

## Abstract/Résumé analytique

### Radio Free Europe's Impact on the Kremlin in the Hungarian Crisis of 1956: Three Hypotheses

Johanna Granville

*This article will expose incendiary Radio Free Europe (RFE) broadcasts hitherto uncited, and juxtapose chronologically for the first time documents released from Russian, Hungarian, and US archives in recent years to show more clearly how US psychological warfare and RFE broadcasts may have influenced Soviet decision-making during the 1956 Hungarian crisis. While wholly indisputable evidence remains to be found, the sequence of events does suggest that early balloon and leaflet operations during reformist Imre Nagy's first term as Hungarian prime minister (1953-1955) — namely "Operation Focus" — both antagonized Nagy and spawned a stern neutralism toward him among US diplomats and RFE broadcasters during the crisis. This, in turn, may have caused Soviet leaders to doubt Nagy's managerial skills, fear the power vacuum in Hungary, and conclude that a second military invasion was necessary.*

*Certainly RFE did not actually "cause" the Hungarian Revolution itself. The insurgents would be insulted if anyone suggested that some foreign radio station had caused their revolution. Yet — while incontrovertible evidence is still lacking — new documents strongly indicate that the radio broadcasts did probably contribute to the Soviet crackdown on 4 November 1956.*

*The Americans' premature distrust of Imre Nagy perhaps points to a larger pattern of bias in US foreign policy during the Cold War: a fundamental prejudice toward communist leaders. Just as Soviet officials were blind to the concept of neutrality, so Eisenhower and other US policymakers in the 1950s appeared blind to the existence of scrupulous, reform-minded communists.*

*Dans cet article, nous dévoilons les émissions incendiaires de Radio Free Europe (RFE), jusqu'ici non mentionnées et nous juxtaposons chronologiquement, pour la première fois, des documents d'archives de la Russie, de la Hongrie et des États-Unis qui ont été publiés ces dernières années. Nous démontrons clairement comment la guerre psychologique américaine et les émissions de la RFE auraient pu influencer les décisions des soviétiques pendant la crise hongroise de 1956. Quoiqu'il n'existe pas encore de preuves incontestables, la séquence des événements suggère que les opérations premières de ballons et de tracts, à savoir, l'Opération Focus, durant le premier terme du réformiste Imre Nagy au poste de premier ministre de la Hongrie (1953-1955) aurait exacerbé Nagy et en même temps engendré un neutralisme sérieux envers les diplomates américains et les radiodiffuseurs de la RFE pendant la crise. Cela aurait pu, en retour, avoir mené les leaders soviétiques à douter des compétences de Nagy, à craindre une absence d'autorité en Hongrie et à conclure qu'une seconde invasion militaire était nécessaire.*

*Il est évident que la RFE n'a sûrement pas été la cause de la révolution hongroise elle-même. Les insurgés seraient insultés si quelqu'un suggérait qu'une certaine station de radio étrangère aurait causé leur révolution. Pourtant — quoiqu'il manque toujours de preuves irréfutables — de nouveaux documents montrent clairement que les diffusions de cette station de radio ont fort probablement contribué aux mesures de répressions soviétiques du 4 novembre.*

*La méfiance prémature des américains envers Imre Nagy donne peut-être un exemple important du parti pris de la politique étrangère américaine durant la guerre froide: un préjugé fondamental envers des leaders communistes. De même que les officiels soviétiques étaient fermés à la notion de neutralité, Eisenhower et les autres américains responsables des politiques des années cinquante semblent également aveugles à l'existence de communistes scrupuleux enclin à la réforme.*

Johanna Granville

## RADIO FREE EUROPE'S IMPACT ON THE KREMLIN IN THE HUNGARIAN CRISIS OF 1956: THREE HYPOTHESES

One wintry day in 1958, President Eisenhower penned a letter in his characteristically awkward syntax to a friend, the industrialist Paul Hoffman: "Communism could, I think, be defined as a doctrine of complete socialism, but including the clear determination to employ any means, including force and international war, to bring about destruction of other forms of government. Consequently, we should not favor on a reciprocal basis giving to proponents a full opportunity to promote Communism, because Communism cannot be divorced from the readiness to use violence," he wrote. "I do not believe this is quibbling."<sup>1</sup>

In the uncertain Cold War era of the 1950s, decision-makers found comfort in absolutes. By viewing all communists in black-and-white terms, one could not be betrayed by them. And by assuming that all communists wanted to destroy democratic forms of government, one could better guard against the spread of this totalitarian ideology. Tragically, however, in failing to distinguish between hard-line and reformist communists in 1956, the Eisenhower Administration may have brought about the destruction of the very type of government it should have promoted in Hungary.

This article revisits the story of Radio Free Europe's role in the Hungarian revolution in 1956. While Radio Free Europe (RFE) — founded in 1950 as one of the four divisions of the National Committee for Free Europe (NCFE) launched a year earlier — ultimately served as one of the key catalysts of the anti-communist revolutions in 1989, it is worth recalling the trial-and-error learning process it endured in the 1950s. Although NCFE/RFE's overall track record in Eastern Europe spanning the entire Cold War period has undoubtedly been positive, it appears that its "informational activities" and broadcasts in the 1950s may have precipitated not the Hungarian Revolution itself, but the Soviet crack-down on Hungary on 3-4 November 1956, as well as the increased number of casualties. This article will expose incendiary RFE broadcasts hitherto uncited and, for the first time, juxtapose chronologically documents released from

<sup>1</sup> Eisenhower to Paul Hoffman, 18 Jan. 1958, Whitman file, box 21, Eisenhower Presidential Library. Cited also in Blanche Wiesen Cook, *The Declassified Eisenhower: A Startling Reappraisal of the Eisenhower Presidency* (New York, 1981), p. 208.

