

**Committee:** Historical Security Council

**Issue:** The Hungarian Revolution (04/11/1956)

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## INTRODUCTION

The Hungarian Revolution of 1956, which took place from 23 October until 10 November, was a nationwide revolution which led to the overthrowing of the ruling party, the Hungarian Working People's Party, and the policies imposed by the Soviet Union.

It was the first major threat to Soviet control and it began as a student protest. The government collapsed really fast as the revolution spread rapidly all across Hungary. The first phase of the revolution was won by the rebels and Imre Nagy, the former Prime Minister, took charge agreeing at the same time the establishment of a multiparty system.



**Image 1: Students protest in the first day of the Hungarian uprising in 1956**

Initially, the Soviets agreed to withdraw their army after Nagy's request. However, Nagy abolished one-party rule and announced the withdrawal of Hungary from the Warsaw Pact. On November 1, 1956, he declared Hungary neutral and asked for the support of the UN after facing the reluctance of Western powers in the prospect of a global fight.

Hundreds of Soviet tanks invaded Budapest and approximately 30,000 people were killed after the decision taken by the Soviet Union to take action against the Hungarian revolution. About 200,000 Hungarians found shelter to the west, leaving behind their properties, in order to avoid the penalties to be imposed by the Soviets.

The US administration, under Eisenhower, was severely criticized by conservatives for failing to give assistance and support to the Hungarian freedom fighters. However, there

is a misconception that the US government and its allies – Western Europe- provided help to the protesters, but that help never came.

The Hungarian uprising serves as an illustration of the fragility of communism in Eastern Europe illuminating the imminent end of the Soviet Empire.

## **DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS**

### **Revolution**

A revolution is defined as the violent attempt to change the current government or social status and replace it with a new system.

As Nagy's government stayed in power only for a short time, it is difficult to determine how radical the changes he brought would have been. The term revolution can be applied in this case as the protests initiated a procedure of break-through changes concerning the Hungarian's Worker's Party. The declaration of neutrality by Nagy's Government, which was accomplished after he declared his intention to withdraw from the Warsaw Pact, meant that Hungary would no longer be a part of the Soviet bloc or of the Western one. Another essential reason why this is classified as a revolution is the fact that violence was started by state actors and not by non-state ones.

### **The Warsaw Pact**

The Soviet Union and seven more Soviet satellite countries of Central and Eastern Europe [Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary, Poland and Romania (Albania withdrew in 1968)] were the founding members of a defense treaty named "the Warsaw Pact". Its formal name was "the Treaty of Friendship, Co-operation and Mutual Assistance" and was signed on 14 May 1955.

The Warsaw Pact and its member countries were representatives of the so-called Eastern bloc, while its equivalent, NATO, was the representative of the Western bloc. Having different ideologies, they created their own defenses which led to an arms race lasting throughout the Cold War.

An official declaration bringing an end to the Warsaw Pact came on 1 July 1991. After a while, the dissolution of the Soviet Union followed in December 1991.

### **The one-party state**

When one single political party is created and governs, then this political framework is defined as the one-party state. This means that the formation of other political parties is prohibited and the existence of only one party is legitimate.

In some countries, there are various political parties that have no chance of gaining power and only one can be in control of the country according to law. This is also called a one-party dominant state.

### **Intrastate conflict**

An intrastate armed conflict, a civil conflict, is a conflict between a government and a non-state group present within the relevant country. The first phase of the Hungarian revolution could be described as an intrastate conflict. The civilians revolted against the Hungarian government, and simultaneously against the Soviet Union. This action developed into street fighting between the Hungarian citizens and the Hungarian police, as well as the Soviet troops.

### **Interstate conflict**

“Interstate violence is a conflict between two or more states (both members of the international system), who use their respective national forces in the conflict.” This was the case in the second phase of the uprising, where the Hungarian people and Nagy’s government turned on the Soviet Union.

