Budapest, October 29, 1956, 8 p.m.," in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957: Eastern Europe*, volume XXV, (Washington D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), 329.

<sup>310</sup> Ibid.

<sup>311</sup> The Special National Intelligence Estimate was a branch of the Bureau of Intelligence and Research in the Department of State.

<sup>312</sup> Special National Intelligence Estimate, "Probable Developments in East Europe and Implications for Soviet Policy, Washington, October 30, 1956," in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957: Eastern Europe*, volume XXV, (Washington D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), 330.



difficulty of using Soviet armed might to put down nationalist and anti-Communist revolt in the face of world opinion.<sup>313</sup>

The U.S. clearly comprehended the Soviet Union and Khrushchev's predicament. This dilemma left the U.S. confused on the direction in which the Soviet Union would move, thereby preventing the U.S. from creating a policy in anticipation of what would occur.

The report continued to assess the situation in each satellite independently. United States Intelligence recognized that the government in Poland still remained communist. The Polish regime seemed to have reduced Soviet influence, thereby inching closer to independence. Furthermore, the regime promised to begin to introduce democratic governmental features, to improve living standards, and to stop coercive collectivization. On the other hand, the Polish leadership, "pledged to maintain the alliance with the USSR, including the retention of Soviet forces in Poland as long as NATO forces remain in Germany, but reserving the right to choose whether or not Soviet specialists and military advisors will remain in the Polish army."<sup>314</sup> The U.S. understood the delicate balance that Gomułka was playing with. On the one hand, Gomułka had to appease to the Soviet Union in order to maintain some liberty in making decisions. At the same time, if he acted with too much freedom, the Soviet Union would be inclined to intervene.

While the U.S. expressed optimism towards the situation in Poland, they did not seem as confident about the developments in Hungary. The Special National Intelligence Estimate criticized the Hungarian government for responding too slowly to the demands thereby only further fueling the demands and making the problem worse. Furthermore, they feared that "it is unlikely that any Hungarian government will be able to reach a

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<sup>313</sup> Special National Intelligence Estimate, "October 30, 1956," in *FRUS, 1955-1957*, volume XXV, 330.

<sup>314</sup> Special National Intelligence Estimate, "October 30, 1956," in *FRUS, 1955-1957*, volume XXV, 331.

compromise between Soviet security requirements and Hungarian nationalist sentiment.”<sup>315</sup> A week after the outbreak of violence and anti-Soviet sentiment, the U.S. was unsure of what the future held for Hungary and the Soviet Union.

The report assessed what the recent developments in both Poland and Hungary would mean for the U.S. and the Western world. The U.S. anticipated an increase in trade between the West and Eastern Europe. While the U.S. understood the satellites economic dependence on the Soviet Union, it also predicted that the recent anti-Soviet sentiments would lead to demands for greater economic independence. In addition to increased trading, the U.S. foresaw that Poland and Hungary would lean on Western powers for economic credits.<sup>316</sup>

Continuing with their report, the Special National Intelligence Estimate turned to what these events meant for the development of Soviet policy. The U.S. believed that the Soviets were caught off guard by the revolt in Hungary and have been hesitating to create a plan for their handling of the satellites. The report argued, “It is too early to be confident on this matter, but we believe that Soviet leadership may be in a state of confusion, and until basic decisions are made, may be unable to conduct policy with sureness of touch.”<sup>317</sup> As a result, the U.S. was unable to formulate a policy because they did not know and could not predict Soviet policy.

United States Intelligence further understood the implications that Khrushchev might be faced with, “If the Hungarian rebels are able to achieve a substantial political victory, pressures for policy changes will almost certainly make the position of the

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<sup>315</sup> Special National Intelligence Estimate, “October 30, 1956,” in *FRUS, 1955-1957*, volume XXV, 331.

<sup>316</sup> Special National Intelligence Estimate, “October 30, 1956,” in *FRUS, 1955-1957*, volume XXV, 333.

<sup>317</sup> *Ibid.*

Khrushchev leadership increasingly difficult. The position of advocates of a harder line may be strengthened.”<sup>318</sup> Hungary presented the Soviet Union with greater problems than Poland did. The instability of the Hungarian government resulted in the failure of appeasing the rebels. Khrushchev and the Soviet leadership needed to step in to suppress the revolt before it erupted into a full-scale revolution. United States Intelligence understood all of these problems. However, they were unable to understand where Khrushchev and the Soviet Union stood. The U.S. was involved in the nervous waiting game to see what would transpire, while neither the Soviet Union nor the U.S. wanted to reveal their hand.

Despite their correct understanding of the Soviet Union’s dilemma with the satellites, the U.S. did not interpret the Soviet Union’s likely choice of reactions. The Special National Intelligence Estimate claimed:

It seems unlikely that US action short of overt military intervention or obvious preparation for such intervention would lead the USSR deliberately to take steps which it believed would materially increase the risk of general war. The Soviet leaders probably recognize that the US nuclear-air capability remains superior to that of the USSR, and have probably concluded that at present the USSR, even if it launched a surprise attack, would receive unacceptable damage in a nuclear exchange with the US.<sup>319</sup>

The U.S. was overly confident in their superiority in their nuclear weapons and knowledge. United States Intelligence believed that the Soviet Union was more afraid of starting a general war than losing their satellites. The United States arrogantly trusted that the Soviet Union feared their superior nuclear power, which would prevent the Soviets from acting too rash or forceful.

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<sup>318</sup> Special National Intelligence Estimate, “October 30, 1956,” in *FRUS, 1955-1957*, volume XXV, 331.

<sup>319</sup> Special National Intelligence Estimate, “October 30, 1956,” in *FRUS, 1955-1957*, volume XXV, 335.

The U.S. confidence shifted once again. Before, they were confident in the Soviet's fear of general war. When that dissipated, the U.S. took confidence in their nuclear power and the threat it posed to the Soviet Union. The U.S. was desperately looking for reasons why the Soviet Union would *not* use brutal force, rather than recognizing why the Soviet Union would cruelly suppress the Hungarians. This strategy allowed U.S. policy makers to find an excuse to provide military support.

