

FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTED TO THE SUCCESS OF THE
REVOLUTIONARY FORCES IN THE EARLY PHASE
OF THE HUNGARIAN REVOLUTION OF 1956

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ABSTRACT

FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTED TO THE SUCCESS OF THE REVOLUTIONARY FORCES IN THE EARLY PHASE OF THE HUNGARIAN REVOLUTION OF 1956, by MAJ Zoltán Virág, 138 pages.

The aim of this thesis is to provide insight and analysis of the factors that contributed to the military success of the revolutionary forces against the Hungarian and Soviet armed and security forces during the early phase of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution 1956.

The thesis in the beginning substantiates an overall comprehension of the Hungarian political, economical, and social conditions from 1953 till 1956. The presentation of this time period facilitates the understanding of the circumstances leading to the revolution break out. Furthermore, thesis examines the legal and legitimacy questions of the Soviet military intervention in the framework of the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance, commonly known as the Warsaw Pact.

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In summary, the reader can gain an insight into this troubled time period of the Hungarian history, which proved to be a determinative event for the future of Hungary, and made its influence felt after the years of the regime change started in the of 1989.

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ACRONYMS

AVH	State Protection Authority
HWPP	Hungarian Working People's Party
MOD	Ministry of Defense
MOI	Ministry of the Interior
PAOH	People's Army of Hungary
PD	Police Department
RWPG	Revolutionary Worker-Peasant Government
UN	United Nations

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CHAPTER 1

HUNGARY 1956, REVOLUTION OR FREEDOM FIGHT: WAS THERE LEGITIMACY ISSUE REGARDING SOVIET MILITARY INTERVENTION

23 October 1956, is a day that will live forever in the annals of free men and nations. It was a day of courage, conscience and triumph. No other day since history began has shown more clearly the eternal unquenchability of man's desire to be free, whatever the odds against success, whatever the sacrifice required.

— John F. Kennedy

The Hungarian Revolution of 1956 broke out on 23 October 1956 with a demonstration organized by university and college students in Budapest. Within a short time, an incredibly huge number of intellectuals and workers joined the protest. They primarily wanted to achieve personal changes in the political elite, in order to open new opportunities for the desired political, economical, and social reform measures. The will of the people to deliver their long suppressed grievances and messages to the government went beyond all expectations. The Revolution achieved an unquestionable victory by 30 October 1956 after a long and costly fight. Hungary could only enjoy its victory and independence until 4 November 1956, when Soviet armed forces launched a second attack based on their preponderant military power. The Soviet forces had been actively involved in the fights against the revolutionary forces since the night of 23 September 1956, when the siege against the Radio Budapest building took place. The Soviet presence and involvement in the fights against Hungarian people united the majority of the nation against the common enemy, its Soviet occupiers. Therefore, 1956 was not only a Revolution against the Hungarian Communist political leadership in office, but a desperate freedom fight of our nation against the oppressor as well.

This freedom fight mobilized a large segment of the population, especially the youngsters. Numerous revolutionary groups sprung into existence with the purpose of entering battle against the invading Soviet troops. In Budapest, one of the most successful and organized groups was located in the vicinity of the Corvin Passage. The group named itself the Corvinists, and among others it was commanded by Gergely Pongrátz during the last days of the Revolution.¹ The joint Hungarian-Soviet units were not able to crush the resistance of this particular group until 6 November 1956, despite numerous offensive attempts. Eventually, the Soviets initiated the final siege with two hours of preparatory artillery fire, when according to Marshall Georgy Zhukov's report the Soviets forces surrounded and captured approximately 1,500 rebels.²



Figure 1. The Corvin Passage

Source: Hungarian Revolution of 1956 Website, Photographs of the Revolution, <http://www.magyarforradalom1956.hu/> (accessed 20 December 2010).

The area this group occupied was an important traffic junction, and besides that it also had a great symbolic importance due to its proximity to the Kilián Barracks. The Kilián Barracks were situated close to many important political and infrastructural institutions like the Radio of Budapest, so who ever controlled the barracks, had an advantage in controlling the surroundings areas. Furthermore, Colonel Pál Maléter who took command of this military installation on 27 October 1956, established and maintained coordination with the revolutionary groups, especially with the Corvinists, operating in this area.³ The barracks were controlled by the government forces; however, control changed hands depending on the momentary power relation with the belligerents. The group occupied the surrounding buildings looking over the small and narrow streets which severely restricted vehicle movement. These buildings offered protection and advantageous fields of fire. As a result of their favorably fortified fighting positions and well functioning verbal communication system, the rebels conducted numerous effective ambushes, inflicting heavy casualties on mostly Soviet patrols. The group mainly supplied itself with confiscated weapons and ammunition. This group also captured enemy transportation assets, including trucks and armored personal carriers, crew served weapons, and artillery pieces in a great number. A nearby gas station provided fuel resupply and a sizeable public cook-house, run by locals, also substantially facilitated the logistical supply of the fighters. The group soon attained a great reputation for itself, resulting in a great number of volunteers wanting to join.

The previous failed military actions against the Corvinist group particularly frustrated the Soviet leadership. Therefore, the Soviets suspended further offensive operations against them until actionable intelligence could be acquired on their strength,

composition, and disposition. After gaining this intelligence information, which later proved to be inaccurate, the planning for the attack against the Corvin Passage resumed on 26 October 1956. General Obaturov, commander of the 33rd mechanized infantry division was tasked to annihilate the opposing revolutionary forces. Many courses of actions were taken into consideration, from extensive artillery bombardment of the revolutionary strong points to subsurface infiltration through the underground sewer system. Eventually, the decision was made to conduct an infantry assault by advancing on the streets from multiple directions supported with tank units.⁴

The planning and preparation was based on poor intelligence information, which brought about the failure of the mission. The subordinate commanders recognized the unfeasibility of the plan, but General Obaturov smothered them by not tolerating any criticism. The coordination and synchronization between the Hungarian and Soviet forces was also unsatisfactory. Furthermore, the Hungarian infantry forces were planned to conduct the assault against the buildings and clear them. These troops were to be transported on BTR armed personal carriers, which the infantrymen dreaded. The reason being that these vehicles had no overhead armor protection, which made them and the soldiers riding on them extremely vulnerable in urban environment. A large number of infantry soldiers riding on those vehicles had been shot or set on fire by Molotov-cocktails, dying terrible deaths during the previous operations against the revolutionary forces. Therefore, these vehicles quickly earned the infamous nickname of the “moving casket.”

The actual attack was launched on 28 October 1956. On that the morning, a T-34 armor platoon was sent in first to conduct reconnaissance. They never returned, therefore

after more than an hour another T-54 armor platoon was sent in to assess the status of the reconnaissance element. Only two of them returned, one of them damaged. The commander of the T-54 platoon reported that all three of the T-34s were on fire, and he also had lost one of his T-54 tanks. After this unfavorable turn of events, the Soviets decided to abort the mission.⁵

As a result of constant combat actions, many Hungarian and Soviet soldiers became prisoners of war after being captured by different rebel units. The revolutionary groups, among them the Corvinists, treated them in compliance with the Geneva Convention and also conducted regular prisoner's exchanges. Interestingly, during these events the Soviets regarded the rebels as an equal belligerent party and treated them accordingly.

After looking at these past events, the question is raised about what legitimacy did the Soviet government have to conduct military intervention against a sovereign state and intrude into its internal affairs. Did the Soviet troops act on behalf of the Warsaw Pact or was it an independent Soviet military operation? The Soviet government made a statement on the 30 October 1956 that the Soviet troops had been operating under the laws governed by the Warsaw Pact Treaty. The Hungarians were officially led to believe for decades that this military invasion against them was accepted by the Warsaw Pact countries and was based on mutual assistance requested by the Hungarian government.

The fact is that the Warsaw Pact was established to eliminate external threats that may jeopardize any of the signatory countries; it was not meant to fight against member states or suppress internal reform movements, which is stated in Article 4.

Article 4. In the event of an armed attack in Europe on one or several states that are signatories of the treaty by any state or group of states, each state that is a party to this treaty shall, in the exercise of the right to individual or collective self-defense in accordance with Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations Organization, render the state or states so attacked immediate assistance, individually and in agreement with other states that are parties to this treaty, by all the means it may consider necessary, including the use of armed force.⁶

Examining the Charter of Foundation of the Warsaw Pact, and the Soviet political decision made during the uprising, it becomes obvious that the Soviet government did not act according to the international laws and agreements in force. As no external attack was threatening Hungary, it had no lawful right to conduct the offensive operations. The official Soviet political statements also bolster this supposition of unlawful Soviet military activity. Technically, the Soviet leadership evaluated the Hungarian Revolution as a “disturbance threatening the foundation of the people’s democracy.”⁷

Moreover, no other Warsaw Pact countries, nor the Supreme Command of the Unified Armed Forces of the Warsaw Pact, were involved in the decision making process and the final approval, which entirely contradicts the Article 3 of the Charter.⁸

Article 3. The contracting parties shall take council among themselves on all important international questions relating to their common interests, guided by the interests of strengthening international peace and security. They shall take council among themselves immediately, whenever, in the opinion of any of them, there has arisen the threat of an armed attack on one or several states that are signatories of the treaty, in the interests of organizing their joint defense and of upholding peace and security.⁹

From 23 October 1956 until 2 November 1956, Marshall Sokolovskij, the Chief of Staff of the Soviet armed forces was in charge of the Soviet military operations. He received orders and directions directly from the Kremlin. Marshall Konev, Commanding Officer of the Supreme Command of the Unified Armed Forces of the Warsaw Pact took over the command on 2 November 1956, after the first phases of the operation were

already accomplished. An interesting addition to the history is that the Commanding Officer of the Unified Armed Forces was the first Vice Minister of the Soviet armed forces making the Warsaw Pact chain of command even more ambiguous.¹⁰ Does that mean that the armies of the different Warsaw Pact countries were basically part of the Soviet armed forces or did the Soviet political leadership exercise authority over the armed forces of the different nations? Imre Nagy wrote in 1957, while in custody, that “what the Soviet government and the Soviet Communist Party cannot achieve through political advice, directives, will be achieved by military means provided by the Warsaw Pact.”¹¹

Most of the Soviet soldiers regarded the fight against the Hungarian forces as a continuation of World War II. This is mirrored in Marshall Konev’s Order #1 saying that “We must not forget that in the previous war Hungary alongside with the Hitlerite Germany entered into war against our homeland!”¹² The Soviet soldiers became one with this idea and caused extensive property damage to the country and inflicted heavy casualties on its people.

To get a better understanding of the Soviet standpoint we should read Nyikita Szergejevic Khrushcev’s discussion with Josip Broz Tito explaining the reason for the Soviet intervention:¹³

The Soviet Union cannot stand on the side line and watch the events unfold in Hungary, because if we did so, the capitalists would think that we are either weak or silly, which is the same. The capitalists would push their positions as far as the border of the Soviet Union. As long as Stalin was in office, everybody remained silent and there was no dissent. When new Soviet leadership appeared, many viewed the revolution as a threat from Hungary. Hungary has already waged war twice against Russia during this century. In the Soviet Army there is a strong animosity toward Hungary, and now the Hungarians are forming an alliance again with the West to turn against the Russians.¹⁴

Examining the question from the Hungarian political perspective, the legitimate government was led by Imre Nagy from 24 October 1956.¹⁵ The Soviet troops were ordered to deploy and support the Hungarian government at Ernő Gerő's telephone request.¹⁶ The official request was not sent until 27 October 1956, which was signed by András Hegedűs the previous Premier, who had been replaced on 24 October 1956.¹⁷ As a conclusion, Hegedűs had no legal authorization to make this request. Moreover, from 30 October 1956, Imre Nagy, the legally elected Premier of Hungary, strongly opposed any further Soviet military intervention against Hungary. He further demanded for the Soviet political management to withdraw the Soviet Army from Hungary. He urged the importance of his demands in both bilateral negotiations between the Hungarian and Soviet governments, and at international forums like the United Nations (UN). After summarizing the previously written assertions, it can be stated that the Soviet military intervention against Hungary was legally unfounded, and was an intrusion into the internal affairs of a sovereign country.

¹Gergely Pongráz (18 February 1932 to 18 May 2005) was second and last commander of the Revolutionary Armed Group of the Corvin Passage in Budapest from the 1 November 1956. The Corvin Passage Group was one of biggest and most efficient groups of revolutionaries. This group was also one of the few pockets of resistance that could hold for days at the sacrifice of severe losses against the Soviet forces after launching the "Operation Whirlwind" commenced on 4 November 1956. At the end of November Pongráz was compelled to flee from Hungary with his family. They immigrated to Austria with the help of Hungarian soldiers. He lived in the USA where he spent most of his exile, and Spain before finally returning back to Hungary in 1991. From the defeat of the Revolution until his death he was an active member of numerous organizations formed by former Hungarian revolutionaries.

²Georgy Konstantinovich Zhukov (1 December 1896 to 18 June 1974) was the most dedicated Soviet military officer holding the rank of marshal. During World War II his role was determining to liberate the Soviet Union and defeat the Axis Powers. In 1956 Zhukov was in charge, as Soviet Defense Minister, of the military intervention against Hungary to suppress the Hungarian Revolution of 1956. In the early phase of the

Revolution he recommended to Khrushchev the deployment of the Soviet troops. However, after the unfavorable unfold of the events he advised the Soviet political leadership to withdraw the Soviet armed forces to prevent the further escalation of the armed conflict. His viewpoint changed after Hungary expressed its desire to resign membership of the Warsaw Pact.

³Pál Maléter (4 September 1917 to 16 June 1958) was a Hungarian professional military officer. He was appointed to be the Defense Minister from 2 November 1956. After the Revolution he was prosecuted and sentenced to death together with Imre Nagy.

⁴Miklós Horváth, *1956 hadikrónikája* [The War Chronicle of 1956] (Budapest: Akadémia Kiadó, 2003), 230.

⁵Ibid., 231.

⁶Internet Modern History Sourcebook, "The Warsaw Pact, 1955," <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1955warsawpact.html> (accessed 29 March 2011).

⁷Horváth, *1956 hadikrónikája*, 455.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Internet Modern History Sourcebook.

¹⁰Horváth, *1956 hadikrónikája*, 453-454.

¹¹The Warsaw Treaty (1955 to 1991) is the informal name for the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance, commonly known as the Warsaw Pact established by the Soviet Union on 14 May 1955. The treaty was a mutual defense treaty with the involvement of eight Eastern European communist countries.

¹²Horváth, *1956 hadikrónikája*, 455.

¹³Nikita Sergeyevich Khrushchev (15 April 1894 to 11 September 1971) was a significant Soviet Communist politician during the Cold War Era. He served as First Secretary of the Communist party of the Soviet Union from 1953 to 1964, and as Chairman of the Council of Ministers, or Premier, from 1958 to 1964.

¹⁴Horváth, *1956 hadikrónikája*, 456.

¹⁵Imre Nagy (7 June 1896 to 16 June 1958) was a Hungarian communist politician who was appointed Chairman of the Council of the Ministers of the People's Republic of Hungary twice, first in 1953, and second in 1956 during the Hungarian Revolution. After the Revolution was defeated by the Soviet invasion, the Hungarian and Soviet Communist leadership took him into custody and his trial resulted in his execution on charges of treason two years later.

¹⁶Erő Gerő (born Ernő Singer) (8 July 1898 to 12 March 1980) was a one of the most influential members of the communist leadership of Hungarian Working People's Party until 25 October 1956, when the Soviet Politburo demanded his resignation for aggravating the situation during the beginning of the revolution.

¹⁷András Hegedűs (31 October 1922 to 23 October 1999) was a member of the Hungarian Communist Party. He served as the Chairman of the Council of Ministers in 1955-1956. Along with Ernő Gerő, he was one of the most hated Communist Politicians in Hungary. During the Revolution he was replaced by Imre Nagy, and he escaped to the Soviet Union on 28 October 1956. In 1958 he returned to Hungary and taught sociology.

CHAPTER 2

INTRODUCTION TO THE ROAD LEADING TO THE HUNGARIAN REVOLUTION OF 1956

This chapter consist of three subchapters. The first subchapter presents the problem statement including the primary and secondary research questions. The next two subchapters provide insight for the reader on the historical succession of events leading to the Revolution. In particular, the second subchapter describes the time period between 1953-1955, when Imre Nagy served his first term as Premier. The third discusses the events after Nagy was removed until 22 October 1956, the very last day before the Hungarian Revolution of 1956.

The Problem Statement

The purpose of this study is to reveal and analyze the factors that contributed to the successful military operations against the Hungarian government and the Soviet intervention, by studying the diplomatic, informational, economic, and most importantly the military perspectives of the events. Among the previously titled factors, I intend to focus on the activity of the Hungarian and Soviet armed and security forces during the Revolution of 1956. In order to find the answer, I identified the following research questions:

Primary Research Question

How and why did the revolutionary forces militarily succeed in the early phases of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956?

Secondary Questions

1. What diplomatic, informational, and economic factors contributed to the initial success of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956?

2. What were the effects of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 on Hungarian society, the Hungarian armed and security forces, and the Hungarian-Soviet official political and military relationship, after it was defeated?

The Soviet and the Hungarian political and military leadership truly underestimated the capabilities of the Hungarian revolutionary forces in 1956. The Soviet leadership made the assumption that the same type of military operation, which was accomplished in Berlin in 1953, would successfully suppress the Hungarian Revolution beginning to take shape. What the Soviet troops had conducted in Berlin was a massive deployment of armored troops, which effectively intimidated the local population and prevented the uprising before it broke out. In Hungary in 1956, the Soviets wrongfully disregarded the fact that the Hungarian population had generally acquired a high level of military training. First of all, at that time, the Hungarians were quite accustomed to military drills. The constant alertness, readiness, and the continuous preparedness for a future war between the socialist and capitalist nations required a high level of military training for both the professional soldiers and the conscripts. Moreover, the youngsters began to participate in basic military training events as early as elementary school, in this training they learned weapon skills, shooting, and basic movement techniques.

Furthermore, the revolutionaries soon realized, and took advantage of the weaknesses of the slower and less maneuverable armored forces confined by urbanized terrain. The revolutionaries developed effective tactics, techniques, and procedures, using

mostly field expedient solutions based on the limited resources and assets they had available. These military skills enabled the revolutionary forces to achieve success against the Soviet forces during the early phases of the Revolution, as a result causing severe casualties and equipment losses to the Soviet forces.

The Nagy Administration

Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin, the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union's Central Committee died on 5 March 1953.¹ The Hungarian population received the news of his death with mixed feelings. There were significant differences perceptible between the Hungarian official statements, and the reactions of the ordinary Hungarian population. The Hungarian government passed a resolution expressing:

The Parliament as testimony of the forever lasting gratitude of the Hungarian nation, incorporates Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin's memory in law in recognition of his merits for liberating the Hungarian people, achieving and maintaining the sovereignty of the Hungarian nation, the political, economic, cultural ascension of Hungarian workers.²

However, not all Hungarians felt this way. The following excerpts from contemporary criminal records picture the general feeling of the populace.

Károly Tatai, 66 years old, former intelligence officer for the Hungarian Chiefs of Staff, currently unemployed made the following statements: I wish that retired post office robber had already perished during the world war, because we would not have to live in a world where the people live in constant fear. The Soviet Union robbed different territories and now it is begging for peace. The Russian will no longer be capable of keeping their puppets at the head of the government. The democracy is corrupt, and the whole system will be changed very soon. –Gyuláné Maczó, 41 years old, wife of a teacher. On the 24 April, she made the following statements in one of the textile shops in

Gyöngyös city: –Abundant crop will be in the Soviet Union, because the biggest piece of manure is already under the ground.”³

After Stalin`s death, the Soviet political leadership experienced significant change. The new leadership intended to implement wholesale changes in both its domestic and foreign policies. As a result, an explicit abatement process started between the Eastern and the Western Bloc. The aim was to restore the previously decayed political relationships, especially with Yugoslavia, and to solve the sensitive diplomatic issues of Germany and Austria. Due to Hungary`s geopolitical location, and its historical background, the Soviet government intended to use Hungary as a key mediator to reach the solution. To fulfill this task, the internal problems had to be solved first, meaning that Hungarian government required significant changes to correct its mismanagement.

The forced nationalization of private industrial companies and agricultural farms, along with the confiscation of private properties had ruined a previously functional economy and had a severe impact on Hungary. In 1953, the economy was on the verge of collapse, the living standard was deteriorating, and the dissatisfaction and frustration of the local population with the current system was increasing. The situation was steadily indicating increasing possibilities of an imminent danger from an outbreak of violence or revolution.

Sensing unrest in Hungary, and after the East Berlin revolt of 17 June 1953, the Soviet political leadership realized the importance of taking urgent measures to implement changes in Hungary. The Soviet Politburo summoned the delegation of the Hungarian government to Moscow in June. The delegation was led by Mátyás Rákosi, Secretary-General of the Hungarian Working People`s Party (HWPP) and President of

the Council of Ministers.⁴ The Soviet politicians demanded changes in the political leadership in Hungary, and requested economic stimulus measures. They strongly criticized the heavy rate of industrialization at the expense of the agricultural sector, which had no deep roots in Hungary. The previously flourishing private agricultural enterprises were nationalized, strangling production and exploiting the peasants. Intolerably high taxes were imposed on the peasants, barely allowing them to make ends meet. The revenue coming from the high taxation was needed to be invested to maintain the rate of the forced development of its heavy industry. In addition to that, the peasants were also to hand in a certain amount of food they produced to supply the urbanized areas. On top of all that, the government widely applied state sponsored terror to suppress malcontents and intimidate the population. Even the Soviets disputed the efficiency of the terror and the so-called “administrative regulations” implemented by the Ministry of the Interior (MOI) and Ministry of Justice. The Soviets asked the question: “Is it acceptable that in Hungary of the population of 9,500,000 that 1,500,000 individuals were prosecuted during two and half years?”⁵

As a solution, Soviet leadership led by Nikita Sergejevic Khrushchev proclaimed that the current Hungarian Premier, Rákosi be replaced by Imre Nagy in 1953.⁶ The Hungarian delegation had no choice other than to concur with the Soviet proposal. This decision stimulated jealousy and resentment from Rákosi against Nagy. After this decision Rákosi, attempted to recruit political allies for resistance against Nagy and the new political direction.