Russian,<sup>2</sup> Hungarian,<sup>3</sup> and US archives<sup>4</sup> in recent years to advance the hypothesis that US psychological warfare and RFE broadcasts may have influenced Soviet decision-making during the crisis. While wholly indisputable evidence remains to be found, the sequence of events does suggest that early balloon and leaflet operations — namely “Operation Focus” — during reformist Imre Nagy’s first term as Hungarian prime minister (1953-1955) both antagonized Nagy and spawned a stern neutralism (later, hostility) toward him among US diplomats and RFE broadcasters during the crisis. This, in turn, may have caused Soviet leaders to doubt Nagy’s managerial skills, fear the power vacuum in Hungary, and conclude that a second military invasion was necessary. Specifically, one may conclude that RFE’s broadcasting was perhaps a key causal factor in the Soviet crackdown for at least three distinct, but interrelated, reasons: the broadcasts contributed to Moscow’s lack of faith in Nagy’s ability to control the situation; they aroused Soviet fears of Hungary’s withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact long before Nagy himself announced it; and the broadcasts contributed to the disbandment of the Hungarian security police (ÁVH), thus convincing Soviet (and Hungarian) communist leaders that Soviet troops were needed to fill the security vacuum in Hungary.<sup>5</sup>

Among the most valuable documents to emerge so far from Soviet communist party archives are the so-called “Malin Notes.” Vladimir Malin, head of the General Department of the Soviet Communist Party Central Committee, took notes of the secret emergency sessions of the Presidium at the height of the crisis, between 23 October and 4 November 1956. Since official verbatim minutes of these sessions were never kept, the Malin Notes shed unique insight on the Soviet decision-making process. Methodological problems remain and, some

<sup>2</sup> Russian documents cited here originated from the former top-secret working archive of the Soviet Communist Party’s Central Committee now known as the Russian State Archive of Contemporary History (RGANI) and, to a lesser extent, the Archive of the Russian Foreign Ministry (AVP RF).

<sup>3</sup> Hungarian documents cited come from the files of the Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party (*Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt*, or MSZMP) housed in the Hungarian National Archive (*Magyar Országos Levéltár*, or MOL).

<sup>4</sup> American archival materials include documents in the Free Europe Committee, C. D. Jackson, and Volunteer Freedom Corps papers declassified in the late 1990s at the Eisenhower Presidential Library (Abilene, Kansas); documents regarding the Operations Coordinating Board and Psychological Warfare in the State Department’s decimal files (hitherto closed Record Group 59) in the National Archive (Washington D.C.); US diplomatic cables stored at the National Security Archive (Washington D.C.); and the Willis D. Crittenger Papers housed at the US Army Military History Institute in Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania. In addition, the Hoover Institution Archive recently acquired from Prague more than 2,300 boxes of RFE manuscripts, recordings, and memoranda. A large portion of these materials deals with the Hungarian crisis of 1956, although they are not yet fully catalogued.

<sup>5</sup> ÁVH stands for the State Security Authority (*Államvédelmi Hatóság*), which was the name for the Hungarian secret police agency after 1948. In 1949, the ÁVH was placed under hardline Stalinist leader Mátyás Rákosi’s direct control in the *Miniszterelnökség* (Prime Minister’s Office). Formally it was called the State Security Department (*Államvédelmi Osztály*, or ÁVO).

caveats are in order, however. The Malin Notes themselves are often fragmented, lacking complete sentences. Nowhere is there a transparent, fool-proof statement such as: "We think Nagy has lost control because we heard RFE denouncing him and therefore we have decided to intervene." Some Presidium members may have complained about RFE broadcasts in undocumented conversations, both in person and over the telephone. In addition, they might not have blamed RFE directly, because the latter's influence was indirect. Émigré broadcasters called Nagy a traitor, citizens within Hungary then demonstrated against him, and subsequently Soviet envoys like the KGB chief in Hungary reported these demonstrations to Moscow. Also, Khrushchev and his colleagues might not have blamed RFE explicitly because the radio broadcasts were probably just one of many factors that affected Soviet decision-making in 1956. Moreover, emergency decision-making often dictates that one ask just two crisp questions: What is the problem?; and How can we solve it quickly? There is little time to ponder the causes of the crisis and, as decision theorist Irving Janis points out, "In emergency decisions psychological stress constricts cognitive functioning."<sup>6</sup> For these reasons, it is difficult to pinpoint any particular "smoking gun" where RFE's impact is concerned. Nevertheless, the absence heretofore of such a smoking gun does not in itself prove that RFE did *not* influence Soviet decision making *vis-à-vis* Hungary. Researchers of Soviet foreign policy decision-making should not become discouraged from at least attempting to discover the Kremlin's motivations preceding military interventions.

### I. RFE's Place in US Psychological Warfare

Literature on psychological warfare, western radio stations, and US "liberation" policy is voluminous.<sup>7</sup> The term "psychological warfare" reportedly entered English in 1941 as a translated mutation of the Nazi term *Weltanschauungskrieg* (literally, worldview warfare), supposedly meaning the scientific application of

<sup>6</sup> Irving L. Janis and Leon Mann, *Decision Making: A Psychological Analysis of Conflict, Choice, and Commitment* (New York, 1977), p. 54.

<sup>7</sup> For useful histories written before 1967 (when funding of RFE by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) was exposed) that provide detailed accounts of balloon-leaflet operations, radio broadcasting, and key individuals involved, see Robert T. Holt, *Radio Free Europe* (Minneapolis, 1958) and A. A. Michie, *Voices Through the Iron Curtain: The Radio Free Europe Story* (New York, 1963). Other early works include: Gerard Mansell, *Let the Truth Be Told: 50 Years of BBC External Broadcasting* (London, 1982); Merni Fitzgerald, *The Voice of America* (New York, 1987); and Thomas C. Sorenson, *The Word War: The Story of American Propaganda* (New York, 1989). Sig Mickelson's *America's Other Voice: The Story of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty* (New York, Praeger, 1983) is a thorough historical analysis. For comprehensive accounts of US relations with Eastern Europe (especially Hungary) from the end of World War II to the 1989 revolutions, see the books by Bennett Kovrig: *Of Walls and Bridges: The United States and Eastern Europe* (New York, 1991); *Communism in Hungary: From Kun to Kádár* (Stanford, California, 1979); *The Myth of Liberation: East-Central Europe in U.S. Diplomacy Since 1941* (Baltimore, 1973); and *The Hungarian People's Republic* (Baltimore, 1970). Four recent accounts by media officials are also

propaganda, terror, and state pressure as a means of securing an ideological victory over one's enemies.<sup>8</sup> Radio Free Europe, as one component of US psychological warfare, was one of the newest of the major transnational radio stations — following Radio Moscow (1929),<sup>9</sup> the Vatican Radio (1931), the British Broadcasting Company's Empire Service (1932), and the Voice of America (1942).<sup>10</sup> Early founders and leaders of RFE — many of them former OSS (Office of Strategic Services) or CIA officials — included Joseph C. Grew (distinguished diplomat), Adolf A. Berle, Jr. (lawyer and former assistant secretary of state), Allen W. Dulles (lawyer, OSS representative in Switzerland, and later CIA Director), DeWitt C. Poole (former chargé d'affaires in Moscow in 1917 and State Department propaganda expert), C. D. Jackson (NCFE president and managing director of Time/Life), and General Lucius D. Clay (former commander of US occupation forces in Europe and US military governor in Germany with control of intelligence and counter-intelligence departments).<sup>11</sup>