On the same day as the Special National Intelligence Estimate's report, Barnes sent a telegram updating the U.S. Department of State. Barnes regarded the current situation in Hungary as a "highly unstable stalemate which could very well result in application iron fist by Soviets."<sup>320</sup> Barnes opinion of the situation drastically contrasted with that of the Special National Intelligence Estimate's opinion. United States Intelligence was optimistically anticipating that Khrushchev would stand by his word and not slam down the Stalinistic iron fist to end the revolt. However, Barnes interpreted the situation very differently, presenting the question of whether the U.S. government was neglectfully misinterpreting the Legation's information.

The American Legation attributed the stalemate between the Hungarian insurgents and the Soviet Union to the lack of shrewd leadership. As of now, Barnes claimed that Nagy proved himself to lack the leadership capacity to negotiate with the Soviet Union and the demand of the Hungarian rebels.<sup>321</sup>

Twenty-eight minutes after Barnes telegram, Nagy announced the return to a multi-party system, which included the revival of the Smallholder Party, the Social Democrats,

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<sup>320</sup> N. Spencer Barnes, "Telegram From the Legation in Hungary to the Department of State, Budapest, October 30, 1956, 2 p.m.," in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957: Eastern Europe*, volume XXV, (Washington D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), 340.

<sup>321</sup> Barnes, "Telegram, October 30, 1956, 2 p.m.," in *FRUS, 1955-1957*, volume XXV, 341.

and the National Peasant Party. An inner cabinet was created, which had representation of these parties. Nagy further announced that negotiations with the Soviet Union about troop withdrawal were to begin shortly.<sup>322</sup>

On the same day, October 30, the Soviet Central Committee passed the “Declaration on the Basis of the Development and Further Strengthening of Friendship and Cooperation Between the Soviet Union and Other Socialist States.”<sup>323</sup> The Declaration read:

The Soviet Government and all the Soviet people deeply regret that the development of events in Hungary has led to bloodshed. On the request of the Hungarian People’s Government the Soviet government consented to the entry into Budapest of the Soviet Army units to assist the Hungarian People’s Army and the Hungarian authorities to establish order in the town. Believing that the further presence of Soviet Army units in Hungary can serve as a cause for even greater deterioration of the situation, the Soviet Government has given instructions to its military command to withdraw the Soviet Army units from Budapest as soon as this is recognized as necessary by the Hungarian Government. At the same time, the Soviet Government is ready to enter into relevant negotiations with the Government of the Hungarian People’s Republic and other participants of the Warsaw treaty on the question of the presence of Soviet troops on the territory of Hungary.<sup>324</sup>

The recent developments of Soviet actions changed the tone of discussions among the U.S. government. The Soviet Union announced its willingness to negotiate with the Hungarian government, validating the United States’ naiveté regarding what the Soviets would not do.

Secretary of State Dulles circulated a telegram to all diplomatic missions an hour and a half after Nagy’s announcement. He claimed that it appeared that Nagy had control of Budapest.<sup>325</sup> Secretary Dulles also reported that the rebels seemed to have divided into groups: “National Communists fighting Soviet troops and opposing government as long as

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<sup>322</sup> John P. Glennon, “Editorial Note,” in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957: Eastern Europe*, volume XXV, (Washington D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), 342.

<sup>323</sup> Ibid.

<sup>324</sup> Glennon, “Editorial Note,” in *FRUS, 1955-1957*, volume XXV, 342-343.

<sup>325</sup> John Foster Dulles, “Circular Telegram From the Department of State to All Diplomatic Missions, Washington, October 30, 1956, 4:04 p.m.,” in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957: Eastern Europe*, volume XXV, (Washington D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), 344.

it uses them, and anti-Communists with more sweeping aims in direction of democracy.”<sup>326</sup>

Dulles presented the, “question whether Soviets willing to allow stabilization under Nagy Government committed to withdrawal their troops (with all that implies for other satellite countries) or whether they must proceed to reestablish complete control over country in role of alien occupier (which implies huge military burden for future and nullifies present world posture).”<sup>327</sup> Secretary Dulles expressed the everlasting confusion within the U.S. government regarding the situation in Hungary. He articulated that the goal of U.S. policy was to prevent Soviet military exerting force on the Hungarian people. Secretary Dulles lacked to provide a path to achieve this goal.

On October 31, the Planning Board of the National Security Council drafted a policy statement. The report started by stating, “our initial objective toward the Eastern European satellite area has been to encourage, as a first step toward eventual full national independence and freedom, the emergence of ‘national’ communist governments.”<sup>328</sup> After this, the Board assessed the achievements of this objective after the recent events in Eastern Europe. The U.S. was still promoting the same goals as before, they were just more prevalent because of the recent developments. Despite these goals being dominant, there was still an uncertainty over how to accomplish these goals. United States Intelligence recognized that Hungary presented a unique opportunity for the U.S. but they were at a loss of how to exploit it.

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<sup>326</sup> Dulles, “Circular Telegram, October 30, 1956, 4:04 p.m.,” in *FRUS, 1955-1957*, volume XXV, 345.

<sup>327</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>328</sup> Planning Board of the National Security Council, “Draft Statement of Policy by the Planning Board of the National Security Council: U.S. Policy on Developments in Poland and Hungary, Washington, October 31, 1956,” in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957: Eastern Europe*, volume XXV, (Washington D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), 354.

Naturally, the U.S. was consistently comparing what happened in Poland to the current situation in Hungary, in hopes that it would further their understanding of Hungary and the Soviet Union. The U.S. felt confident in Gomułka leading Poland and further achieving this goal. That being said, the U.S. did not like the pledged Polish loyalty to the Soviet Union. The Planning Board compared the situation in Poland to the current situation in Hungary:

In Poland, as in Hungary, recent developments have revealed the strong anti-Russian and anti-communist sentiments of the population. Unlike Hungary, the existence of strong leadership in Poland at a critical moment, fear of a reunified Germany with irredentist claims and the timely promise of reforms, together with an assertion of 'national independence' linked with a closely calculated defiance of Russian pressure, evidently has served to enable a reconstituted Polish communist government to set forth on its new course with the acquiescence, if not support, of the majority of Poles...In Hungary, a nationalist movement, similar to that in Poland, was triggered into national revolt by the intervention of Soviet troops called in by the Hungarian Government in the first hours of its difficulty.<sup>329</sup>

The U.S. clearly understood the differences between the circumstances in Poland and those in Hungary. It was understood that if Nagy had been smarter and more careful then the revolt in Hungary would not have resulted in this terrible bloodshed. The U.S. could not forecast the future of Hungary. Both presented likeable situations to the U.S. because of the publicity of the events and anti-Soviet attitudes expressed.