After his inauguration on 4 July 1953, Imre Nagy presented his inaugural speech as the new Premier in the Parliament. Nagy the former Minister of Agriculture, at that

point was not entirely prepared to govern. His overall knowledge on the extent of the crisis regarding every state sector was shallow. However, Nagy instead of implementing small scale corrective measures, he initiated a comprehensive reform program. His policies were organized around five areas.

As his first policy, Nagy implemented a redirection of the economy. He reduced the forced heavy industry development and investments. As result, new financial resources became available, which were invested into the consumer industry, agriculture development and housing construction.⁷ This particular provision upset politicians and supporters around Rákosi, particularly those individuals involved in the heavy industry sector, factory directors and high ranking party members. The greatest objector was Gerő who had previously been in charge of industrial planning and development, and whose previous activity was called into question by this measure. Gerő began actively seeking political alliance with Rákosi to impede Nagy's reform efforts. Furthermore, this step questioned the fundamentals and tenets of the communist state structure based on the ruling working class of the heavy industry sector. First of all, according to the communist philosophers, the developmental results of the heavy industry embodied the undisputable superiority of the socialist planned economy over the capitalist private economy. Secondly, the communist state was theoretically built on the working class, especially coming from the heavy industry. These heavy industry workers, like smelters, forge men, engine builders, miners were privileged, and make higher salaries than the average worker. The redundancy of the heavy industry corresponded to the decreasing number of workers, meaning smaller support and a shrinking foundation for the Communist Party.⁸

The second measure of his stimulus package addressed the agricultural sector. He stopped the forced nationalization of the private farms and provided a legal opportunity for farmers to leave the already nationalized collective farms. The high delivery obligation imposed on the peasants was reduced, and the lease of uncultivated agricultural lands became available. The anti-reformist politicians were outraged and rejecting these government policies. Conversely, the general population reaction was very popular and welcoming. People living in the countryside celebrated the decision by dancing and singing.⁹

The aim of the third, and most significant package, was to raise living standards. The government decreased the financial burden of the population by cutting taxes and lowered the prices of goods. Simultaneously, the operating budget of the bureaucratic state apparatus, Police Department (PD) and other state security organizations to include the People's Army of Hungary (PAOH) was reduced.¹⁰

The most successful area was the fourth measure, amnesty dispositions. Nagy's government released thousands of political convicts, abolished fines, closed internment camps, and halted deportations.¹¹ As a result of this government policy 758,611 individuals were granted amnesty.¹² The government granted rehabilitation to freed political victims. This raised the sensitive issue of calling to account the leadership of the HWPP, most notably, Rákosi who was largely responsible for violations of the law and human rights infringements. He realized the danger of his situation, and attempted to stop or at least slow down, the rehabilitation and investigation process. This was also noted by the population. Rákosi in this regard heavily relied on the Állam Védelmi Hatóság [State

Protection Authority] (AVH). This organization was like a state within the state with special purview and authority.¹³

Finally, the fifth and last package of the reform measures was designed to reorganize and reform the government, and most importantly, the entire Party structure. Nagy wanted to separate government functions and institutions from the HWPP. Nagy, as a truly committed communist, intended to reestablish and perpetuate the reputation of the Communist Party and its ideology. At the same time he also wanted to establish the foundation of his political reform plan. He attempted to improve the communication and information flow between government and the population through the media. The new government formed the Information Department of the Council of the Ministers to inform the population. The government also established the Patriotic Popular Front to provide the possibility for ordinary people to politicize and convey messages to the government and the Party. This package was the least successful, and met the heaviest resistance from Party leaders who eventually characterized Nagy as being an enemy of the HWPP.¹⁴

The reform packages certainly achieved some important results. However, there were no significant breakthroughs in any of the previously discussed areas, except for the amnesty policy. The lack of progress came about due to constantly increasing resistance and the undermining efforts by Party leaders supported Rákosi. By the spring of 1954, Rákosi and his circle had successfully isolated Nagy and his followers in the HWPP and the government. Rákosi and his supporters managed to entirely destroy the Soviet Politburo's trust of Nagy by sending secret and deceitful reports to Moscow stating that Nagy's political platform is entirely against the recognized communist principals, thus jeopardizing the unity of the political leadership and the interest of the working people

representing the Hungarian people's democracy. Rákosi further asserted that Nagy intended to introduce rightist political statecraft to intentionally hinder the industrial and agricultural development, and the necessary improvement of the living standard.¹⁵

The unfolding international politics was also unfavorable for Nagy's government. The Soviet-Yugoslav reconciliation process remained unproductive until 1955 and the Soviet attempts to reunite Germany failed. Furthermore, in 1954, the German Federal Republic was recognized and its admission to North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was ratified. As a result, the Soviet Union assessed these events as a severe threat. In response to this the Soviet Union initiated the foundation of the Warsaw Pact.

As the Hungarian situation failed to show signs of improvement in accordance with Soviet criterion and expectations, the Soviet Politburo summoned the Hungarian leadership again on 12 January 1955. Moreover, Nagy's plans to segregate government functions from the Party influence, and his public statements on the necessity of Party reform made Soviet leaders suspicious. As a result of Rákosi and his followers' underhanded maneuvers, the Soviet tone towards Nagy was strongly changed, and became questioning and critical. The Soviets demanded an immediate change in the direction of reform programs, however, they still wanted the economic issues resolved. Rákosi also attained what he had been longing for; he was restored to his leading position in the HWPP. Even with his return to power, he was not fully satisfied. Nagy and his government were unable to continue his work as Premier, and cooperate with the Party led by Rákosi. Consequently, Nagy requested the Soviet Politburo remove Rákosi for good. This was sensitive and opened intervention into the Politburo's internal affairs, infuriating the Soviet politicians, and further strengthened Rákosi's position. Gradually,

during the Hungarian Central Committee meeting on 3 December 1955, Rákosi obtained his final goal by disenfranchising Nagy from his political status and excluded him from the Party as well.

Hungary on the Downward Spiral to Revolution

Ostensibly, Nagy's removal had significant impacts on the future political situation and everyday life to come. The number of his supporters, mostly intellectuals, scholars, scientists, teachers, students, writers, poets and of course reform politicians, constantly grew. His ideas and views received wide publicity and spread quickly through the Writer's Association, newspapers, and the previously discussed Patriotic Popular Front. The Party intervened in 1955 and further curtailed freedom of speech, dismissed many news writers, and prohibited book publications of designated writers. Politicians who overtly demanded changes to the entire HWPP were regulated and exiled to rural areas away from Budapest as a punishment. These members, however, remained active and continued to address the masses of people with their ideas.

The XX Congress of the Soviet Communist Party, when Khrushchev revealed Stalin's crimes against the Soviet nation, confronted Hungary with new challenges as well. In Hungary, Rákosi should have done the same regarding past mistakes and crimes he committed against the population. Ironically, most of what he was responsible for, the population was well aware of. However, the Soviets did not have the inclination to implement a new personnel change in an already fragile situation, and wanted to have somebody who would reliably follow the Soviets directions. Therefore, the Soviets attempted to restore Rákosi's reputation. Nevertheless, later in July 1956, the atmosphere of public feeling became so toxic that Rákosi had to be put aside. Even the Soviets could

no longer keep him in power. The two main possible candidates were János Kádár and the previously mentioned Ernő Gerő, who would eventually assume Rákosi's position.¹⁶

Despite Nagy's removal from the Party, the size and number of the different communist oriented groups discussing and demanding reforms inevitably grew. One of the most significant ones was the Petőfi Circle that was connected to the Union of Working Youth.¹⁷ The original purpose behind the creation of the Petőfi Circle was to provide a forum controlled by the Party to discuss social problems, issues and tensions in venue of different lectures. In the beginning many people, especially scientists, poets and writers, including Nagy's supporters, were keenly interested in these presentations. (It is noteworthy that Nagy was not officially directly associated with, nor was a member of the Petőfi Circle.) The members of this organization quickly increased, and further discussion forums formed outside of Budapest in cities in other districts of the country. A very interesting fact is that significant numbers of officers serving in the Hungarian armed and security forces also attended meetings of the Petőfi Circle. This in particular applied to the officers of the PAOH, which was reported up to the highest levels of Hungarian and Soviet political leadership. Therefore, they started to question the loyalty and support of the armed forces towards the current political leadership. Soon, besides intellectuals and reform politicians, people from every level of society began attending these debates, and started to address politically sensitive and unacceptable issues according to official position with only two exceptions. One of them was the withdrawal of the Soviet armed forces being stationed in the territory of Hungary and the second one was the necessary reform and future of the HWPP.¹⁸ These supposedly constructive political discussions turned into heated political and social debates that started to get out

of the Party's control. On 27 June 1956, participants openly criticized the detrimental political direction of the government and the ineptitude of the political elite in power, and the government muzzling the press.¹⁹ The audience ended up demanding Nagy Imre's political rehabilitation and his restoration to the ranks of the HWPP.²⁰ The audiences of this speech, including reformer party members, reacted by giving a long, passionate standing ovation. This meeting eventually became a demonstration against the government in power. This event even drew the attention of the Soviet politicians.

Meanwhile, the worsening living standard gave rise to deeper dissatisfaction among the citizens. The number of the reformers and dissidents throughout the Party, including at the lowest levels continuously increased, further jeopardizing the unity of the Party. The government was no longer able to react to, or contain the deteriorating situation in the country. The government was simply incapable of implementing necessary stimulus programs to stop the economic and quality of life decline.

As a result, the Soviet Politburo again felt the need for political intervention. The Soviets realized the possibility of the same or an even worse uprising breaking out in Hungary, as had happened in Poland in June. The Soviet leadership sent Anastas Mikoyan to address the existing problems and gave him a free hand to assess the situation and develop a quick crisis plan for Hungary.²¹ After his arrival, Mikoyan reported to Moscow on 14 July 1956, that the Hungarian government was losing control, and by that time it was even lacking the willingness to initiate punitive actions against so called subversive elements.²² The Hungarian government and the Party leadership led by Rákosi admitted they had already foreseen the likelihood of a possible uprising. Mikoyan further stated the hostile feeling against the government was growing, negatively influencing the

local population. He also reported the Hungarian people were developing an aversion to, and expressing discontent, with the communist government.²³ In his report, he states this situation was agitated by western and Yugoslav secret agents and media operating in the country. In his report, Mikoyan also analyzed the wrong decision of the leadership of the HWPP on Nagy's disqualification out of the Party.²⁴ As a possible solution Mikoyan developed two sets of measures. The goal of the first one was to restore the unity of the HWPP and its leadership. The solution he proposed was Rákosi's dismissal with the acknowledgement of his merit and, his replacement with Gerő. Secondly, Mikoyan wanted to effect further replacements on the Party staff in order to enable the government to efficiently neutralize opposition groups and propaganda. Nevertheless, the Hungarian government at that time did not have the capacity and power to take steps against opposition groups and malcontents. The government also realized those steps would further upset the population.

Predictably, Gerő's inauguration as Premier on 18 July 1956, only served to worsen the situation. After Rákosi's removal the Party became further divided. The reformer wing saw Gerő as a continuation of Rákosi's legacy. At the same time Rákosi's previous circle of intimates who remained very influential, also rejected Gerő's appointment. Gerő desperately attempted to sooth the mood. Therefore, he permitted Nagy's restoration back into the Party, at Nagy request.²⁵

In the summer of 1956, the economic and social problems further worsened and there were no signs of improvement. After relieving Nagy's government, the forceful heavy industrialization resumed, and consumed most of the state budget. The agricultural sector was pushed into the background again, and more taxes were imposed on

agricultural workers.²⁶ The living standard was lower than it was in 1938, meaning 35 percent of the families lived under the subsistence poverty line.²⁷ The big industrial developments further drained money away from the housing industry and leaving families living in miserable conditions. Most of the population could not afford to buy proper winter clothing. The government plan for the allocation of provisions was almost non-existent. Many of essential foodstuffs alongside with other important products were in short supply. Working families could not even dream about having money left at all for recreation and entertainment.²⁸

On the political front, dissident groups loudly voiced their opinion that Nagy's political direction was the remedy for the current desperate situation of the country. Soon, along with intellectuals, the whole society sided with the dissident groups. The Party also lost its control over the press and media. According to Yuri Andropov's description, the Soviet Ambassador in Hungary, ~~the~~ Central Committee has no support inside the Party nor among the population" and ~~the~~ situation in the country is very desperate and it is getting worse."²⁹

On 6 October 1956, the reburial service of the wrongfully convicted former Minister of Foreign Affairs, László Rajk, and his executed comrades was held with thousands of mourners paying their last respects.³⁰ This event was the last significant action before the break-out of the Revolution. The funeral became an expression of the rejection of the ruling political leadership and era. After the burial, demonstrations were held in Budapest where protestors chanted anti-Stalinist slogans. The final act on the road to the Revolution was the demonstration organized by the MEFESZ (Magyar Egyetemisták és Főiskolások Egyesített Szövetsége) on 23 October 1956.³¹ On the

previous night the students composed their demands in 16 points that exceeded the conception of the Petöfi Circle (see Appendix A). The list of the demands was generally aimed at the immediate necessity to implement changes and reform measures regarding the government and the Party leadership, the economic and commercial areas, living standard, freedom of opinion and speech. However, the real uniqueness of this list was that it was the first public document openly demanding the withdrawal of the Soviet troops from Hungary and reinstitution of the multi-party system followed by free elections. These two points were the ones absolutely against the principals of the HWPP appalling and outraging both the Hungarian and Soviet politicians. And those students next day made the Hungarian Revolution of 1956.



Figure 2. Budapest Downtown with a Soviet Tank and the Head of the Previously Toppled Stalin Statue

Source: Hungarian Revolution of 1956 Website, Photographs of the Revolution, <http://www.magyarforradalom1956.hu> (accessed 20 December 2010).

¹Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin (18 December 1878 to 5 March 1953) was a Soviet politician and head of state. He fulfilled the position of the first General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union's Central Committee from 1922 until his death in 1953. He governed the Soviet Union as an authoritarian dictatorship.

²*Állam és Igazgatás, 1953. február - március* [State and Governance, 1953. February-March], 56.

³Ibolya Horváth, *Iratok az igazságszolgáltatás történetéhez. 5. kötet* [Files to the jurisdiction history, Volume 5] (Budapest: Közgazdasági és Jogi Könyvtár, 1996), 669-672.

⁴Mátyás Rákosi (9 March 1892 to 5 February 1971) was the political leader of Hungary between 1945 and 1956. He first fulfilled the position of the General Secretary of the Hungarian Communist Party between 1945 and 1948, and later he served as the General Secretary of the HWPP until 1956. He was politically educated in the Soviet Union and his rule was characterized as a Stalinist type of dictatorship.

⁵György T. Varga, *Jegyzőkönyv a szovjet és a magyar párt- és állami vezetők tárgyalásairól. 1953. Június 13.-16* [Report of the conference between the Hungarian and Soviet party and state leaders. June 13-16, 1953] (Múltunk 2-3.sz.1992), 234-269.

⁶Nikita Sergeyevich Khrushchev (15 April 1894 to 11 September 1971) was the leader of the Soviet Union. He served as First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union from 1953 to 1964 and as Chairman of the Council of the Ministers between 1958 and 1964. Khrushchev took firm steps towards abatement between the West and East, and attempted to take a turn in both the internal and external affairs of political direction of the Soviet Union after Stalin's death.

⁷Ferenc Dér, *A Nagy Imre vonal Dokumentumválogatás* [The Imre Nagy line. Document selection] (Budapest: Reform, 1989), 248-267.

⁸Mátyás Rákosi, *Válogatott beszédek és cikkek. 4. Bővített kiadás* [Selected speeches and articles. 4. enlarged edition] (Budapest: Szikra, 1955), 575-581.

⁹Dér, *A Nagy Imre vonal Dokumentumválogatás*, 248-267.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Ibolya Horváth, *Iratok az igazságszolgáltatás történetéhez I. kötet* [Files to the jurisdiction history Volume 1] (Budapest: Közgazdasági és Jogi Kiadó, 1992), 429-431.

¹³The State Protection Authority (*Államvédelmi Hatóság* or *ÁVH*) was the Hungarian Secret Police. It was established in 1945 based on the model of the Soviet

Union's Secret Police, the KGB. It was disbanded in 1956. It was infamous and feared among the populace for its brutality and terror.

¹⁴Magdolna Baráth, *Szovjet nagyköveti iratok Magyarországról 1953-1956. Kiszeljov és Andropov titkos jelentései* [Soviet ambassador's report from Hungary 1953-1956. Kiszeljov's and Andropov's secret reports] (Budapest: Napvilág Kiadó, 2002), 56-59.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶János Kádár (26 May 1912 to 6 July 1989) became the member of the Communist Party in 1931 and was educated in the Lenin Institute in Moscow. He was sentenced to imprisonment on Rákosi's order, from where he was released in 1954 during Imre Nagy's regime. After the suppression of the Revolution by Soviet assistance he was appointed to be the General Secretary of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party presiding over the country from 1956 until his forced retirement in 1988. His thirty-two year term as General Secretary makes Kádár the longest leader of the People's Republic of Hungary. During Kádár's rule, Hungary was stabilized and liberalized to such an extent never seen before in any Eastern Bloc countries. He was replaced in 1988, when a younger generation in the Communist Party, consisting mostly of reformers succeeded him.

¹⁷The Petőfi Circle was established in the beginning of 1955 in the framework of the Democratic Youth Alliance. The purpose of the organization was to collect the young communist intellectuals and organize discussions on political, social, and economic issues in accordance with the communist tenets. Soon the Party had difficulties to supervise and control the organization. The Petőfi Circle eventually became the forum for the reform movements; Union of Working Youth (*Dolgozó Ifjúság Szövetsége*, DISZ) was a Hungarian youth organization including members between 14 and 26 years. Within DISZ oppositional groups dissatisfied with the Communist government emerged and they established the Petőfi Circle. This organization became the intellectual centre of the oppositionary movement against the Hungarian government in 1956. After the government dissolved the DISZ, the Hungarian Young Communist League (KISZ) was formed.

¹⁸András B. Hegedűs and János M. Rainer, *A Petőfi Kör vitái hiteles jegyzőkönyvek alapján 1.kötet Két közgazdasági vita* [Based on the authentic reports of the discussions of the Petőfi Circle Volume 1. Two economic discussions] (Budapest: Kelenföld Kiadó – ELTA, 1989), 40-41.

¹⁹Ibid., 97-108.

²⁰Ibid., 163-171.

²¹Anastas Ivanovic (25 November 1895 to 21 October 1978) was a Soviet communist politician. He joined the Bolshevik wing of the Russian Social Democratic

Labor Party in 1915. He became one of the leaders of the Soviet Revolution in 1917. He supported Lenin's political platform, then Stalin's, and finally Khrushchev's. After Stalin's death realizing the past mistakes he fully supported Khrushchev's de-stalinization policy and was considered a liberal communist party member.

²²Vjacseszlav Szereda and Alekszandr Sztikalin, *Hiányzó lapok 1956 történetéből Dokumentumok a volt SZKP KB levéltárából* [Missing pages from the history of 1956. Documents from the Archive of the Central Committee of Communist Party of the Soviet Union] (Budapest: Móra Ferenc Könyvkiadó, 1993), 40-45.

²³Ibid.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Tibor Méray, *Thirteen Days That Shook the Kremlin* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1959), 59.

²⁶Gyula Belényi and Lajos Sz. Varga, *Munkások Magyarországon, 1948-1956. Dokumentumok* [Workers in Hungary, 1948-1956. Documents] (Budapest: Napvilág Kiadó, 2000), 455-457.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Yuri Vladimirovich Andropov (15 June 1914 to 9 February 1984) was the Soviet Ambassador in Hungary between 1954 and 1956. He played a key role in the suppression of the Revolution by suggesting the Soviet military intervention to Khrushchev. After the Hungarian Revolution, Andropov suffered from a "Hungarian complex," according to historian Christopher Andrew: "he had watched in horror from the windows of his embassy as officers of the hated Hungarian AVH officers were strung up from lampposts. Andropov remained haunted for the rest of his life by the speed with which an apparently all-powerful Communist one-party state had begun to topple. When other Communist regimes later seemed at risk in Prague in 1968, in Kabul 1979, in Warsaw 1981, he was convinced that, as in Budapest in 1956, only armed force could ensure their survival."

³⁰László Rajk (8 May 1909 to 15 October 1949) was a Hungarian Communist politician, serving as former Minister of Interior and Minister of Foreign Affairs. After his dissent with Rákosi, he had him executed in 1949 as a result of a show trial. After his rehabilitation he was reburied in 1956.

³¹The Hungarian University and College Associations, or MEFESZ was the youth organization playing an important role in the break-out of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956.

CHAPTER 3

ANALYSIS

WHY WERE THE HUNGARIAN HUNGARIAN REVOLUTIONARY FORCES SUCCESSFUL IN THE EARLY PHASE OF THE REVOLUTION?

In this chapter those factors are examined that contributed to the success of revolutionary forces from 23 October 1956, the break out of the Revolution, until 3 November 1956 when the Soviet Politburo passed a unilateral resolution to suppress the Hungarian Revolution by military means. The events are scrutinized from four aspects; diplomatic, informational, military, and economic. The military part is the most pronounced, but these military successes would have never been achieved without favorable diplomatic and informational factors. The economic element is the least important because of the short duration of the Revolution.