Recent archive-based studies reveal that Truman's containment policy was much more proactive than previously thought.<sup>12</sup> Before the communist *coup d'état* in Czechoslovakia (February 1948) and beginning of the Berlin blockade (June 1948), and certainly well before Dwight Eisenhower and John Foster Dulles popularized the terms "liberation" or "rollback," George Kennan and the

worth consulting: James Critchlow, *Radio Hole-In-The-Head/Radio Liberty: An Insider's Story of Cold War Broadcasting* (Washington, D.C., 1995); George Urban, *Radio Free Europe and the Pursuit of Democracy: My War Within the Cold War* (New Haven, 1997); Michael Nelson, *War of the Black Heavens: The Battles of Western Broadcasting in the Cold War* (Syracuse, New York, 1997); and Arch Puddington, *Broadcasting Freedom: The Cold War Triumph of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty* (Lexington, Kentucky, 2000).

<sup>8</sup> Ladislav Farago, *German Psychological Warfare* (New York, 1941). Cited in William Daugherty and Morris Janowitz (eds.), *A Psychological Warfare Casebook* (Baltimore, 1958), p. 12. Also cited in Christopher Simpson, *Science of Coercion: Communication Research and Psychological Warfare, 1945-1960* (New York and Oxford, 1994).

<sup>9</sup> Radio Moscow's first broadcast to a foreign country took place on 29 Oct. 1929 and was directed at Germany (in German). In the 1930s Radio Moscow had a large audience in Germany, but after Hitler took power in 1933, the broadcasts were jammed and listening to them was equated to state treason.

<sup>10</sup> Headquartered in New York, Radio Liberty was founded in 1951; the two radio stations merged as RFE/RL on 1 Oct. 1976. The other three divisions in NCFE included the National Councils Division; the Division of Intellectual Cooperation; and the Research and Publications Service.

<sup>11</sup> "Report on Radio Free Europe," 15 Dec. 1952, Business Research Staff of General Motors, C. D. Jackson Papers, Free Europe Committee, Box 54, Eisenhower Presidential Library. Hereafter referred to as "General Motors report." At the 1996 conference in Budapest, James McCargar explained that Frank Wisner and other CIA officials figured prominently in the Free Europe committee. See James McCargar, "Remarks at the International Conference, 'Hungary and the World, 1956: the New Archival Evidence,' 26-29 September 1996, Budapest" (unpublished paper for the Radio Free Europe panel).

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Scott Lucas, *Freedom's War: the American Crusade against the Soviet Union* (New York, 1999) and Peter Grose, *Operation Rollback: America's Secret War Behind the Iron Curtain* (New York, 2000).

State Department's Policy Planning Staff (PPS) advocated liberation-style psychological or political warfare and covert operations.<sup>13</sup>

## II. Tensions Between NCFE and US Government *vis-à-vis* "Liberation" Policy

However, conflicts arose in both the Truman and Eisenhower Administrations over the policies of psychological warfare and covert operations (liberation and rollback) — particularly between NCFE and the US government. While overt rhetoric emanating from official Washington continued to proclaim the importance of "keeping the hope of liberation alive" in the captive nations (the original words of RFE's first document of policy guidance), the cautious State Department tended to reject liberation and the White House avoided any outright endorsements of the policy.<sup>14</sup> Some of NCFE/RFE's schemes were downright embarrassing to State Department and White House officials. In one incident, for example, a load of leaflets descended on a stadium in Czechoslovakia right in the middle of a sports event attended by American diplomats.<sup>15</sup> On 18 January 1956, the Prague government claimed that US balloons had caused an airplane crash in the Tatra mountains of Slovakia in which twenty-two people died.<sup>16</sup> Shortly thereafter, Eisenhower's Secretary of State Dulles wrote a memo about his conversation with the President:

We discussed the matter of the Soviet protest about the meteorological [*sic*] balloons. The President recalled that both he and I had been rather allergic to this project and doubted whether the results would justify the inconvenience involved. The Pres[ident] said he thought the operation should now be suspended. I agreed, but said I thought we should handle it so it would not look as though we had been caught with jam on our fingers.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>13</sup> The terms psychological warfare and political warfare were often used interchangeably. As C.D. Jackson noted to William Jackson, "Over and over again thousands of characters--mostly military characters--have got to have explained to them that psychological warfare is not an occult science practiced on a couch, but just one of many clubs in the bag of the Foreign Minister or the military commander. We sure have been ruined by that word 'psychological.'" Letter to William Jackson, White House, 9 May 1956 from C.D. Jackson, C.D. Jackson Papers, Box 63, Folder: "Jackson, William (2)," Eisenhower Presidential Library.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 244.

<sup>15</sup> Puddington, *Broadcasting Freedom*, p. 111.

<sup>16</sup> Statement by Joseph Grew to the Secretary General of the United Nations, 19 Mar., p. 4, C. D. Jackson Papers, Box 54, Free Europe Committee, 1956 (6), Eisenhower Presidential Library.

<sup>17</sup> John Foster Dulles, "Memorandum of Conversation with the President," 6 Feb. 1956, 10:15 a.m., John Foster Dulles Collection, White House Memoranda, Box 4, Folder: "Meetings with the President, January-July, 1956," File #5, Eisenhower Presidential Library. John Prados also states that,

They were probably “allergic” to an earlier RFE caper, whereby Hungarian toilet paper printed with the Hungarian Stalinist leader Mátyás Rákosi’s face was installed on Vienna-based trains bound for Hungarian cities.<sup>18</sup> Cruder still was the CIA proposal to airdrop over Soviet territory extra-large condoms labeled “Made in the USA: Size Medium.”<sup>19</sup>

Differences in taste and tact aside, what united both the audacious psychological warfare schemers and prudent statesmen and diplomats was an “inherent bad faith model” where communist leaders were concerned. As we shall see, by assuming all communist leaders to be incapable of reforms, Washington may unconsciously have brought about the very chain of events in Hungary it sought consciously to prevent.