Based on the reaction to the events in Poland and the current response to the ongoing events in Hungary, the U.S. National Security Council concluded that "at least in those countries where Soviet troops are stationed, the Soviet Union is willing to use its armed forces to prevent the coming into power of a non-communist government, or to prevent a communist government from altering a policy of close military and political

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<sup>329</sup> Planning Board of the NSC, "Draft Statement, October 31, 1956," in *FRUS, 1955-1957*, volume XXV, 355.

alliance with the USSR.”<sup>330</sup> United States Intelligence acknowledged that the Soviet Union had troops throughout the Eastern Bloc and as long as those were present, the Soviet Union would be able to maintain communist control in its satellites. In regards to U.S. policy, they maintained their main objective of hoping to encourage non-communist governments in both Poland and Hungary. Furthermore, the U.S. wished to prevent Soviet force to be used on Hungarian civilians.

Director Dulles of the CIA discussed the current situation in Hungary on the first of November. Director Dulles proclaimed, “nevertheless, the impossible had happened, and because of the power of public opinion, armed force could not effectively be used. Approximately 80% of the Hungarian Army had defected to the rebels and provided the rebels with arms. Soviet troops themselves had had no stomach for shooting down Hungarians, except in Budapest.”<sup>331</sup> A newfound optimism existed among U.S. Intelligence in regards to the events in Hungary. Director Dulles doubted that the Soviets were going to use force. The constant contradicting opinions of people reveal the complexity of the situation and the uncertainty of what the U.S. move should be.

On November 2, Eisenhower allocated \$20 million to be used for food and other emergency relief resources for the Hungarian people.<sup>332</sup> The slowing of events allowed for the U.S. to assess the situation better and then decide to take some form of action. However, the support was only monetary for fear of implicating the U.S. in Soviet tensions and for

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<sup>330</sup> Planning Board of the NSC, “Draft Statement, October 31, 1956,” in *FRUS, 1955-1957*, volume XXV, 356.

<sup>331</sup> S. Everett Gleason, “Memorandum of Discussion at the 302<sup>nd</sup> Meeting of the National Security Council, Washington, November 1, 1956, 9-10:55 a.m.,” in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957: Eastern Europe*, volume XXV, (Washington D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), 358.

<sup>332</sup> John P. Glennon, “Editorial Note,” in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957: Eastern Europe*, volume XXV, (Washington D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), 364.



fear of war. President Eisenhower was tiptoeing the line between support and avoiding the situation.

Again on November 2, Secretary of State Dulles produced a circular telegram for certain diplomatic missions. Secretary Dulles interpreted the Soviet Declaration from October 30 as the Soviets feeling that:

Nationalist and anti-Sov feeling has reached danger point where losses must be cut by accepting high degree independence satellites, but within 'socialist' framework. Sovs probably hope maintain their influence through (1) national communist leaders' ideological identification with Sovs and their need for ultimate support against anti-communism; (2) growing degree economic integration, even though trade will be on terms more favorable to satellites and Sovs will have to give some economic aid; (3) and, at least in Poland and Czechoslovakia, fear of German resurgence.<sup>333</sup>

Secretary Dulles was confident that the Hungarian insurgents had successfully pushed the Soviets out of Hungary and forced them to negotiate. The interpretation was that the Soviet Union planned to cut its losses and try to maintain a socialist government in Hungary through negotiations. Secretary Dulles concluded this based on the Soviet declaration, which means that he trusted the word of the Soviet Union. It is possible that Secretary Dulles was looking to Poland as the precedent for Soviet Union action, creating belief that the Soviet Union would actually negotiate as long as Hungary guarantee its loyalty to the Soviet Union and the continuance of a socialist government, similar to what Gomułka did.

The following day, November 3, Bohlen sent a telegram reporting his opinion on the tensions between Hungary and the Soviet Union. Bohlen believed that:

Soviet may not proceed immediately to use of force but, depending upon attitude Hungarian government, may seek through mixed commission or other device to soften up Nagy and Hungarian Communists with 'promises'

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<sup>333</sup> John Foster Dulles, "Circular Telegram from the Department of State to Certain Diplomatic Missions, Washington November 2, 1956, 10:16 p.m.," in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957: Eastern Europe*, volume XXV, (Washington D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), 366.

concerning troop withdrawal in order to induce rebels to surrender arms. If, however, Nagy, stands firm it looks at this moment as though Soviet troops would go into action.<sup>334</sup>

Bohlen shrewdly gauged the tense situation between Hungary and the Soviet Union. Again, he presented a varying of opinions between the ambassadors and diplomats against the U.S. government and intelligence at home. This contrast speaks to the value of proximity of the ambassadors and diplomats and maybe even the blind optimism of the U.S. government.

That same day, November 3, Lodge discussed with the Hungarian Representative János Szabó about current information regarding Nagy and Hungary. Lodge stated:

We are still disturbed by the wide differences between Soviet Union words about troop withdrawals and Soviet Union actions, as evidenced in news reports. We believe, accordingly, that adjournment for a day or two would give a real opportunity to the Hungarian Government to carry out its announced desire to arrange for an orderly and immediate evacuation of all Soviet troops. But, clearly, the Security Council must keep this matter under urgent consideration.<sup>335</sup>

Lodge acknowledged the important disparity between the pledges of and the actions of the Soviet Union.

The Soviet Union disparity continued on November 3, when Edward T. Wailes, the Minister to Hungary, reported that, "firing in suburbs started at exactly 0500 local time. Guns are heavy caliber and to date firing appears to be going out from city rather than [garble]."<sup>336</sup> The Soviet Union claimed that they were withdrawing their troops, but that

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<sup>334</sup> Charles E. Bohlen, "Telegram From the Embassy in the Soviet Union to the Department of State, Moscow, November 3, 1956, noon," in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957: Eastern Europe*, volume XXV, (Washington D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), 371.

<sup>335</sup> John P. Glennon, "Editorial Note," in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957: Eastern Europe*, volume XXV, (Washington D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), 372.