Diplomatic

Arguably, the chaotic diplomatic-political situation that prevailed during the Revolution was the second most important factor after the military, contributing to the overall success of revolutionary forces. Most importantly, the splitting of the HWPP between the reformers and the Stalinist-Rákosi supporters generated constant internal rivalries and tensions since 1953. As a result, it was difficult to designate the general political direction, and to reach consensus. The Party and government institutions were inseparable and the Party would never be willing to give up its influence on the decision processes of the government. The prevalent influence of the Party rendered the government generally incapable of handling the situation appropriately and created a

power vacuum revolutionary elements could take advantage of. The Soviet political influence and the one-sided political decision of the Soviet Politburo to intervene into Hungarian internal affairs created an even more sensitive situation and paralyzed the Nagy administration.

By 23 October 1956, after the demonstrations expanded, two strongly opposed groups calling for two different approaches as to how to handle the situation came about in the Party Committee. One faction led by György Marosán regarded the demonstrations as anti-revolutionary, anti-state, and subversive.¹ This group proposed strict and immediate measures to prevent further demonstrations, and if it is necessary to suppress the on-going one with massive employment of the armed and security forces of the MOI and MOD.² The other faction led by Lajos Ács urged a political solution. They understood the political nature of the demonstrations, and realized how severe the consequences of strong coercive actions would be, which could even jeopardize the future existence of the entire Communist Party.³ The two sides could not come to an agreement for a long time and lost the opportunity to reverse the situation. By the time they reached a decision to prohibit further demonstrations, it was already too late. The number of the demonstrators had escalated to the point it was no longer possible to control or contain them.

On the very first day of the Revolution, the ranks of the HWPP were already broken. Many party members and organizations openly turned against the Party leadership, questioning the decision to prohibit the demonstrations, and expressing their solidarity with the protestors. Some influential communists went even further demanding

the immediate dismissal of those Party and government leaders, among them Gerő and Hegedűs, who were responsible for putting Hungary into this grave situation.⁴

Furthermore, the Union of Working Youth, the youth section of the HWPP, also decided to participate in the student protest in spite of the explicit Party order prohibiting involvement in the demonstrations. Another major factor was the precipitously increasing numbers of workers who were joining the movement. This sharply contradicted the Party and government assumption that demonstrations consisted of only hooligans and anti-socialist elements conducting subversive activity against the working class. This realization led to further confusion and indecisiveness in the government. Later on, the government admitted that they were unable to prevent the further escalation of the protests. In order to try to save their already eroding credibility, the resolution to prohibit the demonstration was repealed after 25 minutes.⁵

By that afternoon, the government came to the conclusion that the possible solution to suppress the demonstrations by force, advocated by Marosán, had become completely un-executable. First of all, Sándor Kopácsi, the Chief of Police in Budapest made the announcement that the units of the PD would not use arms against peaceful demonstrators in Budapest. Secondly, considerable numbers of military cadets and conscripted soldiers had already joined the protests. The government only had the AVH as the only last reliable resort, but they were still hesitant to use them. They were aware of the high chance of the aggressive mass reaction of the demonstrators in case of the employment of the despised AVH. The rebels also realized how confused and incapable the government and Party leadership was in this phase. This added to their drive, immensely sparked their initiative and empowered their determination to carry on.

Student demonstrations took place in many university cities as well but the government attached little importance to them. The widespread demonstrations that were supported by the working class in the cities of Miskolc, Győr, Pécs, however, were more than worrisome. These cities were the foundation of Hungarian heavy industry. This meant the foundation of the Communist Party, based on the working class, was shattered by the workers supporting a revolutionary movement against the HWPP.

The initial Soviet stand on possible resolutions to the crisis also bought more time for the rebels. First, the Soviet Politburo despite alarming reports sent from Hungary discarded the possibility of military intervention at least for a few hours. The Soviet politicians led by Khrushchev still hoped that the Hungarian question could still be solved by political means not jeopardizing the already pending abatement process between the eastern and western block countries. The Soviet Politburo only reversed its decision after several requests coming from Gerő and Andropov. This happened after the armed siege of the Budapest Radio Station had already started.

The Hungarian political leadership, after the Soviet military commitment, felt gratuitous overconfidence again. They made the wrong assumption that the Soviet troops would suppress the revolt in no time and law and order would be restored by the morning of 24 October 1956, which was the next grave mistake in the row. They did not even attempt to work out any further crisis action plan to consolidate the situation, which again favored the revolutionary forces. The only measures they took were to issue a proclamation of the martial law, and the establishment of the Military Committee. The promulgation of martial-law further deteriorated the situation and embittered the people. The function of the Military Committee vested with full authority was to coordinate and

conduct synchronization between the Hungarian and Soviet armed forces. The Military Committee could not efficiently fulfill its role, the reasons for that will be analyzed in the military subchapter.

When Soviet forces were unable to suppress the fighters, the government was compelled to reassess the political situation and reached unpleasant decisions that were enacted on 24 October 1956. The Premier, András Hegedűs, was relieved and Imre Nagy was appointed. This was a significant and inspiring victory for the demonstrators. Unfortunately, Nagy's credibility and reputation, after his first public reappearance at the Parliament, had been slightly damaged in the eyes of the ordinary people. Furthermore, the real problem was that in spite of Nagy's reelection the Hegedűs administration remained in office until 27 October 1956. This prevented Nagy and his cabinet from getting started on working to implement his reform measures, consolidate the situation, and to pacify the people's passion. What is more, Nagy was under pressure to make compromises on the composition of his government. Most importantly, Gerő could maintain his position as First Secretary of the HWPP. As a result, Nagy wasted precious days trying to convince the belligerents to stop fighting and support his program. Nagy also should have been aware that he would never be able to cooperate constructively with Gerő, but he eventually accepted the position of Premier. Why? The question is going to remain unanswered. When looking at the composition of the new Nagy government, the crowd still recognized the names of many of the old communists as members of the new administration they wanted to get rid of, leaving the people disappointed and dissatisfied. So after gaining confidence from the previous victories, the people decided not to leave

their revolutionary path and continued to fight until all of their demands had been fulfilled.

The next great political victory the revolutionaries achieved was the replacement of Gerő, along with deliberations to initiate negotiations on the Soviet withdrawal from Hungary. All of these decisions were made under constant pressure of the growing opposition inside the Party. On 25 October 1956, János Kádár succeeded Gerő in the chair of the First Secretary of the HWPP.⁶ Gerő's expulsion significantly damaged the hard liners position in the Party. This was an unmistakable sign that the government and the HWPP decided to pursue political means to resolve the situation as opposed to a military approach due to the escalation of constant and heavier armed resistance. A strict analysis of the combat ratio and available assets of the belligerents, the revolutionary forces could have never matched the Hungarian government forces backed up by the Soviet Army. By way of compensation, the Hungarian politicians understood that an aggressive military suppression of the Revolution, backed by the Soviets, would render future reconciliation between the nation and the Communist Party impossible, and would result in a military dictatorship.

There was one more especially tragic event that caused further confusion among the state politicians and compelled them to choose the political resolution and Gerő's release. On 25 October 1956, Hungarian and Soviet forces fired volleys from small arms and tanks on the peacefully demonstrating crowd in front of the Parliament (see figure 3).



Figure 3. Volley Fire at the Parliament on 25 October 1956

Source: Országos Széchényi Könyvtár Library, Hungarian Electronic Library, <http://mek.oszk.hu/kiallitas/1956/html/kepek/fotok/images/1956okt25.jpg> (accessed 20 December 2010).

This bloody confrontation left 61 individuals dead and 284 wounded.⁷ This massacre exacerbated and enraged beyond description even the moderate population who were not participating in the demonstration and fights. This massacre was followed by a huge increase of nation-wide waves of protest with the people carrying bloody Hungarian flags. Violent government actions like this one, generally amplified the determination of those fighting and increased the outrage of those who chose to remain uninvolved, increasing the numbers of people taking to the streets. This simultaneously entailed the drastic increase in the number of organized revolutionary elements (see table 1). Information on this tragic event quickly circulated in the country further upsetting the

people. What is more, Soviet politicians began to recognize Gerő's liability for the uprising, so they took an active and important part in Gerő's removal.

Table 1. Correlation between the Number of Volleys Fired against the Demonstrating Populace and the Number of Established Revolutionary Organizations												
	X.23.	X.24.	X.25.	X.26.	X.27.	X.28.	X.29.	X.30.	X.31.	XI.1.	XI.2.	XI.3.
Number of Volley Fires	1	3	12	16	15	12	2	0				
Number of Established Revol. Organizations	4	7	61	290	674	726	328	201	51	22	10	9

Source: Miklós Horváth, *1956 hadikrónikája* [The War Chronicle of 1956] (Budapest: Akadémia Kiadó, 2003), 164.

Within three days of the outbreak of the Revolution, the majority of the countryside was politically controlled by the revolutionary forces and major changes were already institutionalized. Only a few cities remained under the control of the former local Party officials or state security forces. In most of the major cities, the revolutionary forces took over the authority as a response to attacks against the demonstrators. The transition was smoothest in the villages. The peasants, after the forceful removal of party functionaries and directors of the agricultural co-operatives, selected their representatives and continued their agricultural activity. In the cities and villages controlled by the rebels, the newly formed Revolutionary Committees took over governance. The committees followed the leftist, socialist political course, intended to preserve the power of the working class, and refused privatization. This explicitly clarifies that the revolutionaries

did not want to abolish the Hungarian socialist state system, but they wanted to correct its deficiencies.

These Revolutionary Committees attempted to establish close cooperation with local armed forces, armed revolutionary groups and police forces to maintain law and order. For obvious reasons, the already functional committees lined up behind the fights in Budapest, further weakening the position of the HWPP. Generally, the committees were effective and enjoyed the confidence and support of the local population. Therefore, the government had to find ways to establish mutual collaboration with the committees and incorporate them into the governance system in order to restore its power and legitimacy. The fact that these committees also consisted of former reform communist politicians and party members facilitated the connection between establishment and negotiations.⁸

The Soviet political advisors who had been delegated to Hungary were frustrated with the decisions of the Hungarian political leadership. Mikoyan and Suslov were positive about the necessity to progress with a military resolution along some limited political compromise to satisfy the revolutionaries.⁹ However, they were strongly opposed to the possibility of the Soviet troops being pulled out of Hungary. They still regarded regaining the workers' support the key for the success. They only failed to realize the crucial fact that the whole nation, including the workers, wanted the Soviets to leave. This became the number one prerequisite to continue the negotiations with the political leadership.¹⁰

On 28 October 1956, the final victory for the revolutionaries became only one step away. In spite of the public appeal by the government ordering the cessation of the

armed conflict, the fighting did not stop; there were especially fierce fights against Soviet troops. For the revolutionaries there was no way back except for the fulfillment of all their demands. The reform politicians convinced Nagy to embrace and lead the national revolutionary movement.

It is difficult to comprehend when and how the paths of the official Hungarian government and the revolutionary movement emerged. The most important impetus for this decision was the activity of the Hungarian Workers Union. The leadership of the Union initiated negotiations with the representatives of the different student and revolutionary organizations.¹¹ The Union represented almost the entire Hungarian working class. As a result of the negotiations, the Union decided to openly side with the Revolution, meaning the HWPP apparently lost the support of the working class. In order to preserve the remaining influence of the Party, the government came to the realization they also had to align with the Hungarian population to preserve the legitimacy of the government and the HWPP.

Nagy also acknowledged that this was the only way to stop the armed conflict and restore the acceptance of the Communist Party. After Gerő's removal his freedom of decision also broadened, and Kádár as the First Secretary of the Party stood behind him. Nagy reorganized his government with the involvement of trusted and reputed experts of their fields further satisfying the people. During the meeting of the Central Committee the Party approved all but two of the propositions based on the demand of the revolutionary forces. These two were the demands for a multi-party system, and the final withdrawal of the Soviet Army, which will be finally achieved after 30 October 1956, meaning complete victory for the revolutionary movement.

The government and Party called for a nationwide dialogue including the representatives of the revolutionary fighters, the Hungarian Workers Union, and the newly formed Workers' Councils. The government granted amnesty for everyone and proclaimed a cessation of the armed fights. The AVH was disbanded. The Committee also requested Soviet troops to pull back from Budapest and to return their Hungarian garrisons.¹² This allowed the already exhausted and demoralized Soviet troops who had suffered extensive losses to withdraw from Budapest. After four days of constant combat operations the Soviet troops needed to reconsolidate and recuperate. The Soviets by this agreement could preserve the appearances that they left on the request of the Hungarian government not as a defeated force. Nevertheless, it became clear that in spite of the technical and numerical superiority, without reinforcements, change of tactics the Soviet troops in Budapest were destined to defeat.

The Soviet delegation, after the acknowledgement of the government resolution, returned to the Soviet Union to discuss developments and seek further guidance. The Soviet delegation came back to Hungary with a promising document that envisaged the future relationship between Hungary and the Soviet Union based on mutual agreement and friendship (see Appendix B). The governments of Poland, Yugoslavia and China also played an important role in the ratification by stating the Hungarian government has the right of self-determination. The reaction of the Chinese government was particularly impetuous expressing that Soviet political decisions — seriously damaged the solidarity of the socialist states and their common objectives” and accusing them — of not the principle of equal rights into account in their dealings with other Communist states.”¹³ The Hungarian government evaluated the document as a full political victory for Hungary and

its people to achieve independence, while preserving the good relationship between the two countries.

However, by the time the Soviet delegation handed over the declaration to the Hungarian government, the Soviet political and military leadership had reversed and made the decision to launch a unilateral military operation against Hungary. Khrushchev who was previously in favor of political settlements changed his stand and issued his directives:

We will not withdraw our troops from Hungary and Budapest, but we will take the initiative to restore order in Hungary. If we pulled out of Hungary, it would encourage the American, British, and French imperialists. They would consider this act as our weakness and they would launch attack against us. Our Party would not understand us. We would give out besides Egypt Hungary as well to them.¹⁴

Informational

This subchapter sheds light on the informational circumstances that were conducive to the success of the revolutionary forces until the final Soviet political decision on the military intervention. The purpose is to highlight what the consequences were of the lack of situational understanding, fear of the loss of power coupled with some strong negative personal characteristics on the side of the communist political elite. As a result, the revolutionary forces were able to benefit from the poor government information management, and at the same time the protesters could launch successful information operations gaining more supporters for their cause from the general populace.

From the information aspect, this section analyzes mostly the role of oral and written sources of information, first of all, the effects of the radio, both domestic and foreign, which was widely available throughout the country. Through the radio, messages

instantly reached audiences with uncensored content. Conversely, word of mouth was relatively slow and less reliable due to the fact that the message was forwarded through a number of individuals who sometimes, unwittingly or intentionally modified the content. Many times this led to lack of situational awareness and understanding, resulting in immature and inappropriate decisions. Regarding the written source of information the influence of the different newspapers and leaflets were the most important ones.

It was the newspaper *Szabad Nép* that made the first breach on the shield of the HWPP. This newspaper was under the control of the Communist Party. Nevertheless, in its headline article published on morning of 23 October 1956, the paper explicitly supported the demonstrating students and gave approval to the revolutionary demands saying:

Our Party and its newspaper, the *Szabad Nép*, stands by the youngsters, approves these meetings, and wishes success to their wise and constructive discussions. . . . We agree with the young people's demands, and we not just agree on them, but we fight for them in our domain, and we intend to bring them into being. . . . The university students gave sound to their political standpoint in front of great publicity. And we welcome this standpoint.¹⁵

This was the first development from the informational aspect that contributed to the initial success of the Revolution by the demonstrators who assumed this article was the official viewpoint of the Party leadership, but it was definitely not. The Party was not informed about the content of this article in full measure, and most importantly the Party leadership would have never given permission to its publishing.

Although, few clashes between the demonstrators and the government forces had already taken place, by the afternoon the situation become fragile but relatively moderate. The size of the demonstrating crowd was much greater than the organizers from the Petőfi Circle in Budapest anticipated, but a peaceful solution was still an option for the

Communist Party. However, due to Imre Nagy's unsatisfying and disappointing speech at the Parliament, and the failure to deliver a logical and considerate government radio message given by Gerő the crowd had become desperate and hostile. These two failed communication messages, which could have completely turned around the direction of events, exemplify the importance of the timely and appropriately composed communications to share information, and influence opponent leaders.

Nagy arrived at the Parliament and gave his speech on the demands of the demonstrators. Nagy's public reappearance alone was a small victory for the crowd. The people were looking forward to Nagy projecting future radical changes, relevant to what the demonstrators included in their list of demand. Nagy started his speech by addressing the crowd as "comrades" that already had a negative connotation among the people and set a negative attitude of the crowd who had high expectations of Nagy. Nagy made a promise to resume the political programs he started in 1953 in case he should be reelected the Premier.¹⁶ Unfortunately, Nagy failed to realize that this was no longer enough for the population. They wanted radical political and economic reforms. Most importantly the people no longer trusted the HWPP leadership and the current government in power. Therefore the people wanted radical far-reaching political reforms including immediate personal changes. Nagy's attempt to pacify the people obviously failed. The protestors felt a growing disillusionment, impatience, and from the crowd psychosis strengthening self-confidence and the power of a common will. The Party and government at this point lost momentum and control of upcoming events.

Gerő's radio speech was even more miscalculated, and had a devastating effect. The demonstrators who had been unsuccessfully trying to broadcast their 16 points

demands in the Hungarian Radio had to listen to his provoking and insulting radio message in radios that had been placed in windowsills with its inappropriate phrases. —We condemn those who seek to instill in our youth the poison of chauvinism and to take advantage of the democratic liberties that our state granted to the workers to organize a nationalist protest. Our Party organizations must take a firm stand against every subversive attempt, nationalist well poisoning, and provocation.”¹⁷ The speech also reflected his and the Party’s humiliating servility towards the Soviet Union further infuriating the people. —They attempt to loosen the relationships that connect our Party to glorious Party of the Soviet Union, Lenin’s Party, the Party of the XX. congress. They cast aspersion at the Soviet Union.”¹⁸

This radio message is generally considered to be the final act that set off the explosion. Gerő’s conceit and narrow mindedness completely limited his understanding of the situation. He was reluctant to listen to the crowd, which at this time possessed a limited number of weapons mainly from armories of the different factories. After Gerő’s radio speech the demonstrators became more resolute to publish their 16 points demands through the Hungarian Radio, which resulted in the siege of the building of Radio Budapest. After Gerő’s announcement the demonstrators attacked Radio Budapest, party offices, and police stations and the first severe firefights broke out in Budapest.

The government, due to its lack of control and understanding of events, further demonstrated its inability to launch productive information operations to positively influence the people. Gerő and his political faction continued its thoughtless and rash information campaign. These abortive steps further exacerbated the situation and

strengthened resistance against the government, the Communist Party, and formed a strong cohesion among the protestors.

The next unsuccessful move was in the early morning hours of 24 October 1956. At 4:30 a.m., the government announced a curfew in Budapest. The most audacious protestors disobeyed it and continued their activity, which kept the Revolution in motion. The improper and aggressive language is also very noteworthy:

Fascist and reactionary elements have launched an armed attack against our public buildings and against our forces of law and order. In the interest of reestablishing order, all assemblages, meetings, and demonstrations are forbidden. Police units have been instructed to deal severely with trouble makers and to apply the law in all its force.¹⁹

After realizing how much of a failure the previous information campaign was, the government began to desperately attempt to correct it. The government relied heavily on the radio broadcasting, because this was, besides the newspapers, the primary source of communication. Therefore, the government intended to keep control of it at the price of heavy fights. During the day the government even asked the population to put their radios into their windows to make their messages available for as many people as possible.

Later that morning at 8:13, after the government reassessed the situation, and realized the need for drastic changes, they made a radio announcement on the newly implemented personal changes in the government, and Imre Nagy's nomination for Premier.²⁰ These messages contained initial signs of victory for the demonstrators that created a temporary enthusiasm and calmness.

However, the following messages indicated a totally different general direction and political line. At 8:45 a.m. the next radio messages proclaimed martial law on the entire territory of Hungary. (Martial law was revoked later on that same day.) This

message was sent in the name of the newly elected Premier Imre Nagy.²¹ Fifteen minutes later the radio broadcasted the message of military intervention of the Soviet Army. The message explained that the Hungarian government, based on the Warsaw Pact agreement, requested immediate employment of the Soviet forces stationed in the territory of Hungary to assist the Hungarian government to restore law and order.²² The people did not understand why the government, and most importantly, Imre Nagy made these decisions against the people who had been supporting him. The people immediately felt appalled, embarrassed and betrayed, which was followed by anger that was shortly discharged against the Hungarian armed and security forces and especially the Soviet troops. After receiving and comprehending this radio message, the withdrawal of Soviet troops became the most imperative demand of the demonstrators. The Soviets were then referred to as the “Army of the Oppressor.” The people felt insulted and disappointed. The appearance of the Soviet troops drastically changed the demonstrators’ attitude and exacerbated the already tense situation.

The truth of the matter is that, at his time Nagy had no influence on these previous decisions, although he was already the Premier, but without any executive powers. It was Gerő, Hegedűs and their personal staff who composed the radio broadcasts, and requested intervention by the Soviet troops. In reality, at this time Nagy was not in a position yet to make real decisions, on the contrary, he was completely isolated, and his phone was wire tapped.

After these developments and radio messages the western foreign radio stations like *BBC*, *Szabad Európa Rádió* [Radio of Free Europe], *Amerika Hangja* [Voice of America] commenced a fierce anti-Nagy radio campaign against the Premier. These

rejecting and sometimes even hostile radio broadcasts further contributed to the Hungarian people's distrust towards Nagy and his cabinet, and made his attempts less efficient to calm down the passions and consolidate the prevailing general situation.²³

The demonstrators were also fully aware of the importance of information operations. They wanted the ordinary people to understand that they are not a bunch of criminals rampaging on the streets as the official government statements were saying. On the contrary, they wanted the people to see who they were, what the demands and ideology behind the protests were, and they wanted their demands to be published for the entire population to understand.