### III. “Operation Focus”

The story begins with the NCFE’s balloon-leaflet operation in Hungary known as “Operation Focus,” which lasted from October 1954 to February 1955. NCFE/RFE had four key goals: to prevent the integration of the Iron Curtain countries into the Soviet empire; to use the talents of unemployed *émigrés* in the United States; to serve as the “voice of the internal opposition”; and to sustain the morale of captive nations and thereby contribute to their liberation. “Operation Focus” purportedly fit these goals by spreading negative ideas about Nagy and driving a wedge between Hungarian citizens and the Nagy regime, a tactic that would ultimately delay Hungary’s integration into the Soviet sphere as a reliable military ally. RFE personnel were buoyed by the unexpected success of the CIA’s program of providing free food to German citizens just after the riots in the summer of 1953, which began in East Berlin and drew citizens from all over the German Democratic Republic (GDR). Working together with the Free Europe Press (FEP), RFE personnel had embarked on a series of massive propaganda programs — leaflets were to be blanketed over the satellite countries by the use of balloons. There were at least three other balloon programs: “Operation

after the Hungarian crisis, US propaganda projects like Operation Focus were discontinued, and the *émigré* “liberation army” was disbanded. A legacy of the Hungarian revolution in 1956 was the reduced emphasis on psychological warfare. See John Prados, *The President’s Secret Wars: CIA and Pentagon Covert Operations from World War II through the Persian Gulf* (Chicago, 1996). Apparently balloons were used in 1956, however, to drop medicines in Hungary. See “Memorandum Regarding Medicines Dropped from Balloons,” C. D. Jackson Papers, Box #54, 1956 Folder (4), Eisenhower Presidential Library. Other evidence suggests that leaflet drops did continue even after the Polish and Hungarian crises. See Allen Dulles to Andrew Goodpaster, 20 Nov. 1956, CIA Vol. I (4) [Nov. 56-Mar. 57], WHO, Office of Staff Secretary, Records of Paul T. Carroll, et al., Subject Series, Alphabetical Subseries, Box 7, Eisenhower Presidential Library.

<sup>18</sup> Michael Nelson, *War of the Black Heavens* (New York, 1997), p. 40.

<sup>19</sup> Cited in Lukas, *Freedom’s War*, p. 65 and Evan Thomas, *The Very Best Men: Four Who Dared in the Early Years of the CIA* (New York, 1995). Fortunately, this project was never implemented.

Prospero" (13-17 July 1953), "Operation Veto" (April-September 1954), and "Operation Spotlight" (February-May 1955).

Launched a month after the end of Operation Veto, which had been directed against Czechoslovakia, Operation Focus sought specifically to influence upcoming parliamentary elections. RFE's former Deputy European Director Allan Michie believed Veto had actually caused the Czech regime to postpone the elections.<sup>20</sup> For five months balloons dropped "opposition ballots" and stickers with the number twelve (symbolizing twelve demands the people should make, including freedom of speech and higher wages). The Hungarian acronym for the words "twelve demands of the National Opposition Movement" (*Nemzeti Ellenállási Mozgalom*) is NEM, which — appropriately — means "no" in Hungarian. Signs for "NEM" and "12" became ubiquitous throughout Hungary.<sup>21</sup>

Michie and other RFE officials knew that Operation Focus would be more challenging. Nagy's people-friendly New Course program had progressed further than the reformist program in Czechoslovakia: the party apparatus was split between supporters of Nagy and Rákosi, and the opposition was more diffuse and centered in the countryside instead of in cities. Trained as an agrarian theorist, Imre Nagy advanced a platform focusing on private initiative in agriculture, housing construction, and increased production of consumer goods. By 1955 he became attracted to the idea of neutrality in foreign policy.<sup>22</sup> Matyás Rákosi's platform, in contrast, consisted of the collectivization of agriculture, forced industrialization, heavy emphasis on military production, and a close alliance with the USSR.

While the balloon operations perhaps served a constructive purpose by raising citizens' awareness of what they could legitimately demand from their government, they sometimes backfired by irritating communist leaders, indeed even drawing them closer to the Soviet regime and to the masses. Aimed at eroding his popular support, Operation Focus made Nagy livid and leery of US intentions. On 15 October 1954, the Hungarian Ministry for Foreign Affairs sent notes of protest both to the US government and American Legation in Budapest for dropping leaflets from balloons.<sup>23</sup> Ironically, Focus coincided with the first term

<sup>20</sup> Allan Michie, *Voices Through the Curtain: the Radio Free Europe Story* (New York, 1963), pp. 144-145. Michie joined RFE in 1952.

<sup>21</sup> John Holt, *Radio Free Europe* (Minneapolis, 1958), p. 162. Discussed also in James Marchio, "Rhetoric and Reality: The Eisenhower Administration and Unrest in Eastern Europe, 1953-1959," Ph.D. diss., American University, 1990, pp 218-9.

<sup>22</sup> For an analysis of Nagy's views on foreign policy, see János M. Rainer, "Nagy Imre külpolitikai nézetei," *Társadalmi Szemle* no. 6, (1998), pp. 105. Also János M. Rainer, *Nagy Imre: Politikai életrajz, első kötet, 1896-1953* (Budapest, 1996) and Rainer, *Nagy Imre: Politikai életrajz, második kötet, 1953-1958* (Budapest, 1999).

<sup>23</sup> Note of Protest from the Hungarian Ministry for Foreign Affairs, C. D. Jackson Papers, Box 54, folder: "1954," Eisenhower Presidential Library. Noted also in the Hungarian book translated into Russian: Yanosh Berets, *Krakh Operatsii "Fokus": Kontrrevolutsia Perom i Oruzhieem* (Moskva



of Nagy — a reformer — and ended before the hardliner Rákosi's term began (November 1955). Chastened, US diplomats resolved to “forestall such an occurrence” from happening in the future. From then on they adopted a strictly neutral stance toward Nagy's regime. Later, on 15 October 1956, when the Hungarian Workers' Party readmitted Nagy, US chargé d'affaires N. Spencer Barnes sent a telegram to the State Department:

Legation believes tone if not explicit wording of media comment on restoration should be benign and that media's main role in treating Hungarian affairs in future will be to give minimal publicity to Nagyist statements and actions. Nagy as premier reacted openly and violently to attacks on his regime by American radio, and Legation feels we should do all we can to forestall such occurrence once more.<sup>24</sup>

By recommending that the United States stay neutral toward the Nagy regime in the US media (including RFE), Barnes perhaps manifested the habitual caution of a professional diplomat; yet, in the unfolding revolutionary situation, neutralism soon translated into a lack of US support, something that ultimately contributed to the Soviet ousting and execution of Nagy. As we shall see, evidence strongly indicates that RFE's lack of support for Nagy — in contrast to its support for Polish leader Władysław Gomułka — may have helped to sabotage the revolution by causing the Hungarian population and the Kremlin to doubt the Hungarian leader.