<sup>336</sup> "Transcript of a Teletype Conversation Between the Legation in Hungary and the Department of State, November 3-4, 1956," in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957: Eastern Europe*, volume XXV, (Washington D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), 375.

was not the case early November. The American Legation in Budapest relayed a message from Hungarian government, which a portion read as follows:

The subjugation of Hungary, however, would not only signify renewal of oppression in this country but it would also stop the liberation trend[s] which have started so hopefully in the other East European countries; it would also bankrupt the ten year old American liberation policy which was pursued with so much firmness and wisdom. It would create a crisis in the confidence of all the East European people in the USA and [the other lands]...we are not in the position to further pursue these suggestions but we strongly emphasize that in this moment the fate of Eastern Europe and the entire world depends on the action of the President; the next few critical days will determine whether we enter a path of peace and liberation or whether we shall increase the appetite of aggression and proceed to a certain world catastrophe.<sup>337</sup>

The Hungarian government appealed to both the fear and morality of the U.S. government in hopes to involve the U.S. in helping them prevent Soviet troops from mobilizing. The message also conveyed the realization that the Hungarian government cannot defeat the Soviet troops without help. In fact, they see their future being the inevitable Soviet oppression unless President Eisenhower acts.

At 3 a.m. on November 4, the United Nations Security Council held its 754<sup>th</sup> meeting, where Lodge pleaded to the council, "If ever there was a time when the action of the United Nations could literally be a matter of life and death for a whole nation, this is that time. If ever there was a question which clearly raised a threat to the peace, this is the question."<sup>338</sup> The U.S. desperately wanted to act to help the Hungarian people, but they did not want to go in alone. A point worth noting was that 1956 was an election year, which meant that President Eisenhower was facing reelection on November 6, 1956. While the U.S. government wanted to help the Hungarians, the U.S. people did not want to send any more

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<sup>337</sup> "Transcript, November 3-4, 1956," in *FRUS, 1955-1957*, volume XXV, 378.

<sup>338</sup> John P. Glennon, "Editorial Note," in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957: Eastern Europe*, volume XXV, (Washington D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), 388.

troops into a war after just finishing the Korean War and World War II where many Americans lost their lives. If President Eisenhower sent troops to Hungary to support the revolt, it is very possible that he would not have won reelection. For fear of losing reelection, President Eisenhower was not willing to militarily engage the Soviet Union.

As a result of this fear, they turned to the support of the United Nations in hopes that it would not just be American troops. The other motivation to turn to the United Nations was to prevent the military action from evolving into a war but rather a quick, yet forceful suppression of Soviet oppression because of the sheer number they could accumulate. Furthermore, the U.S. could not turn to its usual allies of the British and the French because of their entanglement in the Suez crisis in the Middle East. Worse, the United States had abandoned their allies in this time of need and refused to support them in the Suez crisis.<sup>339</sup>

Simultaneously, while Poland and Hungary were revolting, the Soviet Union was involved with the British and French at the Suez Canal. The crisis began when the Egyptian president decided to nationalize the Suez Canal in July 1956.<sup>340</sup> In response, Israel invaded the canal zone. Additionally, British and French forces invaded the Canal for the immediate reason of protecting the communication lines.<sup>341</sup> Heightening tensions even more, the Soviet Union threatened to intervene as well, further raising the specter for another world war. However, control of Suez had further implications. It was an ideological war, similar to the Cold War. Defending Suez was symbolic of defending Europe from communism.

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<sup>339</sup> Ralph Dietl, "Suez 1956: A European Intervention?" in *Journal of Contemporary History* vol. 43, no. 2, (April 2008): 269.

<sup>340</sup> Dietl, "Suez 1956," 267.

<sup>341</sup> Dietl, "Suez 1956," 272.

Later on in the morning of November 4, Wailes reported that “as late as ten o’clock the Hungarians were negotiating with the Soviets and have also heard this morning that Hungarian delegation has not returned.”<sup>342</sup> At the start of November 4, the U.S. was still hopeful that the situation could be resolved through negotiations. The lack of return of the delegation started to diminish this faith.

In the afternoon of November 4, President Eisenhower sent a message to Marshal Bulganin, the Chairman of the Council of Minister of the USSR. President Eisenhower expressed the U.S. government’s disappointment in the Soviet Union: “We have been inexpressibly shocked by the apparent reversal of this policy. It is especially shocking that this renewed application of force against the Hungarian Government and people took place while negotiations were going on between your representatives and those of the Hungarian Government for the withdrawal of Soviet forces.”<sup>343</sup> Eisenhower further pleaded, “I urge in the name of humanity and in the cause of peace that the Soviet Union take action to withdraw Soviet forces from Hungary immediately and to permit the Hungarian people to enjoy and exercise the human rights and fundamental freedoms affirmed for all peoples in the United Nations Charter.”<sup>344</sup> President Eisenhower desperately tried pleading and negotiating with the Soviet Union in hopes to end this dire situation diplomatically and to prevent any more deaths.

Eisenhower continued his pleading by sending a letter to Nikolai Bulganin, premier of the Soviet Union, in response to recent Soviet intervention despite its declaration on

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<sup>342</sup> “Transcript, November 3-4, 1956,” in *FRUS, 1955-1957*, volume XXV, 384.

<sup>343</sup> Herbert C. Hoover Jr., “Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in the Soviet Union, Washington, November 4, 1956, 4:25 p.m.,” in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957: Eastern Europe*, volume XXV, (Washington D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), 390.

<sup>344</sup> Hoover, “Telegram, November 4, 1956, 4:25 p.m.,” in *FRUS, 1955-1957*, volume XXV, 391.

October 30 claiming a non-intervention policy. He professed that the U.S. understood the Soviet Declaration of October 30 to be “an act of high statesmanship.”<sup>345</sup> Eisenhower voiced his disappointment:

We have been inexpressibly shocked by the apparent reversal of this policy. It is especially shocking that this renewed application of force against the Hungarian Government and people took place while negotiations were going on between your representatives and those of the Hungarian Government for the withdrawal of Soviet forces...I urge in the name of humanity and in the cause of peace that the Soviet Union take action to withdraw Soviet forces from Hungary immediately and to permit the Hungarian people to enjoy and exercise the human rights and fundamental freedoms affirmed for all peoples in the United Nations Charter.<sup>346</sup>

He expressed his surprise over the Soviet intervention, despite his skepticism that he demonstrated towards Khrushchev’s speech in February. The inconsistency of Eisenhower’s trust towards the Soviet Union and Khrushchev is perplexing and demonstrates the United States’ lack of understanding of the Soviet Union.