In order to effectively launch their information dissemination campaign they needed assets. On 24 October 1956, the revolutionary forces occupied the building of the Hungarian Radio, the Athenaeum Press, Vörös Csillag [Red Star] Press, and the office of the newspaper *Szabad Nép*. The rebels were only able to occupy the Hungarian Radio until the next day. The radio employees already moved the instruments to the Parliament building to ensure uninterrupted continuation of the radio broadcasts. Therefore, the occupation of the radio building had no real significance for the revolutionary information operations, however it was a victory with a momentous symbolic importance. Nevertheless, after the occupation of the Athenaeum, and Vörös Csillag Press, the protestors instantly started to print flyers and placards in great numbers, which were disseminated among the population gaining more supporters. These leaflets commonly conceptualized demands of the different revolutionary groups and called for strikes. Sabotaging the industrial production was still a very sharp weapon against the Communist government from economic point of view, and was also a proficient solution

to keep the masses on the streets. The flyers, of course, also served the purpose of recruitment for already existing revolutionary political organizations. The form of these flyers mostly contained symbols and quotations from the period of the Hungarian Revolution and Freedom Fight of 1848-1849, which generally had a stirring emotional effect on the ordinary people boasting their patriotic feeling and morale. The revolutionaries also intended to target the Soviet troops with information messages and convince them to cease combat operations against the demonstrators by handing out bilingual flyers:

Our Russian Friends! Do not shoot!

You have been deceived. You are fighting against revolutionaries not anti-revolutionaries. We, the Hungarian fighters want to have a sovereign and democratic Hungary. Your fight is not righteous: You are firing upon workers, peasants and university students not fascists.

Cease the fight!

The Revolutionary Hungarian Youth.²⁴

However, generally the messages the revolutionist addressed to the Soviets were demanding and had mostly unfriendly intonation. These messages called the Soviets to immediately leave Hungary (see figure 4). The people broadly disseminated these messages on leaflets, and painted them on walls and shop-windows. The people wanted to make sure that these messages get through to the Soviets. Therefore, they made them visible for the Soviets operating on the streets ensuring that the Soviets get a feeling how much grudge the people felt towards them.

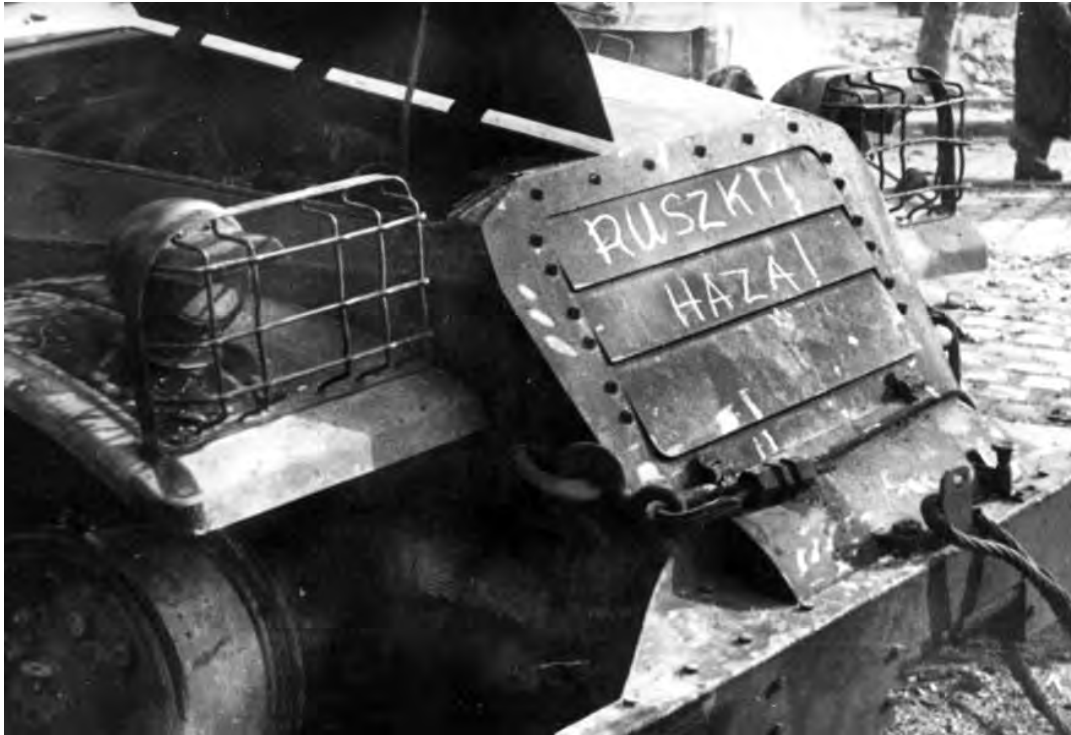


Figure 4. Field Expedient Means to Deliver an Information Operation Message:
–Russians Go Home!”

Source: Hungarian Revolution of 1956 Website, Photographs of the Revolution,
<http://www.magyarforradalom1956.hu> (accessed December 20, 2010)

Furthermore, the Revolutionary Committee of the Universities along with reformer writers published the first revolutionary newspaper *Igazság* [Justice]. This newspaper allowed the revolutionary elements including scholars, writers, and poets, to address the wider population and put out their ideology and further demands. Simultaneously, the spreading of the Revolution to the provincial cities multiplied the number of revolutionary newspapers published outside of the capitol reaching greater masses of the population.

The rebels were also aware of the importance of disruption of the government communication system in order to hinder coordination. For instance, the rebel forces

successfully occupied and damaged communication centers such as the Telephone Center in Józsefváros.²⁵

On 25 October 1956, after the Soviet troops marched into Budapest, Imre Nagy was trying to address the people again via the radio, and convince them to cease hostilities. This effort was in vain. He also tried to outline his future political concept. His message passed unheard, because the rebels were more focused on the fight against Hungarian and Soviet forces.²⁶ On the front of the written media, the HWPP lost one more battle. The previously strictly Party controlled daily newspaper the *Népszava* on 25 October 1956, openly took the side of the reform process and published the proposition of the Hungarian Workers Union. The fact that this article was published was an explicit indication of the complete loss of Party control over the state media sources. That meant that the government should have efficiently countered the information campaign of not only the growing number of revolutionary media, but the former state media as well. The government no longer had the either the power or the necessary resources to do that.²⁷ Also, interesting to note, that from this time the formerly state controlled newspapers and other media sources replaced words like anti-revolutionaries, subversive elements, etc. with the worlds of revolutionary, reformer, etc., and admitted that the revolutionary elements were fighting for social democracy not against it.

The rumors spreading from mouth-to-mouth also played an important role to keep up the motivation of the freedom fighters and strengthen their fighting mood. Unfortunately, most of them were gratuitous, but helpful in keeping up their morale. For instance, after the early successful military actions against the Soviet troops there was a

rumor going about that besides the Hungarian, forces entire Soviet units were surrendering and going over to the revolutionaries.

On the informational domain 28 October 1956, was the major breakthrough. The governmental radio messages were a clear sign of a major victory as a result of the ongoing fights for the revolutionary forces. Based on the previously passed resolutions of the HWPP to restore law and order, Nagy held his speech addressing the entire Hungarian population. The language being used in this radio speech was significantly altered. First of all, instead of the greeting “Comrades!”, Nagy used “The People of Hungary!”²⁸ Most important of all, the government officially admitted the victory of the Revolution by making the statement that “The new government, relying on the power and control of the people, in the hope of winning the full confidence of the people, immediately starts the implementation of the rightful demands of the people.”²⁹

These resolutions ordered an immediate cease fire for all belligerents involved. The Rules of Engagement for the government forces were modified restricting the use of lethal fire only in case of self-defense. Amnesty was granted to everybody willing to surrender and deliver up their firearms. Nagy announced the disbandment of the deeply despised AVH and the reestablishment of security forces based on the MOD and MOI units in collaboration with the delegated revolutionary forces. To the great satisfaction of the population Nagy talked about the decision of the government to renegotiate the partnership with the Soviet Union and the withdrawal of the Soviet armed forces from the territory of Hungary. Nagy also mentioned the government was giving consideration to the replacement of the abominated communist state symbols with the old historic Hungarian ones. Nagy also got the opportunity to explain that Gerő and his followers

were behind the proclamation of martial-law and the request for the Soviet military intervention.³⁰ This helped to regain the people's trust to some extent. The other importance of this particular radio message was that the government made it obvious that it is going to take the same intertwining future road together with the Hungarian people.

While analyzing the conditions that made the revolutionary forces successful until 3 November 1956, the role of the foreign media and press also has to be looked at. Many Western reporters were present, especially before the second Soviet invasion to report the events of the Revolution to the other parts of the world. Obviously, they were mostly supportive of the Revolution; especially the ones arrived from different Western countries. They strongly encouraged the rebels to continue their fight. However, the most influential on the activity of the revolutionary forces was the *Radio of Free Europe* located in Munich, West-Germany. One of the reasons being *Radio Budapest*, due to its party control and its previous anti-revolutionary radio broadcasts, was considered to be unreliable and distrusted; therefore the rebels were looking for a radio station supporting them and reflecting their viewpoints.

Radio of Free Europe was covertly financed by the CIA, (Central Intelligence Agency). The role and impact of this radio station on the Revolution is still controversial in retrospect. Its activity linked to the Revolution can be dated back to 1954, when the *Radio of Free Europe* launched its information operations named Operation Focus. This operation consisted of radio and flyers messages designed to instigate groups and individuals to demand reform measures from the Communist government.³¹ During the Revolution *Radio of Free Europe* openly supported the movement and was adverse to the Hungarian Communist regime. They partly took over Hungarian original radio broadcasts

reporting the successes and achievements of the Revolution. On the other hand, it constantly admonished the revolutionary forces to hold their ground to the end especially against the Soviet forces. It even broadcasted tactical military advice. There is no question about the remarkable psychological and tactical effects of these messages and the positive impact they had on the revolutionary fighters.³²

However, they did not always have a clear understanding of the situation and the flow of events, which created negative effects. First of all, these radio communiqués often hindered the effectiveness of the measures, the Nagy administration tried to implement to appease the populace and consolidate the situation. This attitude may have been based on the supposition that it was Nagy who had proclaimed martial law, and had requested the Soviet intervention. So when Nagy called for cessation of hostilities to restore law and order and spare Hungarian lives the *Radio of Free Europe* called for the opposite not realizing Nagy's intentions.

They (Nagy administration) need a cease-fire so that the present government in power in Budapest can maintain its position as long as possible. Those who are fighting for liberty must not lose sight even for a minute of the plans of the government opposing them.³³

Do not hang your weapons on the wall. Not a lump of coal, not a drop of gasoline for the Budapest government, until the Ministry of the Interior and Defense are in your control.³⁴

Radio of Free Europe also, perhaps unthinkingly, generated unreal illusions among the population and the revolutionary fighters about western political and military assistance already on the way. On the political front, one of the most remarkable was the radio broadcasts on the special session on the Security Council of the UN. In essence, the radio broadcast talked about the facts of the ongoing meeting. The radio forwarded the sympathy of the western participants towards Hungary. Simultaneously, it purposefully

highlighted dubious phrases like “take measures” and “not to remain inactive.”³⁵ These phrases without any real meaning, and taken out of the actual context nursed a delusion and created unrealistic hopes of the possibility of avoiding the full scale Soviet military attack.

From the military perspective some western radio stations broadcasted news on upcoming western military assistance. One of them was related to the *Radio of Free Europe*. This message can be associated with the media analysis on air about the article published in the *Observer in London* “inevitably the government of the United States is in the press to send military assistance to the freedom fighters.” In addition, *Radio Madrid*, and the *NTS*, which is a Russian emigrant radio station in West Germany clearly talked about the eminent arrival of western military forces to fight alongside with the Hungarians against the Soviets.³⁶ Obviously, these irresponsible announcements were entirely incorrect and later on caused the feeling of hopelessness and disillusionment among the Hungarian freedom fighters and the majority of the populace.

Military

In this subchapter, the greatest challenge is to define who in essence belonged to the revolutionary forces. Since, from the very first day of the Revolution we can identify government forces either actively or passively supporting the revolutionary movement. Meanwhile, there were Hungarian units fiercely fighting against the rebels alongside the Soviet forces till the Hungarian government took lead of the national movement.

To analyze the facts that made the revolutionary forces successful against the government forces, it is first necessary to identify the weaknesses of the Hungarian and Soviet units supporting the government. In order to get a full picture, we have to go back

in time before the Revolution started and examine the status of the Hungarian armed and security forces.

The Hungarian armed and security forces were under the all-pervasive control of the Communist Party. Directed by the HWPP, these forces, especially the PAOH, experienced an expeditious and forceful expansion before the 1950s based on the threat assessment and the likelihood of an armed conflict against the western countries.

However, as a result of the abatement process after 1953, the Hungarian government implemented a significant downsizing. Previously the Army of the strength of 210,412 troops was planned to be reduced to 150,000 troops.³⁷ This process required many career officers to be retired, disbanded, or transferred, affecting morale negatively and demoralizing the troops. The government also neglected to socially take care of the officers leaving the army further exasperating them. Many of those former trained Army officers took command of different revolutionary elements during combat operations.

The reorganization was still ongoing in 1956, meaning the institution of the new units and their headquarters was still unfinished severely impacting combat readiness. This also indicates that the MOD was absolutely unprepared to counteract large scale anti-government movements. Still in October, due to the restructuring process, the accession of the new conscripts was delayed, thus leaving Hungarian units severely unmanned and practically combat ineffective. In turn, the reorganization was promised to be accompanied by technical upgrading of the units and the improvement of soldiers' financial and living conditions. These positive changes never made themselves felt.³⁸

The over centralized leadership and command stemming from the party attitude and leadership style further paralyzed the officers' skills and willingness to make

responsible decisions and to take initiative. In addition to that, the abolition of the career non-commissioned officers class, meaning that promoted conscripts served as noncommissioned officers, further impacted the efficacy of mission accomplishment. Party functionalists tended to issue direct orders avoiding the chain of command to accomplish certain missions, thus making the leadership unsure who was in charge of what. This will be exemplified during the Revolution regarding the role and purview of the Military Committee established by the Party. The general distrust of the Party towards the PAOH further alienated most of the career officers. This tendency appeared in the transitive utilization of political officers, internal counterintelligence officers and huge network of informers. One would never know who they can trust and talk to.³⁹ All of these factors led to overall political and moral crisis in the PAOH impacting the soldiers' loyalty towards the current communist leadership. By October, the majority of the Army and Police officers got to the point to question the moral right of the MOD and MOI to issue any order to employ forces against any domestic demonstration.⁴⁰

The situation was similar within the organizations of the MOI. The Police Department, Border Guard Forces, AVH, Penal Institution Department, Air Defense Department, and Fire Department belonged to the MOI numbering approximately 60,000 employees including the administrative staff.⁴¹ Among others, the PD was also a victim of the radical reduction of forces and reorganization. The effects and consequences were the same as with the Army. Most surprisingly, even in the ranks of the AVH, which was considered to be the uncompromising force of the state, signs of declining morale and sense of service could be detected. Furthermore, the other segments of the armed and

security forces generally felt an aversion and distrust towards the AVH, hindering cooperation and intelligence sharing before and during the Revolution.

Actually, from June 1956, the AVH constantly reported signs of emerging anti-state conspiracy what the government and the Party disregarded, and which greatly demoralized the department. What is more, the AVH, as a result of its intelligence collection, gained detailed information on different anti- government and subversive groups. The MOI, in many cases, did not give permission to liquidate them.⁴² The elimination of those already identified anti-government elements might have inhibited the success of the initial protests by eliminating the potential organizers.

Some other speculations regarding the AVH are also worth briefly examining. Based on the testimony of some former AVH officers, they stated they would have been able to counteract the protest at the beginning and or suppress it at the point of time when the siege against the building of Radio Budapest occurred. They also claimed that by using covert AVH agents already mingled among the demonstrators, it would have been possible to remove and detain the leaders and to separate them from the followers. In spite of the repeated request of the AVH, the MOI disapproved this action in order to avoid further infuriating the crowds. It is a valid assumption that this government decision was correct based on the size and the intensified emotional status of the demonstrators.

Another statement says that after the arrival of the AVH battalion from Szombathely and the designated Border Guard units from Pécs, the necessary amount of forces to disperse the crowd were available. As a result of the delay of the Hungarian government to issue the order to rapidly and decisively utilize these forces and to allow

the already deployed units to use lethal force set the stage for success for the demonstrators. Latest research contradicts these statements. The fact is most of these previously mentioned units consisted of young conscripts serving their compulsory draft duty. After moving the majority of these forces to the Budapest Radio they were ordered to open fire on the crowd. The AVH conscripts hesitated and disobeyed the order. As a response, the AVH on-scene commander, Major József Fehér along with some other AVH officers shot at the conscripts. In response, the outraged AVH conscripts alongside with some protestors had beaten MAJ Fehér to death on the premises and joined the demonstrations. Later on these conscripts also actively participated in the armed fights against the Hungarian and especially the Soviet forces.⁴³ Incidents like this facilitated the understanding of the demonstrators that not everyone in the AVH department was professional secret police officer. They realized that the AVH also comprised maneuver units consisting of young conscripts, children of ordinary Hungarian people, serving their mandatory draft duty. Unfortunately, this realization could not save every young AVH conscripts from getting lynched later on.

Still looking at the preliminaries of the Revolution, the conclusion can be made that the unpreparedness of the commanding elements and the outdated crisis action plans also had a detrimental effect on the security operations. The plan was inefficient to control the demonstrations and protect among others the different industrial, political, military, infrastructure facilities and other significant areas of great importance. The physical protection of the designated facilities, buildings and politicians were the highest priority in emergency situations. This is to say that only limited maneuver forces remained available to conduct riot control or if required, offensive type operations against

the rebel forces (see figure 5). The Hungarian crisis action plan was developed in 1954 and since that time it was not reassessed and updated. The armed forces of the MOD were also incorporated into the plans in case of the forces of the MOI needed to be reinforced (see table 2).⁴⁴ However, based on observation, the method of cooperation and synchronization was not properly planned. That serious deficiency resulted in an inadequate force concentration against the revolutionary forces, even fratricide in many cases taking a heavy death toll in literal meaning.

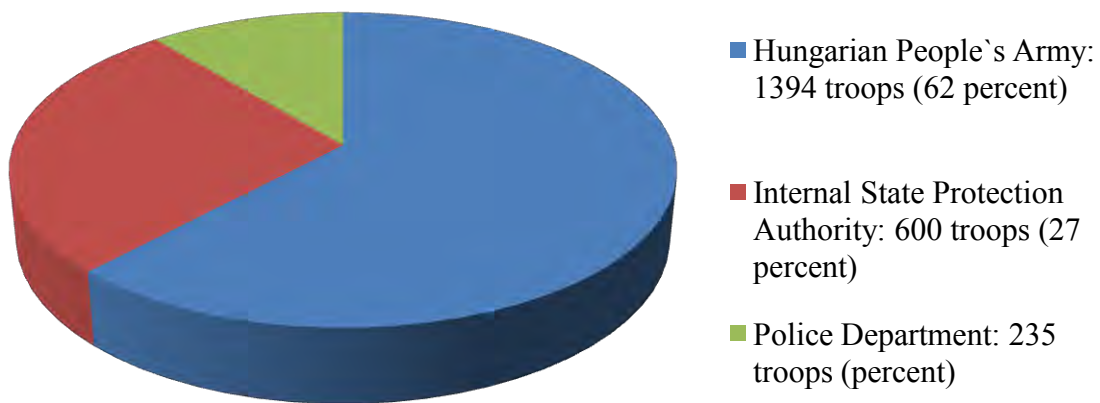


Figure 5. Composition of Available Maneuver Forces

Source: Miklós Horváth, *1956 hadikrónikája* [The War Chronicle of 1956] (Budapest: Akadémia Kiadó, 2003), 52.

Table 2. The Composition and Repartition of the Hungarian Armed and Security Forces Planned to Conduct State Protection Operations												
State Protection Districts	Strength of Permanent Guard Forces			Planned Reinforcement of Guard Forces			Planned Maneuver Forces			Total Strength of Forces for State Protection Operations		
	Police	AVH	Army	Police	AVH	Army	Police	AVH	Army	Police	AVH	Army
Budapest District	555	482	496	4155	486	5235	235	600	1394	4945	1568	7125
3. Corps District	233	264	909	172	-	639	-	100	1060	405	364	2608
6. Corps District	226	481	631	223	29	445	-	-	1080	449	510	2156
8. Inf. Div. District	138	44	252	64	-	183	-	-	150	202	44	585
37. Eng. District	4	-	33	-	-	9	-	-	120	4	-	162
4. Mech. Inf. District	260	535	352	200	11	136	-	-	200	460	546	688
<i>Planned Total Strength for State Protection Ops</i>	<i>1416</i>	<i>1806</i>	<i>2673</i>	<i>4814</i>	<i>526</i>	<i>6647</i>	<i>235</i>	<i>700</i>	<i>4004</i>	<i>6465</i>	<i>3032</i>	<i>13324</i>

Source: Miklós Horváth, *1956 hadikrónikája* [The War Chronicle of 1956] (Budapest: Akadémia Kiadó, 2003), 50.

The Soviet armed forces stationed in Hungarian territory also developed a crisis action plan called “Völna” (Wave) in case of internal disturbance. The Soviet forces besides the reinforcement of the military facilities, were ready to commit maneuver forces. Conversely, the Soviet military leadership was not legally entitled to design any crisis action plan interfering in any Hungarian internal affairs. The Soviets referred to the Warsaw Pact Treaty; however, it did not legally enable the Soviets to do that.⁴⁵ Still, the detailed coordination and synchronization between the Hungarian and Soviet forces were again unplanned, resulting in the Soviets conducting operations without Hungarian support and vice versa. Fratricide was also a very common phenomenon due to the lack of coordination and communication.