### **The Iron Curtain**

The boundary which separated Europe into two different parts and is chronologically placed between World War II and the Cold War is referred as the Iron Curtain. The Iron Curtain is the political, military, and ideological attempt by the Soviet Union after WW2 to isolate itself and its eastern and central European countries from having any contact with the non-communist countries of the West.

This term first appeared when Winston Churchill, the British Prime Minister, in a speech on March 5, 1946, stated “From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic, an iron curtain has descended across the Continent.”

Hungary was one of the countries that tried to bring an end to the existence of the Iron Curtain through its revolution and through the abolishment of one-party rule.



Image 2: Map of Europe showing the Iron Curtain dividing East from West

### Secret police

Secret police, also known as political police, is defined as the intelligence, security or police bodies of a government that operate secretly and often outside the legal system against a government's political rivals and protestors. The secret police is an organization characteristic of authoritarian states and is used to secure the political power of an individual dictator or a totalitarian regime, as well as debilitate the political opposition, usually by applying brutality, assassinations and torture.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

### Historical Background

After the Second World War, Hungary was absorbed as a satellite state of the Soviet Union. A communist government was established in 1953. Political opposition was formed and Matyas Rakosi, who was a strong supporter of Stalin, was appointed leader, but was overthrown shortly thereafter.

In 1953, Imre Nagy became the prime minister of Hungary and his government followed a socialist policy as he wished to slow down industrialism and give space to the Hungarian people. Nagy was removed from his duties in 1955 as his economic policy greatly

deviated from that of the Soviet Union. However, the interest he showed towards the Hungarian people and his socialistic approach won his fellow Hungarian's hearts.

Rakosi regained control, but his Stalinist leadership style, such as his use of the "secret police" to brutally put down opponents, made him deeply unpopular with the people of Hungary as did the low living standards.

In June, 1956, in the spirit of de-Stalinization, Rakosi was forced by the Soviets to resign as general secretary. Nikita Sergeyevich Khrushchev, the Soviet leader, inspired the Hungarians with his policies of de-Stalinization and led them into strongly criticizing the existing Soviet regime and into seeking their freedom and the amelioration of relations with the West.

Similar events had taken place both in East Germany in 1953 and in Poland in 1956, thus threatening the unity of the Soviet bloc. However, the Hungarian revolution was totally unexpected due to the relative stability of the regime at the time.

### **The first phase of the revolution**

It was in October 1956, when many protestors, namely students and workers, waving Hungarian flags with the Communist Emblem in the center cut out, asked for a political system based on the principles of democracy and liberation from the Soviet dynasty.

On October 22, 1956, a large group of students gathered in a hall in Budapest and gave their approval for a manifesto which asked for the removal of the Soviet army from Hungary, free elections, freedom of association, economic reform and the return of Nagy as Prime Minister. The next day, thousands of protestors chanting "Russians go home!" gathered in the streets of the capital city, tore down a statue of Stalin and released political prisoners. It erupted into an active fighting. The first stage of the revolution had been performed successfully against Soviet troops.



**Image 3: Stalin's monument was torn down on October 23, 1956, by enraged anti-Soviet crowds during Hungary's October Revolution.**

### **Nagy's actions**

Taking into consideration the public outcry, communist party officials

appoint Imre Nagy as the new Prime Minister. In order to restore peace and order, Nagy asks the Soviets to withdraw their military forces. Conflicts ended on 28th October, 1956 leading the Hungarians to believe that the Soviet Union had completely removed its army.

Nagy sparked the Hungarian Uprising led by the constantly raising public dissatisfaction. He made public statements preaching the importance of restoring a democratic regime, the withdrawal of Soviet troops and the end of the “secret police”. It was on November 1<sup>st</sup> that he made public his intention to abolish the one-party rule and to remove Hungary’s participation from the Warsaw Pact. In this way, he defied the existing Iron Curtain created by the USSR. His actions triggered a Soviet military intervention.