#### IV. Radio Broadcasts

As irksome as they found RFE's balloon operations, the radio broadcasts nettled communist officials even more. They viewed the broadcasts as a key source of anti-Soviet sentiment, hindering their ability to control information available to the masses. In the Hungarian case, Operation Focus and the broadcasts in the fall of 1956 worked together to doom the Nagy regime. Documents reveal that Soviet and Hungarian communist officials had worried about the influence of RFE and Voice of America (VOA) long before the Hungarian crisis, perceiving the former as a forum for “spies and saboteurs.”<sup>25</sup> In 1952, just a year after RFE went on the air, communist leaders throughout Eastern Europe were scrambling for ways to

1986, p. 38. Original Hungarian version: János Berecz, *Ellenforradalom tollal és fegyverrel 1956* (Budapest, 1981).

<sup>24</sup> N. Spencer Barnes, Counselor of Legation, Telegram #137 to US Department of State, Washington, D.C., 15 Oct. 1956, 4:00 pm. re: Restoration of Imre Nagy's Party Rights, p. 1, “Flashpoints” Project, Box 2, Record Number 62391, National Security Archive, Washington, D.C.

<sup>25</sup> Béla Révész, szerkesztő, “Dokumentok, a Belügyminisztérium SZER-képe 1955-ben,” *Múltunk*, kötet 1, (1991), old. 172. “In the June 25, 1955 edition of *Szabad Nép*, it was reported that

jam the broadcasts. On 26 September 1952, for example, Bulgarian Politburo member Tsola Dragoicheva wrote to East German leader Walter Ulbricht asking for “five shortwave radio receivers with which to counteract the hostile US and western propaganda.”<sup>26</sup>

It should be pointed out that Soviet leaders often referred to Voice of America when they really meant RFE, perhaps because the former was older, chic among Hungarians and other East Europeans before 1952, directly identified with America by name, and devoid of the propagandistic word “free.” Explicit references to VOA in Hungarian internal security reports throughout 1952 disappeared, however, and were replaced by the “Voice of Free Hungary” (RFE).<sup>27</sup> Indeed, the Voice of Free Hungary’s credibility and popularity soared in March 1953 when it became the first medium to break the news of Stalin’s death to the Hungarian people, while the official communist radio station awaited an announcement from TASS, the Soviet news agency.<sup>28</sup> RFE had 70,000 square feet of office and studio floor space in Munich and proliferated Khrushchev’s Secret Speech of February 1956 exposing Stalin’s crimes, both by pamphlets and nightly and daily broadcasts soon after Allen Dulles decided on 2 June 1956 to leak it to the *New York Times*.<sup>29</sup> By contrast, the VOA’s foreign operations were based first in New York City and then — after its absorption into the newly created United States Information Agency in 1953 — shifted to Washington, D.C. After World War II, VOA had a powerful, million-watt transmitter in West Germany, but no offices.<sup>30</sup>

In a conversation with Soviet Presidium member Kliment Voroshilov on 26 June 1956 (the day before the stormy Petöfi Circle debate in Budapest and two days before the Poznań riot in Poland), Rákosi lamented that, had it not been for VOA [*sic*], the Hungarian people would never have heard the full text of

the security organs of the Ministry of the Interior arrested American spies and saboteurs, who were recruited by the CIC American spy network and the so-called ‘Free Europe Radio,’ the imperialistic propaganda and espionage network conducting intrigues against the Hungarian Republic.” The CIC refers to the US Army’s G-2 Counter-Intelligence Corps. The CIC (and later CIA) did fund the Gehlen Organization, which — like RFE — was based near Munich, at a former Nazi compound in Pullach. Gehlen’s Organization became subordinated in Jan. 1957 under Chancellor Adenauer as West Germany’s official intelligence agency (the *Bundesnachrichtendienst*, or “Federal Information Service”).

<sup>26</sup> SAPMO (Berlin), DY 30/13598, To Ulbricht from Tsola Dragoicheva, member of the Politburo of the Bulgarian Communist Party, 26 Sep. 1952.

<sup>27</sup> Mark Pittaway, “The Education of Dissent: the Reception of the Voice of Free Hungary, 1951-1956,” *Cold War History*, issue 4, (2003), p. 1. RFE was referred to them as a series of separate radio stations: Voice of Free Hungary, Voice of Free Poland, etc.

<sup>28</sup> Gyula Borbándi, *Magyarok az Angol Kértben: a Szabad Európa Rádió története* (Budapest, 1996), pp. 129-31.

<sup>29</sup> Ray S. Cline, *CIA under Reagan, Bush, and Casey: The Evolution of the Agency from Roosevelt to Reagan* (Washington, DC, 1981), pp. 185-87. On RFE’s Munich facilities, see Holt, *Radio Free Europe*, p. 15.

<sup>30</sup> Holt, *Radio Free Europe*, p. 101. Also Donald R. Browne, *International Radio Broadcasting: the Limits of the Limitless Medium* (New York, 1982), pp. 95, 101.

Khrushchev's speech. "We disseminated brief excerpts for reading in the party organizations, but we were too late, because 'Voice of America' had already begun to broadcast the text of the speech in full," he said.<sup>31</sup> (The Petöfi Circle [*Petöfi Kör*] was a discussion group of young Hungarian communist party members.) An especially tumultuous debate about the role of the press took place in Budapest on 27 June 1956, just one day before Polish factory workers staged a revolt in the Polish city of Poznań. In his telegram to Moscow, Presidium member Anastas Mikoyan referred to this Petöfi Circle debate as "an ideological Poznań without gunshots." He said: "We should remember that in Poznań there were no direct counterrevolutionary attacks. Thus, the absence of counterrevolutionary slogans in the Petöfi Circle should not reassure the Hungarian communists."<sup>32</sup>