The other weak point of the overall joint plan was the composition of the assigned security and especially Army troops. The PAOH in Budapest predominantly planned to employ cadets of the different military educational institutions (see table 3). Moreover, the MOI also heavily relied on the employment of its students as well, who like the military cadets were also sympathetic with the spreading reform ideas for some extent. From this point of view, the Army was the most accepting of the reform ambitions. The PAOH leadership left the crucial fact out of consideration that a majority of these students, alongside with a significant number of officers, had been actively participating in reform gatherings, such as the meetings of the previously discussed Petőfi Circle. This leads to the assumption that the political dependability and unconditional commitment towards the current communist leadership of these students could be strongly questioned, which proved to be true during the Revolution.

The other additional intangible factor was that neither the MOD nor the MOI issued an explicit order to keep the troops together; therefore, it became difficult to alert and to assemble the forces when the protests were already on-going, allowing the demonstration to gain momentum and to get out of control. Coincidentally, many students just graduated from the military schools further reducing the number of available troops and many more were authorized to take leave when the Revolution broke out. This further justifies the presumption that neither the MOI nor the MOD was previously aware of the precise risk, the possible size and scale of the demonstrations, and had ignored every signs of the possibility of a future armed uprising.

Table 3. Figures Regarding the Strength of the Military Educational Institutions Assigned for State Protection Operations									
Designated Institutions for State Protection Ops	Number of Obj. to Guard	Strength of the Assigned Forces				Reserve Units	Planned to Employ according to Central Crisis Action Plan		
		Officer	Cadet	Conscripts	Total	Total Number	Number	Number of Obj. to Guard	Total Number
Miklós Zrínyi Military Academy	23	42	217	23	282	164	446	24	423
Kossuth Artillery Officer School	29	76	408	0	484	164	648	30	638
Aron Gábor Artillery Officer School	6	13	76	0	89	164	253	6	243
Stalin Political Academy	16	27	189	0	216	246	462	16	448
Petőfi Political Officer School	13	20	155	23	198	164	362	13	362
Ságvári Logistics Officer School	10	29	179	29	237	164	401	10	393
Zalka Commun. Officer School	14	22	131	35	188	164	352	14	352
Vasvári Aviation Officer School	10	32	0	170	202	164	366	10	367
<i>Total</i>	<i>121</i>	<i>261</i>	<i>1355</i>	<i>280</i>	<i>1896</i>	<i>1394</i>	<i>3290</i>	<i>123</i>	<i>3226</i>

Source: Miklós Horváth, *1956 hadikronikája* [The War Chronicle of 1956] (Budapest: Akadémia Kiadó, 2003), 51.

On the first day of the Revolution, the Hungarian and Soviet armed and security forces had already lost the chance for a quick and decisive success despite the incredibly fast Soviet tactical movement into Budapest. Later, among others, the Soviet political advisors held the Hungarian hesitant political leadership accountable for losing the

momentum by not issuing the timely fire-order against the demonstrators at the building of the Radio Budapest.⁴⁶

The Soviet troops received the order to conduct a tactical movement to Budapest and assist the Hungarian government to suppress the ongoing anti-government revolt. The first Soviet units arrived at Budapest only 6 hours later. Actually, the Soviet armed forces had been put on high alert due to events in Poland since 9 October 1956, which facilitated their quick troop movement. The approximate strength of the first initial units totaled 6,000 troops, 290 tanks, 120 armored personal carrier, and 156 artillery pieces. The Soviet military leadership also put the aviation units on readiness. These units mostly conducted demonstration, reconnaissance and surveillance, and convoy escort operations.⁴⁷ The overall strength of the committed Soviet forces operating in the entire territory of Hungary was rapidly increased. By 24 October 1956 Soviet forces totaled 31,550 troops consisting of five divisions along with approximately 6,500 Hungarian Army troops. These divisions roughly possessed 1,130 tanks and self-propelled artillery pieces, 615 howitzers and mortars, 185 air defense artillery pieces and 380 armored personal carriers.⁴⁸

The Hungarian political and military leaders lacked situational awareness, intelligence information, and had completely lost control over the events. As a result, they were not able to give a solid and comprehensive situational assessment to the incoming Soviet staff officers, again losing time to take action against the demonstrators. In addition, the Soviet maneuver plan was based on the mutual cooperation with the Hungarian forces and on the assumption that the Hungarians would

be able to occupy and secure the most important objectives. This assumption proved to be untrue.

On one hand, the Hungarian armed and security forces, due to their lack of situational awareness, liaison officers and unorganized political and military management, were unable to conduct joint operations with each other and with the Soviets.⁴⁹ It gave the Hungarian populace the further impression that the Soviets were conducting offensive operations without Hungarian consent and support, further justifying their sense of righteousness in their fight. On the other hand, because of the previously discussed shortage of manpower the Hungarian armed and security forces were barely able to provide security for the most important facilities of the government; MOD and MOI. Therefore, the Soviet commanders found themselves in the position where they had to allocate Soviet troops for security operations significantly decreasing the number of the available Soviet maneuver units.

In spite of the uncertain situation, the Soviet forces reduced in maneuver elements started to engage in battle with the rebels within a short time. The Soviets, having little serviceable intelligence information on the exact location, strength, composition, and disposition of the revolutionary forces, soon suffered heavy losses. Just on the very first day the Soviets had 20 killed and 48 injured soldiers. In equipment, they lost 10 tanks, 4 armored personal carriers, and 2 other vehicles.⁵⁰

The first unconfirmed intelligence information was only available after the 24 October 1956. Gaining accurate intelligence information on the revolutionary forces was henceforward very difficult. Although most groups had their own area of operations it was difficult to locate them. Plus the population, not actively involved in the fights,

supported them. Only a few of them were stationary, most of them were in constant motion changing their positions frequently. With a few exemptions they did not intend to hold their positions, rather conduct ambushes and raids to harass and disrupt enemy forces. The few stationary groups like the previously discussed one in the Corvin Passage, usually occupied and controlled the most tactically important points of Budapest. These were, for instance, the most significant road junctions and infrastructure hubs. Their strength numbered sometimes a couple of hundred fighters, representing a relatively more robust force compared to the mobile ones.

The revolutionary groups mostly possessed small arms and collective weapons; however, in many instances they successfully confiscated artillery pieces and even armored vehicles. The members of the groups volunteered to fight; nobody was forced to join against their will. As a result, their morale was very high. After the Soviet intervention their goal changed to defeating the occupying Soviet Army. Their fight turned into a desperate freedom fight. One of their most efficient tactics was spontaneity because their actions were not predictable. The coordination and synchronization among the groups were rare, mostly formed in cases of large scale enemy offensive operations. It is one of the reasons why these groups were hard to locate and gain actionable intelligence on them. The leaders of the different groups also changed differently. The leaders were elected based on mostly their ability and skills to command subordinates in combat operations, which highly contributed to the group combat efficiency. The leaders who proved to be inept were relieved.

The Soviet military command based their operations on the excessive use of armored assets to conduct demonstration in order to intimidate and disperse the

revolutionary fighters. The same tactic had been applied in East-Germany successfully, so they expected the same to work for Hungary as well. They were absolutely wrong. Although the estimated initial number of actual fighters was approximately 2,000, without infantry support to provide protection for the tanks, Soviet armored units lost great numbers of assets one after the other.⁵¹ Moreover, without infantry support they were not able to clear and secure buildings used as reinforced rebel fighting positions. These buildings became more fortified over time. On the other hand, the revolutionary forces failed to develop multiple defensive perimeters, which severely limited their ability to conduct retrograde maneuvers when conducting defensive operations. Surprisingly, the Soviets who mastered the tactics of military operations in urban terrain during World War II failed to apply them. The rebels could effectively take advantage of the limited visibility from inside the tanks when they were being positioned inside multi-story buildings. The revolutionary forces could effectively apply interlocking fields of fires from the higher buildings, not to mention the very simple but formidable weapon, the so-called Molotov Cocktail. Thanks to the widespread use of the Molotov Cocktail the tanks and armored personnel carriers were referred to as “*moving caskets*” among the rebels.

Obviously, the Hungarian and Soviet Army units would have had the fire power to destroy those buildings. However, the Hungarian government restrained the employment of the fire support assets to avoid collateral damage. The intent behind it was to regain the support of the moderate population. Therefore, the maneuver elements and the armored convoys had only minimal artillery and air support available in the densely populated downtown area. The relatively narrow streets of Budapest fatally

constrained maneuverability of these armored vehicles. The rebels successfully used field expedient obstacles, like barricades, built from any available material they could lay their hands on, to block and slow down the enemy armored convoys or channelize them into designated kill zones. When the lead or trail vehicle of the convoy became immobilized and unable to escape from the kill zone, the convoy was successfully destroyed.

Interestingly, on the cobblestone roads of Budapest the rebels also used soap to paralyze tracked vehicles. The soap made the surface of the cobblestone roads extremely slippery causing the tracked vehicles losing tractions on them. This field expedient procedure negatively impacted the navigability, the maneuverability, and the speed of those vehicles, rendering them easier targets to destroy.

By 24 October 1956, it became obvious that the forces of the MOI literally became dysfunctional and passive, no lead headquarters remained fully operational. As far as the forces of the MOD were concerned, subordinate units were employed unsystematically and without detailed guidance and instructions. No explicit Rules of Engagement and Escalation of Force Measures were determined causing confusion when the soldiers faced with the protesting crowds. In many instances, this lack of guidance allowed the desperate protestors to physically confiscate the weapons of even those soldiers who did not intend to support the revolutionaries.

The Supreme Command of the Armed Forces also became literally directionless from 24 October 1956. In essence, most of the real political decision makers were simply unavailable. Mostly secretaries and aides were left to answer the phones. The commanders of the deployed units in Budapest, after receiving the order to conduct a tactical movement to designated areas, had no further instructions or guidance stating

what tasks they were to accomplish, what the purpose and the desired end state of their employments were. This was demoralizing for the on-ground commanders, to a large extent. For instance, Army and Police officers were told many times to rely only on the radio broadcasts as their only source of directions. However, different politicians tended to send contradictory messages with different content. The government and the Party leadership failed to inform the command and control elements of PAOH what decisions were made and what missions would have to be accomplished.

The first clear operations order, with the task to find and finish opposing forces in order to restore law and order, was only issued on 27 October 1956, four days after the break-out of the Revolution. The newly appointed Minister of Defense, Lieutenant General Károly Janza signed this order. The execution was destined to failure due to two reasons. Reason number one was that these clearing operations were planned to be conducted with close cooperation with the almost non-existent PD units. Additionally, the order also instructed the commanders to further reinforce the protection of designated objectives of significant importance, leaving even less maneuver elements available. Another reason was that by this time command and control over the already committed army forces was almost non-existent, the units were piecemealed down to platoon and even squad level, predominantly tasked to conduct security operation of certain objectives. As a result, it became impossible to consolidate and reorganize the troops, and to mass enough forces to commence decisive offensive operations.⁵²

Without a doubt, the PAOH generally felt an instinctive attraction towards the demonstrating people. In most cases they were passive and reluctant to open fire upon their fellow countrymen. In many instances, both the Army and Police officers preferred

peaceful negotiations with the revolutionary forces than applying lethal force.

Furthermore, a remarkable number of soldiers, either individually or members of an entire Army unit, joined the revolutionaries with their weapons. It is extremely difficult to make a clear estimate of their number. It is a valid supposition that their exact strength was never precisely assessed due to often inconsistent reports after the Revolution deliberately trying to cover the truth. The PAOH officers and lower ranking soldiers joined the Revolution significantly leveraged the tactical knowledge and capabilities of the revolutionary units. Many Hungarian servicemen from both ministries who did not physically join the rebels provided weapons and material support for them within means and capabilities.

Another form of ~~support~~ from the PAOH was not to interfere in the ongoing firefights between the revolutionary forces and the Soviet troops, which partially can be explained by the growing repugnance of the Hungarian military officer corps against the Soviets. As a result, Soviet resentment and dissatisfaction about the performance of the Hungarian armed and security forces constantly grew, causing growing tensions between the Hungarian and Soviet Commands, further reducing the possibility of jointly planned and synchronized operations. This inaction of the PAOH was also appreciated and acknowledged by the revolutionary forces, in turn, the number of hostile activities against the Hungarian forces was insignificant in comparison of the ones carried out against the Soviet troops.

Similar issues can be detected in the lines of the PD. The police officers were also very cautious to apply lethal fire against the demonstrators. Already on 23 October 1956, Sándor Kopácsi the Chief of Police Department of Budapest unambiguously issued his

instruction prohibiting the use of firearms against the demonstrators unless the police officers were in life threatening situation as a self-protection measure. The discontinuance of command and control from the highest levels all the way down to the lowest echelons was perhaps, more relevant than in the army. Similar to the MOD, the MOI also became dysfunctional, leaving their subordinates without guidance and instruction.

Kopácsi became the central individual to make things happen and issue orders.⁵³ If he became unreachable, due to a lack of initiative, peculiar to the lower ranking officers just like in the PAOH, the system broke down. The most important command and control asset was the telephone network. However, the telephone network was non-operational in Budapest most of the time. This made it extremely difficult to disseminate orders and gain information on the units, contributing to the severe lack of situational awareness. The district Police Chiefs also attempted to dispatch messengers but many of them were captured, allowing the rebels to gain intelligence information.

The incoming rumors and unofficial reports about the great number of soldiers joining the Revolution discouraged and demoralized the police officers considerably. In addition, with the progress of time, more and more police officers realized that this revolutionary movement was based on the ordinary people of Hungary rightfully demanding measures to improve their quality of life.

Understandably, the security forces of the MOI were of less combat value due to their strength and equipment. The initial number of deployable forces to conduct riot control tasks totaled approximately 300 troops, which was increased up to 1,200 by 24 October 1956.⁵⁴ With this available strength it was futile to efficiently prevent the

escalation of protests leading to armed fights. The majority of the units of the MOI were tasked to provide force protection and building security, therefore minimum forces remained to conduct riot control and patrol operations. They did not enter into decisive engagements with superior revolutionary forces. On the contrary, if it was reasonable, they also tended to use the means of persuasion and negotiations.

The police stations and patrolling units became easy source to obtain weapons due to their limited capabilities and level of resistance. For instance, many police stations under attack requested reinforcement to no avail. It frequently happened due to either non-operational communication systems or limited Army and Police forces available coupled with indecisive higher ranking leaders.⁵⁵ Obviously, these hopeless police officers ceased combat actions and surrendered, having no desire and motivation to continue pointless fights against overwhelming opposing forces.

An example of the nature of the collaboration between the PAOH and PD is presented in a particularly interesting story. The police officers under attack in the XVI district of Budapest requested immediate reinforcement. Fulfilling the request, the PAOH leadership sent two tanks. The tanks had arrived with the Hungarian national flags posted on their turret and oriented their guns at the police station. Apparently, they did not engage the revolutionary forces. As a result, the police officers decided to surrender and hand over the building to the rebels.⁵⁶

Eventually, the recognition of the necessity to improve cooperation and synchronization between the PAOH and PD, the representatives of the two ministries held a meeting. This meeting took place on 27 October 1956, when it was already too late

to affect the course of the events. The only result of the meeting was the assignment of one single Army liaison officer.

At many times, during the sieges of the police stations and correctional facilities, to include penitentiaries, besides capturing weapons the besiegers successfully freed prisoners. Most of the time, the guards of the correctional facilities only put up a symbolic or weak resistance in order to show officially their determination to resist. The escaped convicts, especially the political prisoners, usually joined the resistance and increased the number of the revolutionary forces. The backlash of the prisoners having been freed was that the revolutionary forces did not discriminate between the political prisoners and the ordinary criminals. Unfortunately, the freeing of common prisoners contributed to the deterioration of public security.

As mentioned before, the lack of unity of command and the lack of coordination and synchronization among Hungarian MOD and MOI units, and Soviet forces was one of the most important factors that led to the initial success of the revolutionary forces. After realizing this issue, the Party leadership established the so-called Military Committee consisting of mostly militarily unskilled politicians on the night of 23 October 1956.

From the very beginning of the Revolution, the mission of the Military Committee was to conduct coordination and synchronization among the different elements of both the MOD and MOI. They were also to liaise among the leadership of the Hungarian Army, the Headquarters of the Soviet armed forces commanding the pending Hungarian operations, and the political decision makers including the Hungarian Party members and the Soviet political advisors. Its additional task was the remilitarization of

the factory workers and the former partisans willing to fight against the rebels. This decision, issuing out weapons from the depots had an incorrigible outcome as a result of the miscalculated assumptions of the Party leadership about the estimated support of the workers.

After 25 October 1956, the Military Committee based on Antal Apró's strong insistence was invested with plenary power granted by the Party.⁵⁷ According to the interpretation of the Committee members this decision entitled them to issue direct orders to the MOD including the Army Command, and the MOI. In spite of this order, the Committee remained powerless because the two ministries did not recognize the executive power of the Committee, and no units were subordinated to the Committee. Furthermore, the decisions made during the meetings of the Committee were not explicitly communicated down to the level of the MOD and MOI. The Military Committee failed to achieve reasonable situational awareness and understanding during its entire activity, which further contributed to their incompetent instructions. These factors effected mostly no mission accomplishments of any of the tasks issued by the committee.

The ineffectiveness of the Committee also significantly hampered Soviet offensive operations creating favorable conditions for the revolutionary fighters. Justifying this presumption, according to Colonel Malasenko, Chief of Staff of the Soviet Special Corps ~~the~~ Military Committee never fulfilled its mission and had no influence on the shaping of the power relations," he further added that its inconsistent and controversial requests towards the Soviet military leadership further rendered the military operation of the Soviet forces ineffective and significantly contributed to the rebels

gaining the initiative and multiplying their strengths.⁵⁸ The Committee, after realizing the irrationality of any further activity ceased its function and disbanded on 28 October 1956.

Economic

The economic factor had the less significant direct effect on the success of the revolutionary forces than the other factors. The duration of the Revolution was relatively short, not requiring extensive measures to sustain the revolutionary forces. On the other hand, when the majority of the workers went on strike, industrial production literally stopped, it only resumed partly around 29 to 30 October 1956, depending mostly on the security situation and the decision of the Workers' Council of different factories.

Mostly, the rebels were able to self-sustain themselves by the active support of the local population. The arms and ammunition resupply was the most crucial and difficult. The rebels acquired the majority of the weapons from two sources. One of the sources was the armories of the factories. Most of the factories possessed designated numbers of mostly small arms in case the workers had to be armed to repel any hostile activity. The demonstrators consisting of large numbers of workers were aware of it, successfully raided and ransacked many of them. Exemplifying the non-existent situational awareness of the government, the previously discussed Military Committee in accordance with the Party and government leadership made the decision to open up the central armories in order to arm up the workers. The government wanted to give the impression that the government forces supported by the working class were jointly suppressing the anti-revolution generated by subversive elements. Apparently, as the majority of the workers were already supporting the demonstrations, meaning that most of those weapons were

directly issued out to the rebels. Of course, subsequent efforts to recollect the previously issued weapons from the rebels failed.

It is an important note that after the break-out of the Revolution the workers formed the so called Self-protective Workers' Guard. The primary purpose of these organizations was to protect the assets of the factories from damage and looting and the secondary one was to assist the Communist government with suppressing the revolutionary movement, which is the reason why the government issued weapons them. However, many of the workers decided to use these weapons against the government, while mostly the moderate workers did not participate directly in the fights, but they played an important role in ensuring public security. Besides the workers, the PAOH was also ordered to provide security for many of the major factories tying down remarkable number of forces. Those forces were not to participate in the offensive operations against the revolutionary armed groups massively reducing the number of available maneuver units.⁵⁹

On the other hand, back in those days, there was a strong arms industry in Hungary. The rebels successfully occupied a few of those factories, like the Danuvia Arms Factory providing temporary source of weapons and ammunition. The other source to acquire weapons was disarming of security forces and spoils of war.

A continuous food supply was a severe issue during the fights in Budapest. The situation was much better in the countryside, allowing the peasants to provide food for the population in Budapest. Many times the country people donated the food for free as an expression of support and sympathy for those fighting against the Soviets.

Because of the stopped industrial production, Hungary started running out of different goods the population needed. The considerable quantity of donations coming from different foreign countries both socialist and capitalist helped to alleviate the emerging desperate situation. Mostly food, clothing and medical supply was delivered to Hungary. An interesting note to add, for instance, among others President Eisenhower himself pledged \$10,000,000 in aid for Hungary.⁶⁰ Of course, besides the ordinary population, the revolutionary fighters also benefited from these donations, the medical supply being one of the most important ones.

The proclaimed curfew order often prevented people from obtaining food, which concerned Nagy. Therefore, Nagy, after collation with the Party leadership decided to provisionally suspend it on 28 October 1956. The supporters of the military solution strongly criticized and accused him of impeding the successful military operations.⁶¹ This accusation is partially correct from the military point of view, because it became impossible to discriminate and separate belligerents and individuals not involved in the fights. The revolutionary forces, of course had no distinguishable uniform making it almost impossible to identify them, and they could easily blend into the population if the combat situation required doing so.

But the point is that the government was not capable of restoring order, and breaking the resistance during the time period between the 24 to 28 October 1956. The reason being they literally did not bother to develop any accomplishable action plans. Immature, inconsistent, and passionate suggestions were raised from time to time during the Party and government meetings with the Soviet delegations present; however, no detailed and productive planning was performed.⁶²

Summary

In the previous subchapters, this paper discussed the existing circumstances of the political, military, informational, and economical aspects that made the revolutionary forces initially successful. Only, the most important components of these factors are highlighted and repeated in this summary.

The initial success of the Revolution was primarily due to the government being incapable to efficiently cope with the unfolding demonstrations. The state of splitting within the HWPP, separating the progressionists who were able to comprehend the ongoing events and understand the grievances of the demonstrating population from the bigoted and forceful old-school communists completely paralyzed the productive decision making process.