On November 6, the Special Committee on Soviet and Related Problems met to discuss Hungary. Beam reported that the measures taken to help Hungary were as followed:

(1) RFE is broadcasting appeals to the Soviet troops and will soon distribute pamphlets urging them not to fire on Hungarians, (2) we plan to press for distribution of relief in Hungary through the International Red Cross, (3) we have tightened up on U.S. passports, and (4) an effort is being made to take administrative action to make it easier for satellite refugees to enter the United States.<sup>347</sup>

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<sup>345</sup> Dwight David Eisenhower, “Cable, secret, to Nikolai Aleksandrovich Bulganin, November 4, 1956,” in *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower: The Presidency: The Middle Way*, volume XVI, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 2361-2362.

<sup>346</sup> Eisenhower, “Cable to Bulganin, November 4, 1956,” in *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower*, volume XVI, 2362.

<sup>347</sup> PBC, OCB Staff Representative, “Notes on the 44<sup>th</sup> Meeting of Special committee on Soviet and Related Problems, Washington, November 6, 1956,” in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957: Eastern Europe*, volume XXV, (Washington D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), 401.

Beam explained the efforts the U.S. were currently taking in hopes to help liberate Hungary, but the efforts were all reactive. The U.S. Legation in Hungary anticipated these events and the U.S. did not take action to prevent or intervene. Now, the U.S. was merely trying to put a band-aid on the situation to try to stop the bleeding.

Beam then gave an oral report, on November 7, to the Operations Coordinating Board regarding U.S. policy towards the Soviet Union. He asserted that:

It is not recommended that we revive the cold war on the scale of intensity of the late Stalin period. We shall certainly take some steps, and very definite ones, to register our revulsion against the Soviet attack on Hungary. These will include a suspension of the exchange of official delegations under the East-West contacts program and also non-attendance at Soviet social functions. We would also view sympathetically steps such as are now being undertaken by labor organizations in various countries to refuse to handle Soviet ships and goods. On the other hand, we would not wish to jeopardize some of the gains, small as they may be, resulting from the Geneva conferences. Thus, we would like the *Amerika* magazine exchange to continue and we should be willing to go ahead with limited cooperation with the USSR in the International Geophysical Year. Unless Soviet actions become generally more threatening, it would seem best to refrain from drastic measures such as blocking Soviet assets, intensifying trade embargoes, etc.<sup>348</sup>

Beam did not want the U.S. to revert back to previous relations that existed between the U.S. and Stalin. Despite the force demonstrated by the Soviet Union, Beam believed that the U.S. had witnessed some improvements, such as concessions and negotiations agreed upon at the Geneva conference and the situation in Poland. Beam advised against intensifying any tension between the U.S. and the Soviet Union despite the inhumane suppression of the Hungarian people.

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<sup>348</sup> Jacob D. Beam, "Notes for an Oral Report to the Operations Coordinating Board by the Chairman of the Special Committee on Soviet and Related Problems (Beam), Washington, November 7, 1956," in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957: Eastern Europe*, volume XXV, (Washington D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), 418.

On November 8, the National Security Council convened for their 303<sup>rd</sup> meeting, where CIA Director Dulles reported on the situation in Hungary. First, he commented on the brutal Soviet suppression of the Hungarians. Director Dulles analyzed the situation of János Kádár, he described, “Kádár as a potential Gomułka if his hands had not been so deeply stained by the blood of his own countrymen and if he had not acted in collaboration with the Soviets. Even so, he may yet turn out to be a Hungarian Gomułka.”<sup>349</sup> That being said, Director Dulles proclaimed that he did not trust Kádár.

Director Dulles asserted that the opinion of the Soviet Union had reached an all time low in the Western world with its recent violence on the Hungarian people. He also predicted that, “the rebellion in Hungary would be extinguished in a matter of days, if not of hour. Nevertheless, the Soviets would be faced with a problem in Hungary for many, many years to come.”<sup>350</sup> In other words, Director Dulles was suggesting that while the Soviets succeeded in suppressing the satellite once again, it would create further problems for them in the future. The Soviet Union could not appease the demands of the Hungarian people while still maintaining control, implying that there will be anti-Soviet attitudes until Hungary gained independence. As a result, the Soviet Union would always be working to maintain control over Hungary.

Interestingly, at the National Security Council Meeting, Herbert Hoover, Under Secretary of State, believed that if the British and the French had not been entangled in the Suez Crisis then the Soviet Union would never have acted with such aggression towards

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<sup>349</sup> S. Everett Gleason, “Memorandum of Discussion at the 303<sup>rd</sup> Meeting of the National Security Council, Washington, November 8, 1956, 9-11:25 a.m.,” in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957: Eastern Europe*, volume XXV, (Washington D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), 419.

<sup>350</sup> Ibid.



Hungary.<sup>351</sup> Secretary Hoover was suggesting that the fear of the Western powers was so great that it would have kept the Soviet Union in check if they were not preoccupied. Once again, Secretary Hoover expressed the self-confidence of the United States. Furthermore, the confidence that the U.S. held in regards to its partnerships with the British and the French. As a result of the Suez crisis, the Soviet Union believed that they would be granted greater leniency by the Western world because they were preoccupied, a belief that resulted to be true.

In a later meeting between the Bipartisan Legislative Leaders on November 9, Director Dulles echoed his previous claim in the National Security Council meeting. He “concluded that Russia had lost a satellite and gained a conquered province, that in the outside world the myth of sweet reasonableness of communism has been destroyed with a resultant denunciation of it by former Party members and that the Soviets now realize that satellite armies are not at all trustworthy.”<sup>352</sup> According to Director Dulles, the Soviet force proved to the rest of the world the weakness of communism and its inability to negotiate. The Hungarian Revolt proved to the U.S. that communism would not succeed and had a pending imminent defeat.

