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## IREX RESEARCH REPORT

### Topic of Research

This project focuses on the 1956 Hungarian Revolution and two Soviet interventions. Specifically it examines:

- the reasons why Hungary was the first of the satellites to directly challenge Soviet rule, and why the Soviet Union cracked down on Hungary, while developing a more tolerant attitude toward Poland
- the nature of the Soviet decision making process leading to the two military invasions;
- the behind-the-scenes alliances, conflicts, and power plays within the highest levels of the communist parties in the bloc by figures such as Nikita Khrushchev, Anastas Mikoyan, Mikhail Suslov, Vyacheslav Molotov, Marshall Zhukov, and Hungary's János Kádár, Yugoslav's Josip Broz Tito, Poland's Władysław Gomułka, East Germany's Walter Ulbricht, and Communist China's Mao Zedong;
- how the CIA-funded Radio Free Europe (RFE) may have led the noncommunist Hungarian "freedom-fighters" to fight, believing that American military aid was on the way;
- the political and personal dynamics that contributed to the Soviet decision to kidnap and ultimately execute Hungarian communist leader Imre Nagy, after he fled to the Yugoslav Embassy for refuge;
- Imre Nagy's NKVD (KGB) past and its contributions to his indecisiveness during the crisis;
- János Kádár's activities after he mysteriously disappeared on November 1, and his real views about the Soviet military invasion and Nagy's abduction;
- Flaws in the Soviet military's execution of "Plan Wave" (*Volna*) and Plan Whirlwind (*Vikhr*)

### Relevance and Contribution to the Field

The 1956 Hungarian Revolution and two Soviet interventions represent key turning points in both Hungarian and Soviet/Russian history. The Hungarian crisis of 1956 marks the first act of Soviet military aggression against a fellow communist country. Unlike earlier uprisings, such as in East Berlin (1953) and Poznań (1956), the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 signifies the first attempt by a bloc member to leave the Warsaw Pact. Thus in a sense Hungary symbolizes the "first domino" in a process that resulted ultimately in the Soviet Union's loss of hegemony over Eastern Europe in 1989.

New research from recently opened communist bloc archives illuminates the events that helped transform Soviet-East European relations. This research alters much of our understanding of the political, economic, and social dynamics, and of the personalities that contributed to the resistance movement within Hungary. It also deepens our understanding of the political divisions and power play within the Soviet Union that led to the decision twice to invade Hungary to quell the revolution.

### Concise Summary of Approach, Research Methodology, and Research Sites

My purpose was to emphasize only the new archival findings, not to provide a comprehensive history of this events. I relied mainly on documents from the archives I've worked in over the past ten years. In addition to four Russian archives, these include the Hungarian National Archive (*Magyar Országos Levéltár* [MOL]); two Polish archives (*Archiwum Akt Nowych* [AAN] and *Archiwum Ministerstwa Spraw Zagranicznych* [AMSZ]); the Austrian State Archive (*Archiv der Republik* [Staatsarchiv]); and Central Party Archive of the former GDR (*Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR im Bundesarchiv* [SAPMO])

#### *Russian Research Sites:*

A. AVP (Arkhiv Vneshnei Politiki)

Tel. 241-5112 (reading room)

B. Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Noveishii Istorii (RGANI)

Tel. 206-3815 (reading room)

The name of this archive has changed; it used to be called the Center for the Preservation of Contemporary Documents [*Tsentr Khraneniya Sovremennoi Dokumentatsii*, or TsKhSD.]

C. Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Sotsial'noi i Politicheskoi Istorii (RGASPI)

Tel. 292-9566 (The name of this archive has changed; it used to be called the Russian Center for the Preservation and Study of Documents of Contemporary History [*Rossiiskii Tsentr Khraneniya i Izuchenii Dokumentov Noveishii Istorii*, or RTsKhIDNI.]

D. Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii (GARF)

Tel. 245-8161

E. Biblioteka Imeni Lenina ("Leninka")

Tel: 202-5790

### Summary of Research Findings

Many scholars writing about this event during the Cold War have operated on the implicit assumption that the Soviet leaders were the key aggressors and all the East

European leaders the reluctant and passive allies. To use a trite metaphor: the dog (USSR) wagged the tail (East Europe). However, while Stalin's successors continued to play a strong role in internal Hungarian politics, they certainly were neither omnipotent nor omniscient. They misperceived the Hungarian leaders (Rákosi, Gero, and Nagy). Because the Kremlin leaders thought the problem lay at the top, they believed they needed an "iron hand" like Rákosi's to maintain discipline; no one else could take his place. Thus the Kremlin leaders' misdiagnosis of the problem further exacerbated it, as they mistook the disease for the cure. Moreover, Soviet perceptions of Rákosi, Gero, and Nagy are worth examining since, arguably, had Rákosi been replaced earlier than mid-July by Nagy, the Hungarian revolution might never have taken place.

To some extent, as well, the Hungarian leaders subtly manipulated Moscow. They exhibited what psychologists would term "passive aggressive" behavior. The Rajk question, "Farkas Affair," return of János Kádár to the Politburo, Jewish question, use of the Yugoslav press and diplomatic corps, and eventual dismissal of Mátyás Rákosi illustrate this behavior.

Internal factors thus played a decisive role in the Hungarian Revolution, above all the popular dissatisfaction with the slow tempo of destalinization, the economic situation, and Hungary's lack of full sovereignty in the Soviet bloc that emerged after World War Two. Yet, external events in other bloc countries also played a key role.

Most scholars have focused on Soviet-Hungarian relations to discern causes of the conflict. The opening of Soviet bloc archives now permit scholars to gain a better understanding, not simply of Soviet behavior, but also of the behavior and motivation of the other communist states, and of the deeper nuances of intrabloc relations. Thus I also examined the influence that two Slavic states—Yugoslavia and Poland—exerted on Hungary. These two countries' politics figure especially prominently in the Soviet and Hungarian documents.

In particular, I illustrate how slow and tortuous the Yugoslav-Hungarian rapprochement was, particularly between May 1955 and February 1956. Having initiated the rift with Yugoslavia in 1948 and enlisted the support of the peoples' democracies in Tito-bashing, the USSR now discovered, ironically, that it could not so easily induce them (especially Hungary) to make up with Tito after Khrushchev's own trip to Belgrade in May 1955. Rákosi dragged his feet. While they inspired Hungarian intellectuals, the activities of the Yugoslav diplomats and journalists—propagating Tito's model of socialism ("the third path")—to some extent caused the Soviet leaders to misinterpret the origins of the revolutionary movement in Hungary. Soviet and Hungarian authorities believed only a small group of Hungarian intellectuals were disenchanting, while the workers and masses were "healthy." However, if the Yugoslav press and diplomatic corps were not properly censored, there might be an ideological "spillover effect" on the Hungarian people via the Yugoslav media.

Gomułka's selection as party leader inspired Imre Nagy and his supporters in Budapest, and the Polish success in defying the Kremlin emboldened the Petöfi Circle and the Hungarian students.

Western observers have long held an image of the Soviet Union as a crafty monolith that expertly, in the *realpolitik* tradition, intervened while the West was distracted by the Suez crisis. In fact, the documents reveal that the Soviet Union had difficulty working with its Hungarian allies. If Washington's problems with Paris and

London during the simultaneous Suez crisis stemmed from the Allies' bellicosity and obsolete colonial ambitions, Moscow's problems with Budapest stemmed from the pro-Soviet Hungarian leaders' failure to fight resolutely. In the fourth chapter of my study I analyze the Soviet army's performance in the second intervention on November 4, 1956, which improved significantly since the previous one on October 24. I also examine the ambiguous role of the Yugoslav leader Tito, who ended up supporting the Soviet use of military force against Hungary. I explain the hitherto murky circumstances surrounding Tito's decision to grant Imre Nagy political refuge in his Budapest embassy on the day of the invasion (November 4, 1956). Tito's reluctance to surrender Nagy—and the later Soviet abduction of him—chilled Soviet-Yugoslav relations once again.

#### Suggestions for Future Research Agendas

Although beyond the scope of my current study, it should be noted that leaders in the GDR, Czechoslovakia, Romania, and PRC also feared the possible unravelling of the Warsaw Pact and ideological "spillover" of anti-communist ideas across their own borders. A study based on the archival documents from those countries would make a significant contribution to the field.