This also explicitly appeared in the information management and communication of the government and party leaders towards the revolutionaries and the population further exacerbating the situation. These conditions already predestined the fate of the current political leadership on 23 October 1956, when the prevailing controversies within the Party immensely hindered the unity of effort. What is more, there had been numerous and instantly recognizable signs and intelligence reports of the emerging resistance movement what the contemptuous political leaders disregarded and failed to prevent.

However, it was only a few hours, the short hesitancy of the Soviet Politburo to commit the Soviet forces being stationed in Hungary that allowed the demonstrators to achieve the first victories at the siege of the Budapest Radio, and acquire weapons. The triumph over the first the Hungarian units dispatched by the MOI had a grave importance for the future from the military point of view.

The time period between the 23 to 27 October 1956 was also a lost window of opportunity from the political point of view that allowed escalation and strengthening of the revolutionary movement. Although, Nagy was nominated and reelected to be the new Premier replacing the despised Hegedűs in order to satisfy the demands of the crowds, Hegedűs's apparatus exercised the executive power during this time. This delayed Nagy's attempts to initiate the necessary reform measures and consolidate the domestic situation. Most importantly, the Hegedűs government requested the Soviet military intervention, which completely changed the course of the events, and the Revolution simultaneously became a freedom fight against the Soviet oppressors further uniting the public.

The overdue, unconscionable and mostly contradicting political decisions immensely confused the leadership of the armed and security forces giving away the initiative and momentum to the demonstrators and later on the revolutionary forces. Obviously, the current unprepared state of the armed and security forces was also one of the most significant factors to the revolutionary success. This insufficient status of the forces included both tangible factors like strength and equipment, and intangible ones like obsolete crisis action plans, low morale, leadership deficiencies, and the supportive attitude towards the fellow revolutionary countrymen.

The Hungarian and Soviet armed and security forces were greatly inferior to the revolutionary forces regarding their strength and equipment. However, the parties failed to establish coordination and synchronization among the different units, which resulted in lack of unity of effort and command, even often fratricide. Furthermore, the MOD and MOI ceased to efficiently function from the second day of the Revolution, mostly due to the unclear higher political instructions and lack of situational awareness and

understanding. The establishment of the Military Committee, which had the task to liaise between the political leadership and the Hungarian-Soviet armed forces, define and forward military tasks, further deteriorated the already existing disorder. The purview of the Committee was poorly specified, the higher political body did not provide unambiguous instructions to them, their members were ill-qualified to make sound operational and tactical decisions, and the forces executing the tasks mostly disobeyed the orders issued by the Committee.

Also, the Hungarian and Soviet forces were not able to utilize their full combat potential as a result of constraints imposed by the government in order to avoid collateral damage. On the contrary, the revolutionary forces were able to make most of the natural features of the terrain, available resources, and the support provided by the local population. The morale and fighting spirit was high, the leadership motivated, and the former servicemen who joined the revolutionary groups further leveraged the tactical skills and capabilities of these groups. Of course, the revolutionary forces as opposed to the Hegedűs-Gerő political clique, conducted successful information operations, productively firming the local support.

¹Marosán György (15 May 1908 to 20 December 1992) was a Hungarian leftist politician. He started his political career in the Social Democratic Party. He was a strong supporter of the merge of the Social Democratic and Communist Party. During the Revolution of 1956 he was the most violent representative of the coercive measures, even the lethal use against the demonstrators to protect the existing communist state organization.

²Tibor Méray, *Thirteen Days That Shook the Kremlin* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1959), 89.

³Lajos Ács (22 September 1922 to 14 September 1968) was member of the HWPP. In the period of 1955-1956 he worked as the Party Ideological Secretary.

⁴Judith Szabó and Valuch Tibor, *Donáth Ferenc: A Márciusi Fronttól Monorig Tanulmányok, vázlatok, emlékezések* [Donáth Ferenc: From the Front in March till Monor Studies, sketches, recollections] (Budapest: MTA Közgazdaság-tudományi Intézete–Századvég, 1992), 96-98.

⁵Miklós Horváth, *1956 hadikrónikája* [The War Chronicle of 1956] (Budapest: Akadémia Kiadó, 2003), 455.

⁶Julianna Horváth and Zoltán Ripp, *Ötvenhat októbere és a hatalom A Magyar Dolgozók Pártja testületeinek dokumentumai, 1956.október 24–28* [October of Fifty-six Documents of the organizations of the Hungarian Working People's Party] (Budapest: Napvilág Kiadó, 1997), 34-37.

⁷Horváth, *1956 hadikrónikája*, 79-80.

⁸György Litván, *Vidéki helyzetkép, 1956. október 23–27* [Situation report from the country, 23–27 October 1956] (História 7, 1995), 31.

⁹Mikhail Andreyevich Suslov (21 November 1902 to 25 January 1982) was a member of the Soviet Politburo and the Secretariat of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. He was sent to Hungary together with Anastas Mikoyan to provide political assistance to the Hungarian Communist Party during the Revolution of 1956.

¹⁰Vjacseszlav Szereda and Alekszandr Sztikalin, *Hiányzó lapok 1956 történetéből Dokumentumok a volt SZKP KB levéltárából* [Missing pages from the history of 1956. Documents from the Archive of the Central Committee of Communist Party of the Soviet Union] (Budapest: Móra Ferenc Könyvkiadó, 1993), 111-113.

¹¹Horváth, *1956 hadikrónikája*, 235-236.

¹²Horváth and Ripp, *Ötvenhat októbere és a hatalom A Magyar Dolgozók Pártja testületeinek dokumentumai 1956. október 24–28.*, 98-100.

¹³Méray, *Thirteen Days That Shook the Kremlin*, 166.

¹⁴Miklós Horváth, *1956 hadikrónikája* [The War Chronicle of 1956] (Budapest: Akadémia Kiadó, 2003), 456. As a result of the Suez Crisis started on 29 October 1956 the Soviet Union lost its prevailing influence and control over Egypt due to the heavy involvement of the USA in the political negotiations and arrangement of the cease fire.

¹⁵Tamás G. Kotányi, “Szabad Nép, 1956. október 23.” in *Egy népfelkelés dokumentumaiból 1956* [From the documents of a popular uprising 1956] (Budapest: Lap-és Könyvkiadó, 1989), 46-48.

¹⁶János M. Rainer, *Nagy Imre. 1953–1958* (Budapest: 56-os Intézet, 1999), 244-245.

¹⁷Tamás G. Kotányi, *–Kossuth Rádió 1956. október 23.20 óra,*” in *Egy népfelkelés dokumentumaiból 1956* [From the documents of a popular uprising 1956] (Budapest, Hungary: Lap-és Könyvkiadó, 1989), 52-54.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹László Varga, *A forradalom hangja Magyarországi rádió adások, 1956.október 23–november 9* [The voice of the Revolution Radio messages, 23 October–9 November 1956] (Budapest: Századvég Kiadó–Nyilvánosság Klub, 1989), 29-31.

²⁰G. Kotányi, *–Kossuth Rádió 1956. október 23.20 óra,*” in *Egy népfelkelés dokumentumaiból 1956*, 52-54.

²¹Ibid.

²²Ibid.

²³Méray, *Thirteen Days That Shook the Kremlin*, 98.

²⁴Horváth, *1956 hadikrónikája*, 76.

²⁵Ibid., 125.

²⁶Varga, *A forradalom hangja Magyarországi rádió adások, 1956.október 23–november 9*, 72-73.

²⁷Hanna Szalay, *Népszava, –1956. október.26,*” in *1956 sajtója, október 23–november 4. Válogatás* [Press of 23 October–4 November 1956 Selection] (Budapest: Kolonel Lap-és Könyvkiadó Kft., 1989), 59-60.

²⁸Varga, *A forradalom hangja Magyarországi rádió adások, 1956.október 23–november 9*, 131-132.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹A. Ross Johnson, *–A Szabad Európa Rádió szerepe az 1956–os Magyar forradalomban,*” <http://epa.oszk.hu/00800/00861/00037/pdf/147-173.pdf> (accessed 20 December 2010).

³²Ibid.

³³Méray, *Thirteen Days That Shook the Kremlin*, 140.

³⁴Ibid., 169.

³⁵Ibid., 141.

³⁶A. Ross Johnson, „A Szabad Európa Rádió szerepe az 1956-os Magyar forradalomban,” <http://epa.oszk.hu/00800/00861/00037/pdf/147-173.pdf> (accessed 20 December 2010).

³⁷Horváth, *1956 hadikrónikája*, 21.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 23.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 24-25.

⁴⁰Attila Szakolczai, *Az 1956-os forradalom és szabadságharc* [The Revolution and Freedom Fight of 1956] (Budapest: 1956-os intézet, 2001), 143-144.

⁴¹Horváth, *1956 hadikrónikája*, 28.

⁴²*Ibid.*, 34-40.

⁴³*Ibid.*, 188.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 45.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 44.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 72.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, 70.

⁴⁸Szereda Vjacseszlav and János M. Rainer, *Döntés a Kremlben, 1956. A szovjet pártelnökség vitái Magyarországról* [Decision in the Kremlin, 1956. The discussions of the Soviet Politburo about Hungary] (Budapest: 1956-os Intézet, 1996), 171-173.

⁴⁹Attila Szakolczai, *1956, Nemzet és Emlékezet* [1956, Nation and Recollection] (Budapest: Osiris Kiadó, 2006), 116-117.

⁵⁰Horváth, *1956 hadikrónikája*, 70.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, 44.

⁵²*Ibid.*, 148-149.

⁵³*Ibid.*, 169.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, 175.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 171.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, 174.

⁵⁷Apró Antal (8 February 1913 to 9 December 1994) was a Hungarian Communist politician. From 25 October 1956 he was the President of the Military Committee of the Hungarian Working People's Party. After the suppression of the Revolution he was appointed to be the President of the Soviet-Hungarian Friendship Association.

⁵⁸Horváth, *1956 hadikrónikája*, 70.

⁵⁹Szakolczai, *1956 Nemzet és Emlékezet*, 192.

⁶⁰Méray, *Thirteen Days That Shook the Kremlin*, 140.

⁶¹Horváth, *1956 hadikrónikája*, 99-100.

⁶²*Ibid.*, 101.

CHAPTER 4

THE DEFEAT OF THE REVOLUTION AND THE FOLLOWING CONSEQUENCES

Chapter 4 examines and provides a general overview of the events after the suppression of the Revolution. After briefly addressing the circumstances of the Soviet military intervention, the next two subchapters highlight what were the provisions the Kádár government implemented to stabilize its power, how those measures affected the Hungarian armed and security forces, and the populace in general.

The Soviet Military Intervention

According to the unilateral political decision made by the Kremlin, the Soviet Special Corps, temporarily formed to conduct the Hungarian onslaught, commenced its offensive operation against the Hungarian People's Republic after the codeword "Thunder" was issued on 4 November 1956 at 4:15 a.m. Soon after the Soviet military machinery was set in motion, János Kádár, who had been disappeared for days, made a radio announcement from Soviet territory. The Kremlin nominated him, as a former member of the Nagy government, to be the head of the new puppet government satisfying the Soviet political and military interests. He announced the establishment the new Revolutionary Worker-Peasant Government (RWPG) and explained the necessity of the Soviet military intervention. He reasoned that the Revolution had turned into a fascist movement, and to protect the communist achievements and state order, the Soviet political and military assistance were needed. He also gave his word to preserve many of achievements of the Revolution and granted impunity for those ones who actively

participated in the Revolution but accept cessation of further resistance.¹ He never fulfilled these promises.



Figure 6. Soviet Armor Column Advancing in Budapest
Source: Post Cards, <http://www.kepeslap.com/1956> (accessed 20 December 2010).

The Soviet political decision about applying military power was strongly influenced by the Soviet military, which developed the plan, code-named “Whirlwind.” This Soviet Special Corps consisted of eight mechanized infantry, one armor, two infantry, two air defense artillery, two aviation, and two air assault divisions with the estimated strength of 60,000 troops.² The Corps commenced the attack from multiple

directions including the territory of Hungary, Soviet Union, and Rumania oriented towards Budapest and some other designated major cities. The Soviet Corps had two main operational objectives. The first one was to neutralize the PAOH and block the western Hungarian-Austrian border in order to deny any NATO military intervention. The second objective was to fix and finish the mostly civilian revolutionary forces that were still active if engaging Soviet troops.³ Therefore, after rapid advance they surrounded and disarmed the Hungarian garrisons. If the Soviets encountered any signs of resistance they retaliated it disproportionately. Even in many cases the Soviets opened fire at military buildings, military equipments like airplanes, and unarmed soldiers without any reason and warning, killing many people. The Soviet forces also conducted preventive bombardment against different Hungarian military airfields. The Soviets had taken the greater part of the Army officers into custody and immediately deported them to prisons situated mostly in the Soviet Union to prevent them from being involved in any anti-Soviet operations.

Yet, the Hungarian political and military leadership did not issue any order to fight against the Soviet forces, moreover the MOD in the absence of Major General Pál Maléter explicitly prohibited any armed resistance put up against the invaders. Where was MG Maléter, the Minister of Defense at these critical times? MG Maléter and his close advisors were to participate in a Hungarian-Soviet meeting to resolve the pending issues regarding the previously negotiated and accepted Soviet withdrawal from Hungary. However, the Soviets resorting to ruse, immediately had detained the Hungarian delegation with the active participation of the KGB, in order to behead the Hungarian military leadership. What is more, to finalize the deception plan, in a little

while the Soviets sent a telegraph in Maléter's name assuring the Hungarian political leadership that the negotiation was proceeding productive.

To exemplify the indefiniteness of the government at this time, Nagy's first radio communiqué was completely contradictory to the measures that had been implemented by the MOD, which resulted in further confusion among the military officers. Nagy addressed the Hungarian population saying:

This is Imre Nagy speaking, the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Hungarian People's Republic. Today morning the Soviet troops commenced attack against our capitol with the obvious intent, to topple the legal Hungarian democratic government. Our troops are at war. The government is in its place. This is what I intend to inform the Hungarian population and the world public opinion about.⁴

Nonetheless, in the morning of 4 November 1956, the reports kept coming in from the different Hungarian military and border security units attain full combat readiness to accept battle against the Soviets occupational forces. Eventually, Nagy also ordered the Hungarian armed forces to stand down and surrender to the Soviets to avoid any further bloodshed and damage.

Despite the official government instructions, a number of state armed and security forces alongside with the revolutionary forces decided to enter fight against the aggressors in numerous different locations all around Hungary. The freedom fighters were aware of the combat force ratio, and they knew very well that they had no chance to defeat the numerous Soviet forces. The Hungarian goal was to gain time, and hope for the UN to pass the security resolution to stop the Soviet aggression and guarantee Hungary's right of self-determination.

It is important to understand what factors contributed to the desired UN resolution the Hungarians hoped for. The Nagy government passed the resolution to withdraw from

the Warsaw Pact and declare Hungary's neutrality during the government meeting on 1 November 1956.⁵ These decisions were based on the unsatisfactory results of the pending conference between the Hungarian government and the Soviet delegation discussing future political and military issues. The Hungarian government still did not see unambiguous guarantees yet on the previously accepted proposals regarding the Hungarian political independence and the complete pulling out of the Soviet troops from Hungary. What is more, worrisome intelligence reports kept arriving on further Soviet forces crossing the Hungarian border, which completely contradicted to the written agreement earlier signed by the Soviet Politburo.⁶ Therefore, the Hungarian government officially confirmed its intention on international forums to break off the Warsaw Pact agreement on 2 November 1956. The government hoped to cut off the last vague legal possibility for the Soviet Union to use military power. Hungary also announced its neutrality in the UN, which further deteriorated the already fragile international political situation.⁷ The western powers, especially the United Kingdom, France, and the USA were already concerned and preoccupied with the Suez-Crisis. On the other hand, the US political leadership was aware that the Soviet Union would do all in its power to impede Hungary's neutrality, and they decided not to overtly confront with the Soviet Union. The USA possibly concluded that an overt intervention, in an already fragile international situation into one of the countries of the immediate buffer zone between the Soviet Union and NATO, would result in an inevitable war. Consequently, the Hungarian government's attempt to gain international recognition and political protection failed giving free hands to the Soviets.

During the Soviet offensive operations, the most ferocious fights occurred in Budapest, especially in the densely populated downtown area. The Soviet troops, in spite of their technical advantage and preponderant number, were able to crush the revolutionary forces only after several consecutive attacks. The morale of the Hungarian fighters was still high, but their sustainment capabilities became very limited. Moreover, interestingly the Molotov-cocktail proved almost non-effective against the new T-55 tanks due to the better protection and isolation of their internal fuel system in comparison to the previously employed T-34s in great number. What is more, at this time the Soviets applied extensive fire support including artillery and air assets, bringing down entire complexes of building. This resulted in breaking the will of the civilian population and therefore they discontinued to provide logistic supply to the Hungarian revolutionary forces.

The Soviets units operating in Budapest also occupied the government facilities as well and started to arrest the Hungarian politicians being on the list of the KGB. As a result, Nagy together with his closest political functionaries accompanied by their family members had no other option but to escape. The Yugoslav government granted political asylum to them, so they could stay in the Yugoslav Embassy in Budapest for days.

The Soviet forces crushed the backbone of the resistance by 9 November 1956. However, the Soviets needed another 3 weeks to completely crush the revolutionary movement.⁸ The aftermath was shocking. Budapest was in ruins again, similarly like after World War II. More than 20,000 individuals injured, more than 2,500 died during the entire revolution. The majority of the dead were young, sometimes underage children (see figure 7).

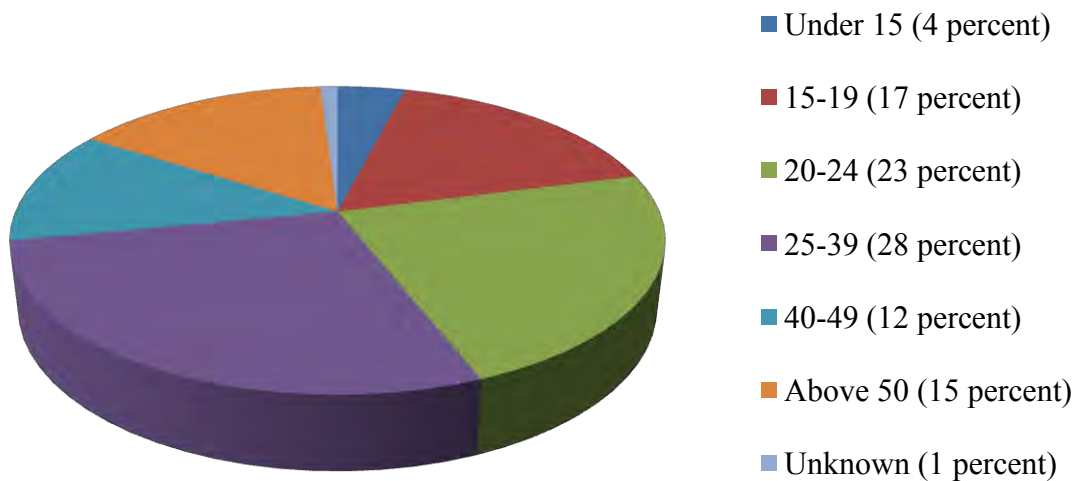


Figure 7. Percentage Distribution of the Dead by Ages

Source: Hungarian Revolution of 1956 Website, Photographs of the Revolution, <http://www.magyarforradalom1956.hu> (accessed 18 December 2010).

During the engagements of the Revolution against the Soviets, 423 members of the armed and security forces were killed.⁹ The Soviet forces also suffered significant losses, especially in Budapest. They had 2,260 injuries including 584 killed, and 1,986 wounded. Additionally, the Soviets lost a great number of military vehicles, mostly tanks, self-propelled artillery assets, and armored personal carriers destroyed.¹⁰

Despite the suffering, some Hungarians could preserve their sense of humor to exemplify the extensive damages in Budapest and the bitter feelings of the ordinary people.

Citizen of Budapest comes out of the basement after the Soviet siege is over in the town. He looks around, sees all the houses destroyed, and eventually exclaims. Well, how lucky we are that all these damages were done by our beloved comrades! What would have happened if our enemies had been here?

Hungarian sarcastic cursing after the Revolution:

Comrade Kádár should protect you from the anti-revolutionaries!

The Soviet Union should be your friend, and the UN should be the one to help you!¹¹



Figure 8. Landscape of Budapest after Soviet “Assistance”

Source: Hungarian Revolution of 1956 Website, Photographs of the Revolution, <http://www.magyarforradalom1956.hu> (accessed 20 December 2010).

The Final Outcome of the Purge in the Hungarian Armed and Security Forces after the Suppression of the Revolution

Although Kádár in his previous speeches repeatedly promised impunity for those who participated in the Revolution, the citizens had to realize before long that this was

not going to be the case. Before the Hungarian prosecution started, the Soviet forces had already deported significant number of PAOH officers to the Soviet Union for interrogation, and during the fight, executed several captured Hungarian POWs on the premises. On the whole, in Hungary 16,748 individuals were found guilty in anti-state subversion and sentenced, 824 of them were servicemen employed by either the MOD or the MOI.¹² The commencement of the court process against service members immediately started after 4 November 1956, and the prosecutions were really expedited and served the purpose to take revenge for the Soviet losses and to intimidate the Hungarian officer corps. Of course, the Soviets closely monitored and supervised the proceedings of the investigations.

After the defeat of the Revolution, the Military Court entirely submitted itself to fulfilling the directions of the new Hungarian political leadership controlled by the Soviet advisors, and they only focused on the investigations of the so called ~~“anti-revolutionary”~~ cases. Up to 31 December 1958, the Military Court convicted 405 individuals through summary courts. ~~“Normal”~~ prosecutions convicted 1,506 individuals. 81 former servicemen were sentenced to death starting with BG Maléter and including many other high ranking officers mostly working for the Joint Staff, and commanding different military educational institutions. Besides the trials, in the PAOH almost 6,000, in the organizations of the MOI about 10,000 additional disciplinary proceedings were initiated.¹³

To further discredit the Revolution, many of the former servicemen including AVH members who died during the fighting against the already ~~“anti-revolutionary”~~ forces were declared honorary war dead. By this measure the RWPG led by Kádár further

attempted to justify the unreasonably high number of the convicts. They publicly asserted that every fallen hero fighting against the rebels had to be remembered and avenged. However, they disregarded the fact that a considerable number of these casualties was the result of uncoordinated Hungarian and Soviet operations causing fratricide.