On November 13, Douglas MacArthur II, Counselor of the Department of State, reported to the Acting Secretary of State regarding his meeting with the President and Colonel Goodpaster. MacArthur relayed that:

The President expressed concern over reports which seem to indicate that many European people had the impression that the US had incited the Hungarians to rebellion. He said this concerned him and we should devote all our efforts to correcting this impression. He said it has never been out policy

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<sup>351</sup> Gleason, “Memorandum, November 8, 1956, 9-11:25 a.m.,” in *FRUS, 1955-1957*, volume XXV, 419.

<sup>352</sup> John P. Glennon, “Editorial Note,” in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957: Eastern Europe*, volume XXV, (Washington D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), 423.

to incite captive peoples to insurrection, but we have always stood ready to assist in their peaceful liberation through giving strong moral support to the captive peoples.<sup>353</sup>

President Eisenhower expressed concern over the image of the U.S. in the eyes of the world. Furthermore, he presented the limitations of the U.S. efforts to help suppressed people. He acknowledged that all the U.S. could offer was moral support to assist in peaceful liberation, indirectly stating that if a liberation operation turns violent that the U.S. cannot assist militarily.

The focus of discussions began to shift from the atrocity of the Soviet aggression to how the Western world should “punish” the Soviet Union. Additionally, the U.S. stopped focusing on what could have been done to help the Hungarians liberate themselves, but now how the world could absorb all the Hungarian refugees and provide the necessary resources and aid for the Hungarians. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) assessed the events between the Soviet Union and Hungary to determine what action should be taken. George W. Perkins, the Permanent Representative to the North Atlantic Council, reported that NATO urged “respective governments to: (a) coordinate efforts in UN to exert maximum pressure on Russia, (b) give asylum to Hungarian refugees and provide supplies to Red Cross for Hungarian relief and (c) ban all cultural and sport activities with Russia. Regarding latter, asked what governments doing about Olympic Games.”<sup>354</sup> NATO attempted to coordinate with the governments to provide a united

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<sup>353</sup> Douglas MacArthur II, “Memorandum From the Counselor of the Department of State (MacArthur) to the Acting Secretary of State, Washington, November 13, 1956,” in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957: Eastern Europe*, volume XXV, (Washington D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), 435.

<sup>354</sup> George W. Perkins, “Telegram From the Office of the Permanent representative to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization to the Department of State, Paris, November 13, 1956, 8 p.m.,” in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957: Eastern Europe*, volume XXV, (Washington D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), 443.

punishment to the Soviets. However, these punishments were merely reactive and did not help the Hungarians to liberate themselves.

Bohlen reported from Moscow on November 14, that he believed that, "Soviet policy will clearly be to promote national Communism in Hungary and will endeavor while insuring maintenance Communist system to produce developments somewhat along Polish line."<sup>355</sup> Bohlen interpreted that the Soviets would appease the Hungarians in some way in hopes to prevent another disruption in the Eastern Bloc.

The U.S. government concerned itself with what form of economic aid that it should offer for both Poland and Hungary. It was suggested to sell agricultural surpluses to both Poland and Hungary, granting food relief to Hungarians in need, and emergency relief money for Hungarians.<sup>356</sup> While the U.S. was unwillingly to support the Hungarian insurgents militarily, they believed in supporting the Hungarians economically in the aftermath. The U.S. was upset the revolt failed and clearly felt remorse for all the deaths of the Hungarians, which caused them to want to help the Hungarians in their aftermath struggle. An important thing to note is that the U.S. was willing to help because it did not involve the U.S. military nor did the aid directly engage the Soviet Union.

On November 19, the National Security Council produced a report regarding the reevaluation of U.S. policies, objectives, and courses of actions based on the recent events in Eastern Europe. The report reiterated the initial objective, which was:

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<sup>355</sup> Charles E. Bohlen, "Telegram From the Embassy in the Soviet Union to the Department of State, Moscow, November 14, 1956, 7 p.m.," in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957: Eastern Europe*, volume XXV, (Washington D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), 446.

<sup>356</sup> Herbert V. Prochnow, "Memorandum From the Deputy Under Secretary of State for Economic Affairs (Prochnow) to the Chairman of the Council on Foreign Economic Policy (Randall), Washington, November 14, 1956," in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957: Eastern Europe*, volume XXV, (Washington D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), 448.

A first step toward eventual full national independence and freedom, the emergence of 'national' communist governments. While these governments might continue to be in close political and military alliance with the Soviet Union, they would be able to exercise to a much greater degree than in the past independent authority and control in the direction of their own affairs, primarily confined in the first stage to their internal affairs.<sup>357</sup>

The report continued by assessing the success of these objectives in Poland and Hungary after the tense events of the past six months. The goals of the U.S. have not changed because Poland and Hungary still remain under the control of both the Soviet Union and the communist system. Despite the revolts in both countries, in the eyes of the U.S. they were essentially back where they started at the beginning of the year.

The U.S. National Security Council saw Poland as a country in progress of achieving these objectives. In regards to Hungary, the council did not portray the same optimism. The report read as follows:

The Soviet Government renewed on November 4 its efforts to suppress the Hungarian revolt by installing a new puppet regime headed by Kadar, and by the employment of greatly increased Soviet armed force. Soviet reaction to UN actions and to the President's appeal to Bulganin on November 4 have made clear Soviet determination to maintain its position there by force of arms. The Kadar regime has reverted to a program of modest reform promises including a promise to negotiate in the future for the withdrawal of Soviet forces while making it clear that the political and military alliance with the USSR must be maintained.<sup>358</sup>

The report assessed the Hungarian situation well. The U.S. understood the Soviet Union's hold on Hungary and that they would not let go unless there were extenuating circumstances. They gained a better understanding of the importance of the satellites to the

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<sup>357</sup> "National Security Council Report: Interim U.S. Policy on Developments in Poland and Hungary, Washington, November 19, 1956," in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957: Eastern Europe*, volume XXV, (Washington D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), 464.

<sup>358</sup> "National Security Council Report, November 19, 1956," in *FRUS, 1955-1957*, volume XXV, 465.

Soviet Union after Poland and Hungary. The Soviet Union was not going to give up any satellite easily because of their desired goal to have communism rule the world.

United States Intelligence concluded that the maintenance of control over the satellites was greatly attributed to the presence of Soviet forces in the area. In other words, Soviet troops were stationed all throughout Eastern Europe, ready to mobilize at any moment in the case of an uprising.<sup>359</sup> A conclusion that was not explicitly stated was that the U.S. believed that without the presence of Soviet troops, both Poland and Hungary would have been able to secede from the Soviet bloc.