Supporting the second phase of the revolution, which had just broken out, Hungarian soldiers passed their weapons to the revolutionaries. It was at this time that the intrastate conflict progressed into an interstate one.

### **The reply of the USSR**

On November 4, 1956, Soviet tanks invade the capital, Budapest, aiming to stifle the Hungarian uprising.

At 5:20 a.m., Hungarian Prime Minister Imre Nagy announced the invasion to the nation in a grim, 35-second broadcast, declaring: “This is Imre Nagy speaking to you, the president of the Council of Ministers of the People’s Republic of Hungary. At dawn today, Soviet forces began an attack on our capital, obviously with the aim of toppling the legal, democratic Hungarian government. Our troops are fighting. The government is in place. I am making this fact known to our people and the whole world”. Nagy also appealed to the United Nations to support the revolution and defend Hungary’s neutrality.

## **MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED**

### **The United States of America**

Havoc in Washington was caused after the news of the Hungarian Revolution as the American government possessed no strategic scenario concerning such an unlikely event. It was then that Eisenhower’s government realized its limited potential for intervention in an anti-Soviet uprising in the Soviet sphere of interest.

In October 1956, Dwight D. Eisenhower stated: “The United States considers the development in Hungary as being a renewed expression of the intense desire for freedom long held by the Hungarian people. The demands reportedly made by the students and the

working people clearly fall within the framework of those human rights to which all are entitled, which are affirmed in the charter of the United Nations[...].The United States deplores the intervention of Soviet military forces which, under the treaty of peace, should have been withdrawn [...]. The heart of America goes out to the people of Hungary.”

President Eisenhower of the USA said “I feel with the Hungarian people.” J F Dulles, American Secretary of State, said “To all those suffering under communist slavery, let us say you can count on us.” Here, it is worth noting that Eisenhower’s main target was the restriction of communism and a decrease in federal deficits. But the USA took no further action.

The US were incapable of forcing the Soviet Union to give up on Hungary as they possessed no political means. Furthermore, any intervention by the US would have certainly resulted in a direct conflict and the outbreak of the Third World War would have been imminent.

### **Western Europe**

Western Europe took no diplomatic action nor pressured politically the Soviet Union in relation to the Hungarian crisis. Instead, they placed the case relatively early before the UN asking for an urgent session of the Security Council.

### **The Union of Soviet Socialist Republic**

The intervention in Hungary and the suppression of the revolution was not performed peacefully nor with diplomacy by the Soviet Union.

For this reason, it is not unreasonable to say that the actions taken in order to handle the crisis of East-Central Europe between 1953 and 1981, including 23 October 1956, were the only wrong decisions made as the USSR was interested only in its own imperial sovereignty.

The invasion of 4 November, 1956 was the result of a wrong political decision that caused a chain of events, which after a certain point could not be handled politically anymore. By the end of October, the fast collapse of the communist system was more obvious and it was a direct threat to the integrity of the Soviet bloc. At that time, the armed intervention was a one-way road for the Soviets.

The strict policy the Soviet Union adopted especially against Hungary might have been the reason why a stable communist regime was so easily demolished.

## Poland

On 28 June, 1956 worker’s demonstrations took place in Poland demanding better working conditions. The USSR suppressed those massive civil movements using violence. Almost a hundred people lost their lives.

The Polish Uprising inspired the Hungarians who had now decided to “follow the Polish way”. In October, organizations brought together students and intellectuals and organized demonstrations in major cities of the country demanding the return of Imre Nagy as Prime Minister. A political gathering in support of Poland under the auspices of the Polish-Hungarian friendship was held.

When the Hungarian Revolution broke out, the news of the street fighting in Budapest reached Poland. According to the Hungarian historian Janos Tischler, the Polish offered assistance to the Hungarian rebels as they provided them with supplies of food, blood and medicines. From his point of view, "It was no coincidence that Poland was the first country in Central Europe to commemorate the Hungarian Rising." and he supports the opinion that this was the beginning of an enduring friendship between Poland and Hungary.