With the prosecutions and court trials ended the purge in the PAOH was far from being over. The Kádár government wanted to ascertain about the future loyalty of the Army officer corps towards the newly formed Communist government. The political leadership introduced the Officers' Oath of Allegiance, and the leadership of the RWPG demanded officers sign it if they wished to continue to serve in the Army(See Appendix C). Approximately 74 percent of the officers were willing to sign it the rest of them refused, numbering 6,857.¹⁴ The relatively low rate of the officers continuing the service was contributable to the aversion, the Hungarian officers felt towards the Soviets, who afterwards vehemently intruded into and controlled the daily operations of the Hungarian Army. Furthermore, after signing the oath 1,858 officers decided to leave the Army, in response to the government's retaliatory measures against the population committed hand in hand with the present Soviet authorities.¹⁵ Simultaneously, additional internal investigation was ongoing in order to check the officers' loyalty who decided to stay. Additionally, 8 generals and 1116 lower ranking officers' roles were examined during the Revolution. The outcome of this investigation was that added 3 generals and 726 officers were discharged.

As a result, the final number of the officers remaining in the service was reduced by 36 percent.¹⁶ That means that the overall combat readiness and the operational capability of the Hungarian Army fell way below unacceptable level. The government, in

order to fill the vacant positions, started to reinstitute former AVH officers and gave them commissions, generating indescribable tensions between the former Army officers and the despised AVH ones. This decision further deteriorated the overall morale predicament prevailing in the PAOH. Regarding the Hungarian-Soviet military relationships, the mutual trust has never been restored between Hungarian and Soviet officers. To this day the Hungarians remained repulsed by the Soviets, and the Soviets remained distrustful of the Hungarians.

The general picture in the different departments of the MOI was similarly alarming. The decrease in the number of the officers serving in Border Security Forces was proportionate to the Army. The situation in the Police was the most desperate. The strength of the available police forces after the fight in Budapest was only 87 police officers, who were lacking the necessary equipment to operate. There was no coordination between the forces of the MOD and the MOIA. The newly formed local Communist party cells and leaders enthusiastically initiated replacement of the police staff, removing former police officers and employing trusted party functionalists and former AVH officers.¹⁷ A great number of police officers decided to leave the PD voluntarily denying the cooperation with the RWPG. In Budapest alone approximately 800 police officers requested their discharge.¹⁸ This situation rendered the PD literally dysfunctional for months. After criminal trials were over, follow-up internal investigations, just like in the Army, were conducted resulting in further dismissals from the PD. The Government's solution was again the filling of as many empty positions with former AVH officers as possible.

The extensive reemployment of the former AVH officers was a more than welcomed measure favored and supported by the Soviets who were actively involved in the reorganization and the supervision of the Hungarian armed and security forces. The trusted AVH officers were an outstanding source of internal intelligence sometimes reporting directly to the Soviets. However, the widespread returning of the already disbanded AVH officer into state positions enraged the local populace. The Kádár government also realized this issue and they had to cope with a dilemma. If they keep the hatred AVH in the state system they, would upset the people, compromise and further delegitimize the still unstable governance. At the same time, these AVH officers were the most reliable supporters of the newly formed RWPG, not to mention that they actively participated in the suppression of the Revolution and the following arresting campaign and investigations. Obviously, due to the sporadic but still mostly violent demonstrations, the Kádár government did not dare to risk the direct reestablishment of the previous AVH. The hybrid solutions was a state level investigation against the former AVH officers who committed crimes against humanity, while establishing the Political Investigative body inside the PD, which was tasked to be in the leading role in liquidating the remnants of the revolutionary elements.¹⁹ Of course due to the trivial number of charges reported by the intimidated people, this prosecution was almost symbolic. On the other hand, this newly formed police body perfectly met the expectations of the RWPG.

The final stage was the extension of the basing rights of the Soviet troops in Hungary. In March 1957 the Kádár government and Marshall Zhukov signed the document addressing the future status of the Soviet troops in Hungary. This agreement legalized and extended the presence of the Soviet forces in Hungary for an unlimited

time. In reality, it meant that officially the last Soviet troops left the country on 30 June 1991 on the request of the Hungarian government.

The Period of State Repression and the Stabilization of the Kádár Government

After the defeat of the Revolution, sporadic anti-government demonstrations continued to occur throughout Hungary. The newly formed government was only able to suppress these by applying heavy fusillades, many times fired from Soviet weapons. The number of casualties continued to rise and the opposition strengthened. The RWPG in order to breakdown the resistance and intimidate the population declared extraordinary punitive legislations and the summary court-martial remained in effect until the summer of 1957.²⁰ Everyone was subject to prosecution and custody, and the defendants could not expect fair court procedures. The other form of punitive action was the forced movement into either Hungarian or Soviet internment camps. Everyone who was suspected to have any alleged disturbing effect on the society was a subject to be interned for one and half year. This was obviously an outstanding way to facilitate the already ongoing prosecutions against the individuals involved in the Revolution by removing every possible witness for the defendant. Many of these arrests and internations were unlawful and not justified by the law. For instance, by 15 November 1956, just in the penitentiary of Ungvár (former Hungarian city located in Ukraine) the Soviet authorities held close to 1,000 Hungarian individuals in captivity. Among those there were women, young children who were taken away from their parents and put into custody, and moved rapidly to the Soviet Union.²¹

The corporal punishment and torture became part of the everyday life. The newly formed units of the MOI led by the former AVH officers regularly conducted retaliatory raids against designated institutions or settlements and they beat up everyone without any reason to intimidate the locals. These actions further increased the number of personnel fleeing the country, and the ones remaining showed a strong unsympathetic attitude towards the Kádár administration. By the end of this period approximately 200,000 Hungarians immigrated to different foreign countries.²² This expatriation in such great numbers further weakened the resistance movement and strengthened the position of the RWPG and the Communist Party.

After the Kádár apparatus firmed its position in Budapest, it continued to extend its authority to the rural cities and eventually the villages. The purge and reconstitution of the local government and judiciary system was the next step. Only trusted individuals close to the Party were nominated to fulfill these positions. Simultaneously, the Party initiated the organization of the rural Party cells and representatives penetrating in every way of life. The Party again became able to control and monitor every walk of the society by the end of 1957. These events entailed the coming back of the previously hard liners, mostly Rákosi supporters, who had been marginalized earlier by the reform wing of the Party. These hard-liners were very impatient to return to power. They openly criticized the Kádár government for being hesitant and incapable of coping with the still active revolutionary elements. They demanded the immediate termination of any negotiations between the government and the representatives of the working class, and called for extensive application of coercive measures. The protest strike and sabotaging the industrial production in the factories remained the only means for the workers to express

their opposition against the Kádár government and achieve more favorable negotiating positions. Therefore, the hard-liners asserted the necessity to forcefully break the strikes, and to dismiss the workers who went on strike.²³ Kádár also realized that the return of the Rákosi supporters was an inevitable threat to his power, although at this time he was still too weak to fight and silence them. On the other hand he needed them to restore the control of the Communist Party. Therefore he only put them in less significant positions, not jeopardizing his power.

The Party decided to arm the workers who proved to be faithful to the new political leadership, and formed the Workers Militia to protect the state system.²⁴ On the other hand, the will of those workers and peasants, who showed not more than a slight uncooperative attitude towards the new government, was broken by not providing job opportunities for them. If they wanted to sustain themselves and their families, they had no other choice but compliance. The government immediately terminated the pre-existing cultural and intellectual organizations and strictly prohibited any further activity including unauthorized meetings, publishing, and public speeches. Many renowned representatives of the cultural and scientific society, including actors, poets, writers, scientists, scholars were silenced forever, and even incarcerated for years. Unfortunately, as a result of the previous state actions, Hungary again lost many talented people fleeing abroad.

The freedom of the press and freedom of speech became strictly prohibited as the Party expanded its censorship of every media. The government also tightened its control over the churches, and strongly discouraged the practice of religion. As the priests generally supported the Revolution, many of them were prosecuted and ended up either

interned or imprisoned. State employees and the members of the armed and security forces were no longer authorized to exercise their religion and maintain connection with the church.

The Party also wanted to ensure that future generations would not gravitate towards revolutionary and reform ideas. Therefore, they created the KISZ (Kommunista Ifjúsági Szövetség- Hungarian Young Communist League) to indoctrinate the youths and educate them in the spirit of communism. The KISZ principally recruited the youngsters from the age of 14 years until 30. The KISZ fulfilled the role to educate the new generations of young communist politicians and maintained relationship with other youth communist organizations in the other parts of the world. The participation of the KISZ was strongly encouraged for college and university admittance. The size of the KISZ in its days of glory came close to 900,000 members.

The relationship between the Hungarian and the Soviet Politburo was improving as the Soviets politicians saw the results of Kádár's drastic retaliation measures. The Soviets affirmed their trust in Kádár and continued to support his administration. Without doubt, Kádár badly needed that support to further reinforce his political position and maintain law and order by keeping the populace in fear. Furthermore, Hungary also needed the economic support of the Soviet Union and the other communist countries to invigorate the economy, which was still in ruins.

The unfavorable situation of Hungarian foreign policy also necessitated the close relationship between the Hungarian and Soviet governments to encounter external political attacks mostly initiated by the UN. The UN and other foreign nations did not stop to put pressure on both the Hungarians and the Soviets in order to reveal the actual

after-revolution situation in Hungary including the circumstances of the second Soviet Military intervention.

The Soviet acknowledgement for the achievements of the Kádár government was the approval of the final liquidation of the remnants of the revolutionary movements, and the prosecution of Imre Nagy, the former Premier. The Hungarian political elite had been eager to inflict punishment on Nagy and his closest supporters. The trial against Nagy and his circle took place on 15 June 1958. Previously the situation was still too fragile, and Kádár did not dare to risk a recurrence of demonstrations. Therefore, from 24 November 1956, when Nagy and his comrades alongside with their families were captured while trying to leave the Yugoslav Embassy. They were arrested and were held in custody in a Rumanian prison, under strict Soviet guard. Of course, Nagys' apprehension further deteriorated the still strained relation between the Soviet Union, Hungary, and Yugoslavia. Reason being, as the result of previous bilateral agreement between Hungary and Yugaslavia, the Soviet and the Hungarian politicians granted the free departure, immunity, and safety of Nagys. Yugoslavia considered the violation of this bilateral political agreement as disregard of its international political status, degradation of its authority, and trustworthiness.²⁵ The final verdict was not even questionable, death. Kádár, by way of thanks, sentenced the person to death who freed him from the political prison in 1953, and lead him back to lines of the Communist Party. For most of the people in Hungary with the death of Nagy, the hope for the reforms and Revolution to revive died out for good.

After the Kádár's government accomplished the total annihilation of the revolutionary elements and leaders, eventually Kádár turned against the old communists,

who returned to power and were becoming more influential, thus posing a threat to Kádár's position. Kádár also realized that by removing those hardliners he could enhance the legitimacy of his government among the population. Kádár among other measures initiated investigations against Rákosi, Gerő, and some other influential Rákosi supporters in 1962, which resulted in the expulsion of these politicians from the Communist Party. Furthermore, the judiciary reexamined the trials of the former AVH officers, who committed crimes against humanity, and abused their authority. As a result, the AVH officers found guilty were discharged from service, and the state would no longer employ them. This process lasted for months and was complete in 1962.

Lastly, 1961 was a general positive change from the point of view of the population. This was the year of the cessation of summary-court martials and the prosecutions against the ~~anti~~-revolutionist" in general. From this time the government focused on the development of the living standards of the population. They carefully wanted to prevent any possibility of future revolt. Therefore, the government paid close attention on the grievances of the people, and intended to maintain a balanced and constant economical growth. After a few years Hungary reached the highest living standard in the countries of the Communist bloc, which eventually pacified and satisfied the population. As the situation improved the government lifted the strict control of the public life, and allowed more freedom to its citizen.

Beginning in 1960, the Hungarian and US governments engaged in a series of secret negotiations. As a result of these negotiations the UN no longer discussed the ~~Hungarian Issue.~~" In 1962 and 1963 the Hungarian Government granted amnesty to the individuals who participated in the Revolution.²⁶ However, these individuals remained

stigmatized and under surveillance until the end of their life or the end of the Communist government, whichever came first.

The following years passed calmly regarding the domestic political situation. The government also intended to isolate the population from the effects of the external political storms, like the pending Cold War. The Kádár government was able to maintain a constant economic growth completely eliminating the unemployment in Hungary. What is more, every Hungarian citizen was obliged to be employed by the law. The ones without job were legally titled shirkers a danger to the public and were prosecuted. Due to the increased living standard Hungary witnessed a significant demographic explosion in the middle of the 1970s. The subject of the Revolution of 1956, which was officially proclaimed as anti-revolution, was avoided, people were prohibited to broach the subject. It remained omitted part of Hungarian history for years. Not even the history curriculum in the educational institutions mentioned it until the early 1990s.

However, significant changes started to take place in 1988. The socialist economic system was no longer sustainable financially. The joint economic cooperation union consisting of the countries of the socialist bloc collapsed. Simultaneously, the population also felt the need for political changes, and the regime change came into force after several peaceful demonstrations. The multi-party system was reintroduced in Hungary in 1989 followed by free elections in 1990, the first one since 1948. The events of 1956 were redeclared as a Revolution, being one of the most significant events of the Hungarian history of which every Hungarian is proud of. Imre Nagy and the others, who fell during and after the Revolution were rehabilitated and declared as national heroes. Eventually on 23 October 1989, the Hungarian government proclaimed the new

Hungarian Republic, and announced the 23 October as a national holiday. So 23 October became a double national holiday for Hungary, the proclamation of the Hungarian Republic and commemoration of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956.

¹Éva Gál, *A Jelcin-dosszié Szovjet dokumentumok 1956-ról* [The Jelcin Dossier Soviet Documents on 1956] (Budapest: Századvég Kiadó-1956-os Intézet), 89-91.

²Miklós Horváth, *1956 hadikrónikája* [The War Chronicle of 1956] (Budapest: Akadémia Kiadó, 2003), 415.

³Gál, *A Jelcin-dosszié Szovjet dokumentumok 1956-ról*, 93-94.

⁴László Varga, *A forradalom hangja Magyarországi rádió adások, 1956.október 23–november 9* [The voice of the Revolution Radio messages, 1956. October 23–November 9] (Budapest: Századvég Kiadó–Nyilvánosság Klub, 1989), 487.

⁵Glatz Ferenc, *Jegyzőkönyv a kormány kabinet negyedik üléséről, 1956. November 1. Délután* [Report on the fourth meeting of the government cabinet, 1956. November 1. Afternoon] (História, 4-5. Edition, 1989), 49.

⁶Attila Szokolczai, *1956, Nemzet és Emlékezet* [1956, Nation and Recollection] (Budapest: Osiris Kiadó, 2006), 271-272.

⁷Hanna Szalay, *1956 sajtója, október 23-november 4., Nagy Imre távirata az ENSZ főtitkárának, 1956. November 1* [Imre Nagy's telegram to the Secretary of the United Nations, November 1, 1956] (Budapest: Kolonel Lap- és Könyvkiadó Kft, 1989), 335.

⁸Gál, *A "Jelcin-Dosszié" Szovjet dokumentumok 1956-ról*, 101.

⁹Horváth, *1956 hadikrónikája*, 441.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 443.

¹¹Szokolczai, *1956 Nemzet és Emlékezet*, 414.

¹²Horváth, *1956 hadikrónikája*, 444.

¹³*Ibid.*, 446.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 449.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 450.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Szakolczai, *1956 Nemzet és Emlékezet*, 375-377.

¹⁸Horváth, *1956 hadikrónikája*, 450.

¹⁹Ibolya Horváth, *Iratok az igazságszolgáltatás történetéhez. 5. kötet* [Files to the jurisdiction history Volume 5] (Budapest: Közgazdasági és Jogi Könyvtár, 1996), 757-765.

²⁰Tamás G. Kotányi, *Törvények és rendeletek, Egy népfelkelés dokumentumaiból 1956* [Laws and Decrees, Documents of Popular Uprising 1956] (Budapest: Tudósítások Lap-és Könyvkiadó, 1989), 189.

²¹Vjacseszlav Szereda and Alekszandr Sztikalin, *Hiányzó lapok 1956 történetéből Dokumentumok a volt SZKP KB levéltárából* [Missing pages from the history of 1956. Documents from the Archive of the Central Committee of Communist Party of the Soviet Union] (Budapest: Móra Ferenc Könyvkiadó, 1993), 155-158.

²²1956. *Az Egyesült Nemzetek Szervezete különbizottságának jelentése* [1956. Report of the UN special committee] (Budapest: Hunnia Kiadó, 1989), 39-42.

²³Szakolczai, *1956, Nemzet és Emlékezet*, 315-316.

²⁴Following the suppression of the Revolution the Revolutionary Worker's and Peasant's Party ordered on 18 February 1957 the establishment of the Workers' Militia (*Munkásőrség*), which was based on voluntary service. The members of this paramilitary organization were issued military equipment and went through regular military training. The Workers' Militia soon became significant strength numbering more than 50,000 troops. The main purpose of the Militia was to defend the means of industrial production and protect the state institutions. It was disbanded in 1989.

²⁵Lajos Gerecsényi, *Wodak osztrák nagykövet jelentése Nagy Imre és társai elhurcolásáról 1956. november 24* [Wodak Austrian Ambassador's report on the carrying off of Imre Nagy and his comrades, 24 November 1956] (Múltunk, 1996), 199-201.

²⁶Attila Szakolczai, *Az 1956-os forradalom és szabadságharc* [The Revolution and freedom fight of 1956] (Budapest: 1956-os Intézet, 2001), 232-233.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

The intention of this thesis is to examine the events of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 and find the answers on the following questions:

1. How and why did the revolutionary forces militarily succeed in the early phases of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956?
2. What diplomatic, informational, and economic factors contributed to the initial success of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956?
3. What were the effects of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 on the Hungarian society, Hungarian armed and security forces, and Hungarian-Soviet official political and military relationship, after it was defeated?

On 23 October 1956, a student demonstration, which started out peacefully, numbering only a few thousand protestors, rapidly grew on a national scale, and an armed Revolution developed due to the deeply rooted grievances stemming from the early 1950s. These socioeconomic grievances of the population related to the incredibly low living standards, poverty, and uncertainty of existence, and necessitated a change in the political line of direction, which would also ensue personal changes in the Hungarian government and the leadership of the HWPP. This was the collision point between the demands of the nation and the communist political apparatus in power. Previously, the ignorant HWPP leadership failed to realize the importance of the implementation of timely reform measures to prevent the further deterioration of the general situation in Hungary. They forcefully continued the inordinate development of Hungarian heavy

industry, while completely ignoring the other sectors, especially agricultural. Moreover, all of these economic measures were complemented with state wide judiciary terror, intimidation, and deprivation of fundamental human rights.

In 1953, when the Soviet Politburo realized the necessity of a political intervention and personal replacements in the government, the Party was already ideologically divided. The realization of the necessary reforms from one side, and the aggressive rejection of any dissident initiation, and opinions from the other side drove a remaining wedge into the ranks of the HWPP. It is also important to remember that first it was the communist politicians who voiced the necessity of reforms in organizations like the Petőfi Circle, and therefore they vastly contributed to making the Revolution, and many of them actively participated in the revolutionary events fulfilling several state and local level political positions. Nagy Imre's governance and reform measures may have been the solution, but as a result of Rákosi's and his followers' disruptive activity, it also proved to be a lost window of opportunity to avoid the Revolution.

This nature of the split inside the HWPP proved to be a vital factor for the success of the revolutionary forces from the very first day of the Revolution. Its inability to reach consensus on how to handle the unfolding Revolution, which at that time already conceptualized more radical demands compared to the previous ones, immeasurably paralyzed the timely and constructive decision making. The revolutionaries already started to demand sweeping political changes including multi-party system followed by free elections, and the immediate withdrawal of the Soviet armed forces stationed in Hungary.

The government's indecisiveness led by Gerő and Hegedűs allowed the demonstrations to grow out of control. The HWPP leadership also failed to realize the very important fact that this demonstration was no longer a student act, but included large numbers of workers who had already joined the protests as a result of the government's dissatisfying policy to improve their living conditions. This meant that the HWPP started to lose its legitimacy, which caused even more serious confusion among the Party and the government politicians later on.

After the outbreak of the Revolution, the government continued to communicate its contradicting and unreasonable political decisions to the local population until 28 October 1956, further displeasing the already disillusioned crowds. Government communication was aggravated by ineffective information management and operations. On the contrary, the revolutionary forces understood how important the information aspect of their fight was, and used it efficiently to gain general support from the population for their cause.

After 24 October 1956, the Communist politicians in office came to the realization that immediate personal changes had to be implemented. To fulfill the demands of the protestors, Imre Nagy was reelected to serve his second term as a Premier. However, he initially lacked the necessary freedom of action during the first days of the Revolution to implement his reform plan and to pacify the intense crowds. It is very important to grasp that Nagy himself was not a real revolutionist, he was an honest to goodness communist politician. Still, he was a reformer, who needed lengthy reaction time to think about his future steps. He preferred to make slower progress instead of making huge leaps forward, which contradicted the revolutionaries' urgent

deeds dissatisfying them. This characteristic is unfortunately a disadvantage in a revolutionary situation, when the politicians must have the ability to keep up with the fast and constantly changing situation, and react on them accordingly. Without doubt, he was willing to listen to what the nation had to say and responded to those messages. However, it was impossible to strike a reasonable balance between the will of HWPP, the Soviet Politburo, and the demands of the revolutionary forces, which resulted in the Soviet military intervention, and eventually the subjugation of the Revolution.