Interestingly, the conclusion regarding U.S. action remained unchanged from the Special National Intelligence Estimate from October 30. United States Intelligence still believed that unless the U.S. took military action themselves, the Soviet Union would not act in ways that would risk another total war.<sup>360</sup> However, they did believe that "Soviet suspicions of U.S. policy and present circumstances which involve Soviet troop movements and alerts probably increase the likelihood of a series of actions and counter-actions which might lead to war."<sup>361</sup> The U.S. formulated a new opinion in regard to the Eastern Bloc. It may now be interpreted that if the Soviet Union was to exert force on their satellites, that the U.S. would not engage the Soviet Union on its own. The U.S. maintained a general understanding that Eastern Europe belonged to the Soviet Union and communism.

On November 27, the Special National Intelligence Estimate reevaluated Soviet-Satellite relations. The report concluded, "Given the vital character of the interests involved, the Soviet leaders will not seriously consider abdicating their dominant position in Eastern

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<sup>359</sup> "National Security Council Report, November 19, 1956," in *FRUS, 1955-1957*, volume XXV, 465.

<sup>360</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>361</sup> *Ibid.*

Europe. At the other end of the scale, a full-blown return to the extremes of Stalinist rule is highly unlikely.”<sup>362</sup> The U.S. now truly understood that the Soviet Union would do anything to keep control of Eastern Europe, including excessive force. However, when the satellites were under control they would maintain a looser grip.

Furthermore, U.S. Intelligence agreed that the Soviet Union had been grappling with the problem of governance since the death of Stalin. The U.S. recognized that the goal of the relaxation of terror was to gain popular support without lack of discipline. The U.S. also acknowledged, “it was easier to satisfy both of these conflicting goals in the USSR than in the Satellites, where Communist authority was less securely established and where, particularly in Hungary and Poland, Communist leaders had to contend with traditions of intense nationalism and a rise in popular expectations, particularly among the youth.”<sup>363</sup> The U.S. understood that the satellites had conflicting interests that presented problems for the Soviet Union. Within the satellites there were conflicting communist movements and nationalist movements, explaining the revolts and problems of dissent. These conflicting ideologies were not present within the Soviet Union because Soviet nationalism was deeply entangled communism.

The report continued to assess the potential effects of the Poznań Revolt, the return of Gomułka, and the Hungarian Revolt had upon Soviet policy. The contradictory pressures that the Soviet Union faced caused the U.S. to be uncertain of the way Soviet policy would fall. United States confusion remained prevalent in the report. It was unclear whether the Soviet leadership would return to a harder line or if it would maintain its relaxed state and

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<sup>362</sup> “Special National Intelligence Estimate: Probable Developments in Soviet-Satellite Relations, Washington, November 27, 1956,” in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957: Eastern Europe*, volume XXV, (Washington D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), 483.

<sup>363</sup> Ibid.

believed that its suppression of Hungary was an example of what would happen if any satellite raised trouble.<sup>364</sup> That being said, the U.S. anticipated the Soviet leadership to follow a course of “continuation of the present course of expediency, involving shifts between conciliation and repression.”<sup>365</sup> While it appeared that the U.S. was better able to anticipate, there was still an air of confusion.

The U.S. reactions started with going toe-to-toe with the Soviet Union in hopes that Khrushchev would not call the United States’ bluff. However, the year concluded with the United States’ concern whether the world thought the U.S. had initiated the revolt and thereby caused the deaths of thousands of Hungarians. Confusion froze U.S. policy and prevented them from ever being able to decide on action to help Hungary in the moment. United States foreign policy was walking a tight rope because when military intervention is ruled out, what options are left. The U.S. was at a loss to formulate a coherent foreign policy when the options were limited and unattractive. Constrained by the fear of war, the U.S. was left with a policy of psychological warfare. However, when this leads to uprisings and bloodshed and the U.S. cannot intervene, it leaves the U.S. in an embarrassing situation.

United States policy makers wanted to base their policy off of what they anticipated the Soviet’s policy and actions to be. However, the U.S. government could never determine what that would be. All the U.S. ever gathered was multiple possibilities that would have lead to very different possibilities, halting U.S. action and policy making in regards to the Hungarian Revolt. Instead, it was not until the revolt was brutally suppressed by the Soviet Union that the U.S. was finally able to decide policy regarding Hungary and the Soviet

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<sup>364</sup> “Special National Intelligence Estimate, November 27, 1956,” in *FRUS, 1955-1957*, volume XXV, 487.

<sup>365</sup> “Special National Intelligence Estimate, November 27, 1956,” in *FRUS, 1955-1957*, volume XXV, 489.

Union. The U.S. policy included punishments coordinated by NATO and economic aid for Poland and Hungary.

While the U.S. correctly attributed the differences between Poland and Hungary to explain the different reactions from the Soviet Union, it still created confusion. The U.S. could not predict the Soviet actions and future of Soviet policy. Although it might have been speculated that the year of 1956 would allow the U.S. to evolve their opinion of the Soviet Union and Khrushchev, it only created puzzlement over the direction of the Soviet Union, similar to how Khrushchev's Secret Speech created confusion within the Soviet Union. Khrushchev's capricious nature paired with the differing circumstances within Poland and Hungary, led to unpredictable reactions from the United States standpoint. The U.S. was left desperately trying to grasp an understanding of Khrushchev and the Soviet Union's policy. The lack of understanding and the fear of war prevented the United States from ever being able to act.



## Conclusion:

In the beginning of 1957, the United States government produced a report reflecting on the past year and reevaluating the Soviet satellites. The report believed:

The long-latent conflict between Soviet interest and Satellite aspirations exploded in crisis last fall as a result of the progressive weakening of ideological authority and loosening of police controls following the death of Stalin...tensions between the Satellite populations and their regimes during the next several years probably will be higher than prior to the events in Poland and Hungary, and the unity of Satellite parties will be subjected to greater strains. Soviet policy is likely to reduce these tensions in Eastern Europe, or even to restore the degree of acquiescence prevailing earlier.<sup>366</sup>

The United States understood the value that the Soviet Union placed on its satellites. While they did see the year of 1956 as a year of slight progress, they also did not expect the Soviet Union to release its control within the year, despite the discontent within the satellites.