Perhaps because Soviet diplomats themselves were so often engaged in propaganda and espionage, Yuri Andropov (Soviet Ambassador to Hungary in 1956 who later became the KGB chief and General Secretary after Brezhnev) believed the diplomats in the US legation in Budapest were the ones preparing the material for broadcast "by VOA in Munich" [*sic*]; this opinion was revealed by his cable on 5 July 1956 to V. V. Kuznetsov, Soviet Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs.<sup>33</sup> In the summer of 1956, Andropov and Kazimirov, the attaché of the Soviet Embassy in Budapest, closely monitored the Western radio and newspaper reports about events in Hungary, regularly sending digests of the reports to Moscow.<sup>34</sup> Some Presidium members deemed youth to be the most vulnerable. In a military report transmitted to Moscow by A. I. Kirichenko (First Secretary of the Ukrainian Communist Party) on 1 November 1956, Colonel Starovoitov of the Ministry of Internal Affairs border troops wrote: "The radio broadcast 'Voice of America' greatly influenced the youth."<sup>35</sup>

As for Hungarian communist officials, they were superbly well-informed of the RFE programs — far better informed, in fact, than even the most devoted anti-communist listener. A secret monitoring service, which reported to a special

<sup>31</sup> RGANI (Moscow), f. 89, per. 45, dok. 2, l. 4, "Zapiska K. E. Voroshilova v Prezidium TsK KPSS o besede s M. Rakoshi o sostoyanii vengero-iugoslavskikh otnoshenii i slozhnosti polozheniya Rakoshi v VPT, 26 iyunya 1956 g."

<sup>32</sup> See RGANI, f. 89, o. 2, d. 2, l. 61. "Informatsiya Mikoyana iz Budapeshta, 18 iyulya 1956."

<sup>33</sup> AVP RF (Moscow), f. 077, o. 37, por. 37, papka 190, l. 140. Iz dnevnika Andropova, zapis-ki besedy s zamestitelem Ministra Inostrannykh Del V.V. Kuznetsovyom, 5 iyulya 1956. Andropov wrote: "This statement confirms the data we have that the employees of the American mission in Budapest, in particular the press-attaché, are preparing material for the broadcast of 'Voice of America' from Munich."

<sup>34</sup> AVP RF, f. 077, o. 37, por. 20, papka 188, l. 3. Voprosy pressy. Iz Andropova k K. D. Levychkinu, zaveduyushemu piategu evropeiskogo otdela MIDa, 1 avgusta 1956g.

<sup>35</sup> RGANI, f. 89, per. 45, dok. 17, l. 3: "Notes of Kirichenko with enclosed reference report of Col. Starovoitov, the chief of the second staff of the Ministry of Internal Affairs border troops of the south-west region in connection with the crossing over onto the territory of the USSR," 1 Nov. 1956. Starovoitov wrote: "Writers issued the same kind of sermons in literary and other newspapers, on the radio, and at meetings. The radio broadcast 'Voice of America' greatly influenced the youth."

department of MTI (*Magyar Távirati Iroda* or Hungarian News Agency), which was under the control of the Ministry of the Interior, transcribed the recorded programs religiously every day from 1951 to 1989. The personnel summarized the RFE programs in a daily information bulletin of thirty to forty mimeographed pages and distributed them to all the members of the Hungarian communist party leadership.<sup>36</sup> Other foreign radio broadcasts were monitored daily as well.<sup>37</sup>

RFE also had a simpler purpose — to entertain and educate — that probably incensed communist officials all the more. Plays, stories, and songs by black-listed writers and composers delighted listeners. “Radio Doctor,” a Czech program, described the latest medical drugs in the West, access to which the Iron Curtain barred listeners. RFE planners hoped to arouse in them “strong feelings of frustration.”<sup>38</sup> To woo party diehards, RFE also had a special program (“Calling the Communist Party”) using communist shibboleths to explain the real history and background of the communist parties around the world.<sup>39</sup> The radio program expressed solicitude for its loyal *émigré* broadcasters and freelancers by paying their hospital bills.<sup>40</sup>

## V. Inflammatory Broadcasts

Thus, when refugees, fleeing across the border into Austria on the weekend of 4 November 1956 alluded to radio broadcasts promising US military aid, many found it hard to believe that RFE could be so callous and irresponsible as to put such gross untruth on the airwaves. After a review of the most damaging broadcasts, we will then examine how these and other broadcasts may have affected Soviet perceptions of Nagy and the Hungarian situation in at least three ways.

The Eisenhower Administration itself disavowed responsibility for the broadcasts, since RFE was assumed to be a private organization. (Of course, in 1956 alone RFE’s annual budget was \$21,000,000, of which \$16,000,000 was

<sup>36</sup> István Rev, “Just Noise?” p. 5. Unpublished paper presented at the Conference on Cold War Broadcasting Impact, Hoover Institution, Stanford University, 13-15 Oct. 2004. More than thirty thousand pages of verbatim transcripts of RFE programs can be found in the MTI archives. After 1953 monitoring took place in the News Agency’s headquarters, but in 1959 the monitoring department moved to Gödöllő, just outside of Budapest, where reception was better.

<sup>37</sup> These include the programs of Voice of America, the BBC, Deutschlandfunk, Deutsche Welle, Radio Beijing, Radio Vatican, and Israeli Radio. See Márta Szomor, *Rádiófigyelés és Kiadványai az MTI-ben*. Unpublished report, Jul. 2004. Cited in István Rev, “Just Noise?” p. 5. Unpublished paper presented at the Conference on Cold War Broadcasting Impact, Hoover Institution, Stanford University, 13-15 October 2004.

<sup>38</sup> General Motors report, C. D. Jackson Papers. See fn. 11 *supra*.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> Brief note from Thomas H. Brown, Acting Director, regarding the Polish poet and journalist, Kazimierz Wierzyński, 8 Nov. 1957, attached to letter to C. D. Jackson from Bernard Yarrow, Vice President of Free Europe Committee, New York, 12 Nov. 1957, C. D. Jackson Papers, Box 54: Folder: “Free Europe Committee” (1957) (2), Eisenhower Presidential Library.

furnished by the Central Intelligence Agency.)<sup>41</sup> RFE officials themselves reacted with vehement denials. On 12 November C. D. Jackson underscored: "Over the years, Radio Free Europe has *never*, in a single broadcast or leaflet, deviated from this essential policy, and did not broadcast a single program during the recent Polish and Hungarian developments which could be described as an 'incitement' program."<sup>42</sup> Lieutenant General Willis D. Crittenger (president of the Free Europe Committee) remonstrated with equal vigour on the same day: "The policy of Free Europe is NOT to inflame Eastern Europeans ... [but] to base our broadcasts on factual reporting of the news WITHOUT any exaggeration, prediction, or promises. *If there has been any violation of this policy, we are unaware of it.*"<sup>43</sup> Other officials, such as Cord Meyer,<sup>44</sup> Paul Henze,<sup>45</sup> and James McCargar<sup>46</sup> passionately denied that RFE incited the Hungarians or undermined Nagy — some even forty or more years after the event.