The indecisiveness and the contradicting instructions of the Hegedűs government also negatively impacted the action plan and the mission accomplishment of the Hungarian armed and security forces. These conflicting orders were the result of complete lack of situational awareness, and situational understanding coupled with massive ignorance. Literally, the PAOH and PD became dysfunctional in a short time, giving up the ground to the revolutionary forces and abandoning the last standing government force, the AVH. The AVH facing superior revolutionary forces also soon disintegrated, which was a great opening success and incentive for the rebels. This means that the revolutionary forces were able to gain the initiative and momentum from the very beginning, and they were able to retain it until the commencement of the second Soviet offensive operations.

The state of incapacity and unpreparedness of the PAOH and PD, however, did not develop overnight, just right before the Revolution. It stemmed back to years before the Revolution. As a result of the long lasting reorganization started in 1953, which was still incomplete by the time of the Revolution, the government downsized the number of troops, and significantly cut the budgets of these departments. The financial conditions in

which the career officers lived were also below minimum standard to ensure a good way of life. The Party intruded into, and kept strict control of, the everyday operations of the PAOH and PD, which was a clear sign of distrust and poor political esteem. These effects immensely alienated the officers' corps from the political leadership. As a result of these measures, the general combat readiness, the strength, and the morale of the units was far short of acceptable levels. This low morale later on proved to be a fertile ground for the revolutionary ideology and growing aversion towards the HWPP leadership led by Gerő, and the Communist government led by Hegedűs. This phenomenon would come to the surface as a generally supportive attitude of the PAOH and PD towards the revolutionary forces. This support included active and passive military assistance and donations of weaponry.

Examining the role of the armed and security forces facilitating the success of the revolutionary forces, the lack of coordination and the lack of unity of effort were definitely one of the most decisive factors. These deficiencies can be contributed to the non-existent unity of command from the anti-revolutionary side. Even the Military Committee, which was established to conduct the task of coordination and synchronization among the different Hungarian and Soviet forces supporting the government, was unable to fulfill this mission what the revolutionary forces could turn to their advantage. In addition to that, the decision of the Military Committee to arm the workers is also a question of primary importance. The Committee failed to recognize that the majority of the workers they intended to provide arms with had been already sympathetic to the anti-government movement.

The Soviet support in the early phase of the Revolution, 23 to 30 October 1956, meant political and military intervention of the Soviet Union creating a favorable situation for the revolutionary forces to a certain degree. The Soviet projected political guideline exacerbated the already pre-existing opposition between the reformers and the aggressive orthodox communists within the Party, further impacting the disposing capacity of the Hungarian government. The team of Soviet political advisors led by Mikoyan and Suslov, made the already insecure Hungarian politicians more unsure of how they should have coped with the deteriorating situation, which resulted in significant delay of actions against the rebels.

At the same time, the Soviet presence also gave the false feeling of protection for the government making them too complacent to develop any coherent crisis action plan addressing the current and anticipated future events. Simply, the Hungarians made the wrong assumption that the Soviets would resolve the situation instead of them. The Soviets strongly proposed a coercive, military resolution of the crisis. They disregarded the fact that a military suppression of a nationwide Revolution would make the future reconciliation between the HWPP and the Hungarian population impossible, delegitimizing both the Communist government and the Communist state system itself. Obviously this action would have resulted in a dictatorship sustained by the power of the armed and security forces, which was actually the case in the following years after the suppression of the Revolution. As later on the Nagy administration unambiguously overrode this proposed Soviet operational approach, the dissension between the Hungarian and Soviet political leadership inevitably widened. The controversies rose to

the highest pitch when the Nagy government manifested its political intent to withdraw from the Warsaw Pact and have the Soviet armed forces pull out of Hungary.

As a result of the first Soviet military involvement, as part of its Operation Wave, the course of the Revolution considerably changed. The Soviet military intervention galvanized the nation against the foreign aggressor, and a desperate fight for freedom started. This fight convinced the revolutionary forces about their righteousness and greatly enhanced their morale. The superior Soviet troops applying the incorrect tactics in urbanized terrain with limited combat support and force protection granted the initial “victories” for the revolutionary forces. The successful application of guerilla tactics inflicted heavy casualties and heavy equipment losses on the Soviet side, which severely impacted the morale of the Soviet forces. The previously discussed lack of coordination between the Hungarian and Soviet forces was definitely a reason why the Hungarian and Soviet forces were inefficient, and why the revolutionary forces were so successful.

The revolutionary forces were inferior in strength; however, they wisely used the terrain and took advantage of their interior lines. The use of interior lines greatly facilitated their maneuvers and sustainment operations. The majority of the revolutionary forces were enemy focused, which made them relatively mobile. The composition, disposition, and the leadership of the different groups changed constantly, which impeded the effectiveness of the intelligence gathering operations of the anti-revolutionary forces. This vacuum of actionable intelligence created a lack of situational understanding and situational awareness. The general support of the local population was also a great combat multiplier for the rebels enabling particularly the intelligence and sustainment operations including the recruitment as well.

The Revolution achieved final success, after the paths of the revolutionary forces and the Nagy Administration converged on 28 October 1956. However it was not to last long. The Revolution was entirely crushed by the end of November, after the Soviet armed forces commenced their second military intervention, Operation Whirlwind on 4 November 1956. The suppression of the Revolution was followed by extensive strikes and demonstrations. The new puppet government led by Kádár consolidated power situation, liquidated the remnants of the revolutionary organizations, and its activities, while solidifying the position of the RWPG to prove his aptitude to govern to the Soviet Politburo.

Kádár launched an extensive and aggressive retaliation campaign, concurrently supported with information operations. The most important element of his information campaign was the issuance of the series of books titled *The Counter-Revolutionary Forces in the October Events in Hungary*. By these publications he attempted to defame the individuals participating in the events of the Revolution, renounce the achievements of the Revolution, and make the people believe that what occurred was actually rightist anti-revolution committing a crime against the entire Hungarian society. The retaliation measures consisted of endless numbers of prosecutions, trials, internments, physical and psychological abuses. Thousands ended up imprisoned, and even more emigrated. The amnesty and the end of the state terror became reality only in 1963.

The military, political, and economic support the Kádár government received from the Soviet Union predetermined the course of events for the next few decades. The Hungarian and Soviet political and economic connections remained tight, however, the Kádár government intended to keep the politics out of the ordinary people's life. The

political and military elite of the two countries reassured the Hungarian-Soviet military relationship within the framework of Warsaw Pact; nevertheless, the mutual trust between the officer corps of the two countries has never been restored.

Recommendations

This essay provides a general insight of the events before, during, and after the Hungarian Revolution of 1956. Therefore, this paper is a source of information for those ones who are simply interested in this troubled period of Hungary in the twentieth-century. Without doubt, these times have been one of the most controversial and complex of the modern Hungary and its history influenced by a strong domestic and foreign political effects. The repercussions of the Revolution were perceptible not just inside Hungary, but abroad as well. Scholars discussed for long time if it was a revolution, a freedom fight, or both.

The thesis also has a significant relevance to our contemporary and possible future interstate conflicts. The reader can have a view from the military stand point of what tactical, operational, and strategic factors may make any revolution or insurgency successful or unsuccessful. The fact is noteworthy that the revolutionary forces fought against immensely superior enemy forces in number, strength, and doctrine. Regardless, they were able to accomplish successful military operations, and based on their military successes, eventually achieve significant political aims and final victory. This proves the importance of intangible factors versus tangible ones, like morale or population support, especially when the fight is against a foreign power or army of occupation. Furthermore, the essay is intended to illustrate how other factors of the operational environment,

namely diplomatic, informational, and economic, may impact the military one, and what may be the interaction among them.

The remote and immediate reasons leading to this uprising have universal validity. These generally include low standard of living, poverty, lack of social security net amplified by deprivation of basic human and political rights. By analyzing them the reader can get closer to the possible solution to define the probable root causes of any anti-government subversion. As for instance, these previously discussed motives bear resemblance of the disturbance currently happening in the countries of the Arabic world like Egypt, Tunisia, Yemen, and Libya.

The foreign policy connections of that time, especially the role, purview, and the executive power of the UN, are still relevant to our present days. The dominant western countries, including the USA, United Kingdom, and France were involved and busy with the Suez Crisis. The Soviet Union was also one of the indirectly affected parties, walking out of the situation having lost its influence over the region. This situation irrevocably stiffened the determination of the Soviet Union not to allow one more country to break away from its political and military control, jeopardizing its buffer zone created after World War II.

In retrospect, any western military intervention in Hungary may have brought the two opposing superpowers to the brink of the next World War. Nobody could have wished it in the era of the nuclear menace. Therefore, it is understandable why the western powers remained commonly inactive, except for some solemn and passionate public speeches and aid shipments.

However, the UN was established to represent and advocate the interest of the member states, as long as those interests are in accord with the international laws and treaties, and do not harm the wellbeing of other sovereign countries. Hungary after the declaration of its neutrality received no support and acknowledgement. The UN remained basically inactive and powerless to support the request of the Hungarian nation. As a matter of fact, the UN's inaction simply confirmed the Soviet domination over Eastern-Europe. Other historical examples from the recent past, like UN sanctions imposed on countries posing real threat to world peace, for example Iraq, Iran, and North-Korea, proved also to be literally futile.

These facts raise the question of how capable or effective the UN is to address and cope with the current and future crisis in the world. This question becomes even more intricate after taking the composition and the interests of the permanent members of the Security Council possessing right of veto into considerations. There is a little likelihood of consensus on future major security issues. Even, if there is consensus achieved, the UN resolutions can be interpreted and curved according to momentarily interest of different major powers. The significantly dissimilar interpretation of, and differently perceived ways how to implement —“No-Fly” zone enforcement in Lybia among different nations perfectly exemplify this statement. In this case even there are major dissents among countries belonging to the same alliance and coalition making the successful accomplishment of this particular UN resolution more problematic and improbable. This might be an important planning factor to consider about regarding the operational approach of the future military operations.

APPENDIX A

16 POINTS DEMAND OF THE MEFESZ

1. We demand the immediate evacuation of all Soviet troops, in conformity with the provisions of the Treaty of Peace.
2. We demand the election by secret ballot of all Party members from top to bottom, and of new officers for the lower, middle, and upper echelons of the Hungarian Workers' Party. These officers shall convoke a Party Congress as early as possible in order to elect Central Committee.
3. A new Government must be constituted under the direction of Comrade Imre Nagy; all the criminal leaders of the Stalin-Rákosi era must be immediately relieved of their duties.
4. We demand a public inquiry into the criminal activities of Mihály Farkas and his accomplices. Mátyás Rákosi, who is the person most responsible for all the crimes in the recent past, as well as for the ruin of the country, must be brought back to Hungary for trial before the people's tribunal.
5. We demand that general elections, by universal, secret ballot, be held throughout the country to elect a new National Assembly, with all political parties participating. We demand that the right of the workers to strike to be recognized.
6. We demand the revision and readjustment of the Hungarian-Soviet and the Hungarian-Yugoslav relations in the fields of politics, economics, and cultural affairs, on a basis of complete political and economic equality and non-interference in the internal affairs of one by the other.

7. We demand the complete reorganization of Hungary's economic life under the direction of specialists. The entire economic system, based on a system of planning, must be reexamined in the light of conditions in Hungary and in the vital interest of the Hungarian people.

8. Our foreign trade agreements and the exact total of reparations that can never be paid must be made public. We demand precise and exact information on the uranium deposits in our country, on their exploitation, and on the concessions accorded the Russians in this area. We demand that Hungary have the right to sell the uranium freely at world market prices to obtain hard currency.

9. We demand complete revision of the norms in effect in industry and an immediate and radical adjustment of salaries in accordance with the just requirements of workers and intellectuals. We demand that a minimum living wage be fixed for workers.

10. We demand that the system of distribution be organized on a new basis and that agricultural products be utilized in a rational manner. We demand equality of treatment for individual farms.

11. We demand reviews by independent tribunals of all political and economic trials as well as the release and rehabilitation of the innocent. We demand the immediate repatriation of prisoners of war and of civilian deportees in the Soviet Union, including prisoners sentenced outside Hungary.

12. We demand complete recognition of freedom of opinion and of expression, of freedom of the press and of radio, as well as the creation of a new daily

newspaper for the MEFESZ Organization (Hungarian Federation of University and College Students' Associations).

13. We demand that the statue of Stalin, symbol of Stalinist tyranny and political oppression, be removed as quickly as possible and be replaced by a monument to the memory of the martyred fighters for freedom of 1848-1849.

14. We demand the replacement of the emblems that are foreign to the Hungarian people by the old Hungarian arms of Kossuth. We demand for the Hungarian army new uniforms conforming to our national traditions. We demand that the fifteenth of March be declared a national holiday and that the sixth of October be a day of national mourning on which schools will be closed.

15. The students of the Technical University of Budapest declare unanimously their solidarity with the workers and students of Warsaw and Poland in their movement toward national independence.

The students of the Technical University of Budapest will organize as rapidly as possible local branches of the MEFESZ, and they have decided to convoke at Budapest, on Saturday, 27 October 1956 (Saturday), a Youth Parliament at which all the nation's youth will be represented by their delegates. Tomorrow afternoon, on the 23 October 1956, at 2:30 p.m. the youth of the Technical and other Universities will gather at the square in front of the Technical University. From there the students they will march to the Bem statue, where they will lay a wreath to give expression to our sympathy for the Polish freedom movement. The factory workers are welcomed to join the march.¹

¹Lajos Izsák, *1956 plakátjai és röplapja október 22–november 5* [The placards and flyers of 1956. 22 October–5 November] (Budapest: Zrínyi, 1991), 16.

APPENDIX B

OFFICIAL DECLARATION OF THE SOVIET GOVERNMENT REGARDING
THE MATTER OF FUTURE RELATIONS BETWEEN HUNGARY
AND THE SOVIET UNION

—The unchangeable foundation of Soviet foreign relations has been and remains a policy of peaceful coexistence, of friendship, and of collaboration with all other states.

The most profound and the clearest expression of this policy is to be found in the relations between the socialist countries. Linked together by the common goal of building a socialist society and by the principles of proletarian internationalism, the countries of the great community of socialist nations can base their relations only on the principles of complete equality of rights, of respect for territorial integrity, of political independence and sovereignty, and of non-interference in the internal affairs of one state by the other. This does not preclude, but on the contrary assumes, a close fraternal collaboration and a mutual assistance between the countries of the socialist community in economic, political, and cultural matters.

It was on this foundation that, after World War II and the collapse of fascism, the democratic people's regime leaped ahead. It was on this foundation that the regime was strengthened and that it was enabled to demonstrate its vitality throughout numerous European and Asian countries.

In the course of establishing the new regime and in the course of establishing deep revolutionary changes in socialist relations, there have come to light several difficulties, several unsolved problems, and several downright mistakes, including mistakes in the relations among socialist states. These violations and these mistakes have demeaned the principle of equal rights in socialist interstate relationships.

The Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union strongly condemned these violations and errors and decided that the Soviet Union would base its relations with the other socialist countries on the strict Leninist principles of equal rights for the peoples. The Congress proclaimed the need for taking into account the history and the individual peculiarities of each country on its way toward building a new life.

The Soviet Government has systematically applied the historic decisions of the Twentieth Congress in creating the conditions for strengthening the amity and the cooperation between socialist countries. It has based its application of these decisions on the firm foundation of complete respect for the sovereignty of each socialist state.

As recent events have shown, it is apparently necessary to declare the position of the Soviet Union concerning its relations with the other socialist countries, and, above all, concerning its economic and military relations with such countries.

The Soviet Government is prepared to examine, along with the governments of the other socialist states, the measures that will make possible the further development and reinforcement of economic ties between the socialist countries, in order to remove any possibility of interference with the principles of national sovereignty, of reciprocal interest, and of equality of rights in economic agreements.

This principle must also be extended to cover the question of advisors. It is well known that during the period just past, when the new socialist regime was being formed, the Soviet Union, at the request of the governments of the people's democracies has sent into these countries many specialists, many engineers, and many agronomists and scientists and military advisors. Recently, the Soviet Government has frequently proposed to the socialist states the question of withdrawing those advisors.

Inasmuch as the people's democracies have trained their own personnel, who are now qualified to handle all economic and military matters, Soviet Government believes that it is necessary to reconsider, together with the other socialist states, the question of whether it is still advantageous to maintain these advisors of the U.S.S.R. in these countries.

As far as the military domain is concerned, an important basis for relations between the U.S.S.R. and the people's democracies has been provided by the Warsaw Pact, under which the signatories have made political and military commitments with each other. They have committed themselves, in particular, to

take ~~those~~ concerted measures which are deemed necessary for the reinforcement of their capabilities for protecting the peaceful employment of their people, for guaranteeing the integrity of their frontiers and their territories, and for assuring their defense against any aggression.”

It is well known that, under the Warsaw Pact and under agreements between the governments, Soviet troops are stationed in the republics of Hungary and Rumania. In the republic of Poland, Soviet troops are stationed under the terms of the Potsdam Agreement with the other great powers, as well as under the terms of the Warsaw Pact. There are no Soviet troops in the other people’s democracies.

In order to insure the mutual security of the socialist countries, the Soviet Government is prepared to review with the other socialist countries signing the Warsaw Pact the question of Soviet troops stationed on the territory of the above-mentioned countries.

In doing so, the Soviet Government proceeds from the principle that the stationing of troops of one member state of the Warsaw Pact on the territory of another state shall be by agreement of all the member states and only with the consent of the state on the territory of which, and on the demand of which, these troops are to be stationed.

The Soviet Government believes it is essential to make a declaration regarding the recent events in Hungary. Their development has shown that the workers of Hungary have, after achieving great progress on the basis of the

people's democratic order, justifiably raised the questions of the need for eliminating the serious inadequacies of the economic system, of the need for further improving the material well-being of the people, and of the need for furthering the battle against bureaucratic excesses in the state apparatus. However, the forces of reaction and of counter-revolution have quickly joined in this just and progressive movement of the workers to undermine the foundations of the people's democratic system in Hungary and to restore to power the landlords and the capitalists.

The Soviet Government and all the Soviet and all the Soviet people deeply regret that these events in Hungary have led to bloodshed.

At the request of the People's Government of Hungary, the Soviet Government agreed to send Soviet military units into Budapest to help the Hungarian People's Army and the Hungarian Government to reestablish order in that city.

Being of the opinion that the continued presence of Soviet units in Hungary could be used as a pretext for further aggravating the situation, the Soviet Government has now given instructions to its military commanders to withdraw their troops from the city of Budapest as soon as the Hungarian Government feels that they can be dispensed with.

At the same time, the Soviet Government is prepared to engage in negotiations with the Hungarian People's Government and the other signatories of

the Warsaw Pact regarding the question of the presence of Soviet troops elsewhere on the territory of Hungary.

The defense of socialist gains in the Hungarian People's Government is at the moment the primary and sacred task of the workers, the peasants, intellectuals, and all the working people of Hungary.

The Soviet Government expresses its conviction that the people of the socialist countries will not allow reactionary forces, whether foreign or domestic, to undermine those foundations of the democratic People's Government which have been won and strengthened by the struggle and sacrifice and work of the people of this country. These people will, it believes, employ all their efforts to eliminate any obstacles in the way of strengthening the democratic foundations, independence, and the sovereignty of their country. Such action will, in turn, strengthen the socialist foundations of the economy and the culture of each country and will continue to increase the material well-being and the cultural level of all the workers. The Hungarian people will strengthen the brotherhood and the mutual cause of the socialist countries in order to consolidate the great and peaceful aims of socialism.”²

²Tibor Méray, *Thirteen Days That Shook the Kremlin* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1959), 144-148.

APPENDIX C

OFFICERS' OATH OF ALLEGIANCE

In our homeland an extensive patriotic popular movement began to expand the social democracy, to correct the serious mistakes committed by the Rákosi-Gerő clique, and for the assurance the national independence and sovereignty.

I acknowledge the legitimacy of these demands, and I also support them by myself. However, I deeply condemn every form of the anti-revolutionary forces, the brutal white-terror, the capitalist restoration attempts, the undermining work of capitalist circles against our people's power.

I am ready to fight against these attempts to the utmost of my power. I know that the reactionary forces also mislead the honest workers.

The weakness and indecisiveness of the Imre Nagy government immensely impeded the clarification of the situation. As a result of this politics the discipline has broken in our people's Army. After that our nation was in a grave danger of the anti-revolutionary forces overcoming, and they would give back the factories to the capitalists, the lands to the big landowners, and they would overthrow the people's power in our homeland.

I make the statement that I unconditionally join the Revolutionary Worker-Peasant Government formed on 4 November 1956. I support my government to rectify the errors and deficiencies of the past.

I agree that because of the jeopardy posed on our nation and homeland, it was necessary to request the assistance of the government of the friendly Soviet Union, and

the allied Soviet Army to annihilate the anti-revolutionary forces, and to solidify our people's democratic system and freedom.

I am a devotee of the Soviet-Hungarian friendship based on the footing of honest equality.

I solemnly undertake that, I unconditionally obligate myself to the measures of the Revolutionary Worker-Peasant Government, and bounded by my Military Oath I will self-consciously abide by the military orders.

I am aware that, our people's power needs an army to restore order, tranquility, the peaceful constructive work being capable of maintaining law in order in the entire country, and this army should be a firm, irreversible support to our government and our people's democratic system.

I hereby also declare that in the past times I did not participate any activity condemned by the Revolutionary Worker-Peasant Government, which violate the laws of our people's democracy.

I consider the above binding on me, and my signature is to certify that.³

³János M. Bak and others, *Az 1956-os magyar forradalom Reform, felkelés, szabadságharc, megtorlás* [The Hungarian Revolution of 1956. Reform, revolution, freedom fight, retribution] (Budapest: Tankönyvkiadó, 1991), 117.

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