The United States entered the year 1956 not knowing what would unfold. The change in leadership in the Soviet Union left the door for change open, but the U.S. never anticipated Nikita Khrushchev's speech or Poland and Hungary to begin to crack the Eastern Bloc. The uncertainty, along with the lack of intelligence regarding Khrushchev's speech, left the United States unprepared to react. 1956 was a trying year for U.S.-Soviet relations. The dynamics of the relationship between the two superpowers fluctuated for the entirety of 1956. The year that started out with the promise that the cold tensions might thaw between the Soviet Union and the United States ended with a hard freeze.

Khrushchev's speech on February 24 rocked the world with its implications over its control of Eastern Europe and potential optimism for the change in leadership style. It gave the U.S. false promise that the Soviet Union was headed in a new direction. The brutal

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<sup>366</sup> "National Intelligence Estimate: Stability of the Soviet Satellite Structure, Washington, February 19, 1957," in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957: Eastern Europe, volume XXV*, Washington D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990, 578-579.

suppression of the Hungarian Revolt secured the Soviet Union's position as a power hungry superpower willing to use deadly force in order to secure its holdings in Eastern Europe. The political ambiguity of the year forced the United States to consistently reevaluate their policy towards the Soviet Union and their understanding of communism.

Despite the disparity of the events on 1956, the United States articulated its goals clearly, which was to eliminate communism. It was evident that the U.S. wanted their policy to promote "free world" ideology and to lead to the independence of Eastern European countries. Their policy was also meant to bring an end to communist rule. While they expressed their goals well, they were consistently at a loss of how to achieve them. Militaristic efforts were the only plausible way of being able to immediately achieve their goals and the U.S. was unwilling to involve their military, which drastically limited their options.

The varying quality of intelligence also influenced the United States' policy. In the case of Khrushchev's speech in February, the U.S. struggled to formulate a policy due to a lack of knowledge. Initially, they were unaware of the speech until about a month later, preventing the formulation of a policy. Even at this point, the U.S. did not have an official copy, crippling their ability to properly understand the speech's implication. When the U.S. did finally get a copy in May, they still grappled to understand Khrushchev's motives. United States policy started off the year without proper information regarding the events, causing them to be constantly be behind.

When the U.S. did finally formulate a policy regarding Khrushchev's speech, it embodied typical suspicion towards the Soviet Union and communism. The U.S. approached the speech with skeptical optimism. They saw the speech as being positive, but

they also recognized that it was just that, a speech. United States policy makers decided to wait for the Soviet Union to validate Khrushchev's claims through action, and the U.S. did not have to wait long.

Unlike with Khrushchev's speech, the U.S. Intelligence community was aware of the Poznań Revolt within hours of it happening. The quick relaying of information allowed the U.S. to react more appropriately than they had the opportunity to with Khrushchev's speech. The U.S. saw the revolt in Poland as an opportunity to further their long-term goal of eventual liberation of the Soviet satellites within the constraints of their anti-military policy. United States policy makers decided to invoke and prolong the anti-Soviet attitudes that evolved from the Poznań Revolt to fuel the unrest within Poland. In other words, the U.S. used psychological warfare to help instill Polish nationalism. Furthermore, the revolt offered the U.S. the chance to observe the Soviet Union's handling of the situation to either validate or negate Khrushchev's words. The lack of Soviet intervention made Khrushchev's new plan and direction seem genuine.

The events of the Polish October were also reported with accuracy and speed, granting the U.S. the ability to reconfigure its policy and plan of action applicably. The return of Gomułka provided the U.S. Intelligence community another instance to test Khrushchev's sincerity. Khrushchev again proved himself and managed the change of leadership diplomatically, thereby further confirming the new direction of the Soviet Union. The U.S. gained confidence in the thaw in the Eastern Bloc.

Similar to the events in Poland, U.S. policy makers were aware of the Hungarian Revolt within hours of it erupting. However, the constant evolution of events prevented the U.S. from ever being able to truly pause and formulate a policy. Each plan was stalled by a

new development occurring in the situation. In dealing with this debilitating feature, the United States' strategy was again psychological warfare. The U.S. wanted to encourage the protestors and their anti-Soviet attitudes, in hopes that they would gain independence, while still not involving themselves militarily.

Unlike the events in Poland, the suppression of the Hungarian Revolt conflicted with Khrushchev's speech. Khrushchev denounced Stalin for his reign of terror and unnecessary force and brutality. However, he exhibited exactly that with the oppression of the Hungarian insurgents. The quelling confirmed the United States fears that Khrushchev's speech would not be genuine. The United States suspicion regarding the new direction was validated by the suppression of the Hungarians.

Throughout the year, the United States constantly had conflicting opinions and views within the Intelligence community. Some people were confident in the new leadership of the Soviet Union, while others maintained their distrust of any communist leader. Some policy makers gained confidence from the events of Poland and used it as evidence for the change in nature of the Soviet Union, while others watched with skepticism. Regardless, they all understood the oppression of the Hungarian people as a horrific act.

The United States' theme of inconsistency in this time period demonstrated its wavering trust of the Soviet Union. The United States trusted the Soviet Union only when it worked in their favor. For example, when Khrushchev made his speech, there were mixed opinions of trust and suspicion. Those inclined to trust the speech were seduced by the appeal of Khrushchev's words, while those who were suspicious looked to the history of the Soviet Union to validate their argument. Another instance when the U.S. deviated from

their constant skepticism towards the Soviet Union was when the Soviet Union said that they were removing their troops from Hungary. This was a grave mistake in trust by the United States.

The U.S. was playing the constant waiting game with the Soviet Union. They were always on the defensive and always reacting to the Soviet Union. Neither party was particularly in control of the whole situation. The Cold War was a volatile time where both superpowers were constantly waiting to react to the other; uncertain of what would come next.

The relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union was a result largely of the historical circumstances of the time. World War II, the Korean War, the Suez Crisis, and the U.S. Presidential Election of 1956 all played dramatic roles in determining the relationship between Khrushchev and President Eisenhower. The battle between the “free world” and communism would persist past 1956. This year, however, influenced U.S.-Soviet relations and the progression of the Cold War drastically.

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