### TIMELINE OF EVENTS

| Date                       | Description of Event  |
|----------------------------|---|
| 5 March 1953               | Stalin’s death  |
| August 1952 - 13 June 1953 | Matyas Rakosi serves as the Prime Minister of Hungary.  |
| 17 June 1953               | The uprising of East Germany against the USSR for better living conditions.   |
| July 1953                  | Imre Nagy becomes Prime Minister in communist Hungary for the first time.   |
| 18 April 1955              | -Nagy is discharged<br>-Rakosi is restored to power   |
| 18 June 1956               | Rakosi is removed from office   |
| 28 June 1956               | The Polish uprising against the USSR for better working conditions.   |
| 22 October 1956            | 5,000 students call for the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Hungary and the establishment of a more democratic political system. |
| 23 October 1956            | -Begin of the first phase of the revolution<br>-Protesters pull down the statue of Stalin.  |
| 24 October 1956            | Imre Nagy is re-appointed Hungary’s new Prime Minister.   |

|                      |  |
|----------------------|--|
| 26-27 October 1956   | Nagy asks the USSR to withdraw their military forces from Hungary.   |
| 28 October 1956      | The US and Western European States propose forwarding the issue to the Agenda of the Security Council.   |
| 29 October 1956      | -The USSR withdraws its military forces from Hungary.<br>-Start of the Suez Crisis   |
| 1 November 1956      | -Nagy announces his intention to abolish the one-party rule and to withdraw Hungary from the Warsaw Pact.<br>-Nagy declares Hungary's neutrality and asks for the support of the UN. |
| From 1 November 1956 | Begin of the second phase of the revolution  |
| 4 November 1956      | -Soviet tanks enter Budapest.<br>-Nagy seeks asylum at the Yugoslav Embassy in Budapest.   |

### **UN INVOLVEMENT: RELEVANT RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS**

As the USA tried to alter international public opinion for its inactiveness concerning the issue of Hungary and in order to maintain its political prestige, three Western Great Powers, namely the USA, the United Kingdom and France, made an official request to the UN Security Council. They took the initiative to propose putting the question of Soviet intervention in Hungary on the agenda of its session on 28 October, following US encouragement.

### **POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS**

The suppression of the Hungarian people and a desires to keep their rights unviolated has led the United Nations Security Council to take into consideration the current situation provoked by the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. The Council feels the need to exercise its duties and fulfil its role in maintaining international peace and security. Consequently, some possible solutions to the topic may include:

#### **The formation of a Special Committee on the issue**

The formation of appropriate recommendations after calling an emergency special session of the General Assembly. Moreover, the establishment of a Special Committee on this issue is proposed in order to investigate Hungary's 1956 Revolution and the conditions under which Soviet military intervention took place.

The USSR and Hungary should be urged to fully cooperate with this Committee and free entrance and the movement of officials and members of the committee within the country should be legally-binding.

Furthermore, every Member State should be asked to pass on to the committee all relative information on the subject inquired including all the necessary information, such as eye-witness testimonies and crucial evidence gathered through diplomatic channels. Finally, they should collaborate in obtaining such evidence.

### **Monitoring of developments in Hungary**

The continuation of the monitoring of developments in Hungary is recommended. The formation of a monitoring group is suggested as it is vital to keep track of future changes.

### **Imposition of economic sanctions against the USSR**

The UN should place economic sanctions (trade barriers, tariffs, restrictions on financial transactions) /an embargo against the USSR because of a breach of human rights and the use of illegitimate military intervention.

### **Suspension of the USSR in global events**

As the USSR's actions were found to be illegitimate and violated human rights, penalties, such as its exclusion from the Olympic Games and other international competitions, should be imposed in order to prevent the USSR and other countries performing similar operations and adopting illegal activities.

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