It comes as a shock then to read verbatim several declassified scripts that show Hungarian insurgents were indeed misled. Shortly after the crisis, upon Eisenhower's request, Allen Dulles presented a classified four-page report on 20 November 1956, which read: "RFE broadcasts went somewhat beyond specific guidance in identifying with Hungarian patriot aims, and in offering certain tac-

<sup>41</sup> General Willis D. ("Critt") Crittenger was appointed on 1 Oct. 1956 to serve as the new Chairman of NCFE. In a 3 Jul. 1956 personal memo, "Critt" wrote: "RFE's annual budget is \$21,000,000, of which \$16,000,000 is furnished by the Central Intelligence Agency. The other five is raised by another private organization known as Crusade for Freedom. I would therefore be associated principally with Allen Dulles of the Central Intelligence Agency, with whom I worked in the Volunteer Freedom Corps." US Army Military History Institute, Carlisle Barracks, PA, Willis Crittenger Post-Retirement Activities, "Correspondence, 1956 — Memorandum for the Record." The CIA continued to finance RFE and RL until 1971, despite the so-called Katzenbach committee which exposed in 1967 the CIA's financing of student organizations.

<sup>42</sup> "Draft," 12 Nov. 1956, C. D. Jackson Papers, Box 54, Folder: 1956 (4), Eisenhower Presidential Library (emphasis in the original).

<sup>43</sup> Willis D. Crittenger Papers, Post Retirement Activities, Correspondence, 1956, Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania. (Uppercase letters and italics in the original).

<sup>44</sup> After the second Soviet intervention, Eisenhower ordered a postmortem analysis from the CIA. Cord Meyer, the CIA's liaison with the radio stations since 1954, concluded: "RFE did not plan, direct, or attempt to provoke the Hungarian rebellion." Cited in Prados, *The President's Secret Wars*, p. 125. Cord Meyer succeeded Tom Braden as head of the CIA's International Organizations Division.

<sup>45</sup> Paul Henze, "Recollections of Radio Free Europe: Its Evolution in the 1950s and the Hungarian Revolution," unpublished paper delivered at "Hungary and the World, 1956: the New Archival Evidence, 26-29 September 1996," p. 2. "The stations' tone was openly and strongly anti-communist and opposed to all kinds of totalitarianism, but broadcasters were not to encourage East Europeans to revolt. RFE's broadcasters included non-political programming, sports news, as well as entertainment."

<sup>46</sup> James McCargar was a member of the group in the CIA's Office of Policy Coordination (OPC) created in 1948 and headed by Frank Wisner. The OPC then created the National Committee for a Free Europe (NCFE). See James McCargar, "Remarks at the International Conference, 'Hungary and the World, 1956: the New Archival Evidence,' 26-29 September 1996, Budapest."

tical advice to the patriots."<sup>47</sup> Although scholars Borbándi and Lucas, and media officials Puddington and Nelson, have previously disclosed some of the indiscretions of two of the Hungarian broadcasters (For example, by Thury and Borsányi), this article contains other excerpts from transcripts not quoted elsewhere.<sup>48</sup> At an international historians' conference in Budapest in September 1996 commemorating the fortieth anniversary of the 1956 revolution, William Griffith, who had served in 1956 as the Political Advisor in Munich supervising the individual East European radio stations, including the Radio Free Hungary staff, produced a thoughtful memo that he had written to another RFE official, Richard Condon, on 5 December 1956. Griffith acknowledged that sixteen programs involved "distortions of policy or serious failure to employ constructive techniques of policy application."<sup>49</sup>

In Griffith's opinion, the worst infraction came on 4 November when Zoltán Thury broadcast a "Short World Press Review." Thury quoted excerpts from a London newspaper:

This morning the British *Observer* published a report of its Washington correspondent. This situation report was written before the Soviet attack early this morning. In spite of this the *Observer* correspondent writes that the Russians have probably decided to beat down the Hungarian Revolution with arms. The article goes on: "If the Soviet troops really attack Hungary, if our expectations should hold true and Hungarians hold out for three or four days, then the pressure upon the government of the United States to send military help to the freedom fighters will be irresistible." This is what the *Observer* writes in today's number. The paper observes that the American Congress cannot vote for war as long as the Presidential elections have not been held [elections were to be held on Tuesday, November 6]. The article then continues: "If the Hungarians can continue to fight until Wednesday [the day after the elections] we shall be closer to a world war than at any time since 1939." The reports from London, Paris, the United States and other Western reports show that the world's

<sup>47</sup> "Radio Free Europe," Eisenhower Library NLE MR case no. 80-502, document #4. Cited in Nelson, *War of the Black Heavens*, p. 74, and paraphrased in Prados, *The President's Secret Wars*, p. 125.

<sup>48</sup> See Borbándi, *Magyarok az Angol Kériben*; Lucas, *Freedom's War*, pp. 255-60; Puddington, *Broadcasting Freedom*; and Nelson, *War of the Black Heavens*.

<sup>49</sup> "Memorandum from William Griffith to Richard Condon (RFE), "Policy Review of Voice of Free Hungary Programming, 23 October-23 November 1956," 5 Dec. 1956, document # 16 in Csaba Békés, Malcolm Byrne, and Christian Ostermann (eds.), *The Hidden History of Hungary 1956: A Compendium of Declassified Documents* (Washington, DC, 1996). Hereafter referred to as Griffith memorandum.

reaction to the Hungarian events surpasses every imagination. In the Western capitals a practical manifestation of Western sympathy is expected at any hour.<sup>50</sup>

As Griffith concedes: "The fact that the *Observer* printed these words hardly gave Thury authorization to broadcast them to Hungary at a time when Hungarians were likely to be clutching for any straws of hope from the West."<sup>51</sup>

While the radio stations spread news and propaganda to more people faster and could be understood even by illiterate people, it also magnified the negative effects of false information. The Oral History Archive, part of the Institute for the Study of the 1956 Revolution (*Az 1956-os Magyar Forradalom Történetének Dokumentációs és Kutatóintézete Közalapítvány*) in Budapest is full of testimonies by Hungarian freefighters who told their interviewers that RFE broadcasts made a strong impact on them during the revolution.<sup>52</sup> Badly outnumbered and overpowered, insurgents — had they not heard Thury's message — might realistically have concluded that to continue fighting was to forfeit their lives. "This lie only served to increase the numbers of those dying innocently and without a reason", stated Janos Berecz, a historian and former party ideologist in Kádár's regime, referring to Thury's message in a paper for a recent conference on the impact of Cold War broadcasting.<sup>53</sup> According to Berecz, whereas the BBC and other West European broadcasts in the fall of 1956 "only" provided dry facts, "RFE broadcast all day, giving information, directions, and advice; it denounced and instigated. A radio was in practically every window, in offices and among insurgent groups."<sup>54</sup> Accurate broadcasts might also have obviated the suffering of those not injured or killed, but imprisoned for years and isolated

<sup>50</sup> Michie, *Voices through the Iron Curtain*, pp. 259-60. Also Holt, *Radio Free Europe*, p. 197.

<sup>51</sup> Griffith memorandum.

<sup>52</sup> See, for example, the testimonies in Hungarian (cassette tapes and written transcripts) of former freedom fighters such as Aladár Ányos (catalogue number 414); István Ápelesz (#296); Rezső Ásványi (#431); József Bakonyi (#494); Tibor Beke (#390); Bertalan Benőcs (#301); Károly Bóna (#358); Rezső Bóna (#238); Attila Böszöny (#510); János Bük (#413); Péter Czájlik (#519); László Császár (#342); and Tibor Dseley (#277).

<sup>53</sup> János Berecz, "Impact of Western Broadcasting During the Cold War on Hungary," p. 6. Unpublished paper presented at the Conference on Cold War Broadcasting Impact, Hoover Institution, Stanford University, 13-15 Oct. 2004. If one refers to the number of Hungarians killed by Soviet military forces, 2, 502 would be a realistic estimate. See Péter Gosztonyi, "Az 1956-os forradalom számokban," *Népszabadság* (Budapest), 3 Nov. 1990, p. 3. If one counts the Hungarians repressed in the aftermath of the crisis, György Litván and his colleagues at the 1956 Institute in Budapest estimate that 350 people were executed, including "at least 229 people sentenced to death in political trials" for participating in the uprising. See György Litván et al., *The Hungarian Revolution of 1956: Reform, Revolt, and Repression, 1953-1963* (London, 1996), p. 144. During the intervention, about 720 Soviet military personnel were killed and 1,540 were wounded. See "Sobytiya v Vengrii 1956 goda" in G. A. Krivosheev (ed.), *Grif Sekretnosti Snyat: Poteri Vooruzhenykh Sil SSSR v Voinakh, Boevykh Deistviyakh i Voennykh Konfliktakh: Statisticheskoe Issledovanie* (Moscow, 1993), p. 397.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

from their families. Truthful messages could have alleviated the suffering of the street fighters' children, who endured years of stigmatization and poverty after their parents were killed or incarcerated.<sup>55</sup>

The degree of RFE's impact on the Hungarians remains hotly debated to this day, however. Some Hungarians attest to the poor quality of the reception due to electronic jamming. István Liptak, a 71-year-old pensioner, told an interviewer, "We listened to RFE whenever we could, but it was not easy," he said.<sup>56</sup> Gyula Borbándi, an RFE staff member since its founding in the early 1950s, believes that the poor quality made many listeners hear what they wanted to hear.<sup>57</sup> However, we do know now that RFE broadcasts could be heard clearly by 24 October, thanks to Gusztáv Gogolyák, head of Post Office No. 118, the covert headquarters for the jamming operation in Budapest.<sup>58</sup> In addition, Soviet jamming was not always effective, especially very early in the morning and very late at night.<sup>59</sup>

Nevertheless, Borbándi admits that the contents of some broadcasts were "often unfortunate, and there were plenty of mistakes."<sup>60</sup> A cursory glance at other broadcasts would cause even the most brash journalists ethical cardiac arrhythmia. Some gave concrete military advice. On 27 and 28 October, for example, Gyula Borsányi told listeners how to disconnect railroad and telephone lines, and claimed that if they could establish a central military command and continue fighting, this would greatly influence the debate on Hungary in the UN Security Council. Borsányi implied that "the most the Soviets can bring in is about four divisions" and that it "might take as long as two or three weeks for the Soviets to secure the Danube line if Hungarians fight effectively against them." He reminded listeners that in 1943 Yugoslav partisans in Serbia fought against numerically superior German forces and won. Gyula Litterati advised listeners on 30 October about techniques of anti-tank warfare, giving the impression that tanks were easy to destroy.<sup>61</sup>

On 29 October, a "shrill, violent" report by Imre Mikes told the freedom fighters not to give up their arms. This report "lacked any reference to the fact

<sup>55</sup> See the moving oral history by Zsuzsanna Kőrösi and Adrienne Molnár, *Carrying a Secret in My Heart: Children of the Victims of the Reprisals after the Hungarian Revolution in 1956. An Oral History*. (Budapest, 2003.)

<sup>56</sup> Éva Kekes, "Controversial Radio Free Europe Tapes Aired on Hungarian Radio," Associated Press, 23 Oct. 1995. <http://www.chron.com/content/chronicle/world/95/10/24/hungary.html>.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.* Also see Gyula Borbándi, *Magyarok az Angol Kértben: a Szabad Európa Rádió története* (Budapest, 1996), pp. 135.

<sup>58</sup> Interview by Béla Révész of Gusztáv Gogolyák, 26 Mar. 1996. Cited in István Rev, "Just Noise?" p. 4. Unpublished paper presented at the Conference on Cold War Broadcasting Impact, Hoover Institution, Stanford University, 13-15 Oct. 2004.

<sup>59</sup> See K. R. M Short, "The Real Masters of the Black Heavens," in K. R. M Short (ed.), *Western Broadcasts over the Iron Curtain* (London, 1986), p. 6.

<sup>60</sup> Gyula Borbándi, *Magyarok az Angol Kértben: a Szabad Európa Rádió története* (Budapest, 1996), p. 135.

<sup>61</sup> The quoted statements in this paragraph can be found in the Griffith memorandum, op. cit.



that people in the country might be able to judge this delicate question better than *émigrés* on the outside and made no reference to the Freedom Stations or other opinions from within the country," Griffith wrote. "This had been specifically advised and agreed upon at the morning meeting when a summary of the program had been presented."<sup>62</sup> On the same day, 29 October, Katalin Hunyadi stated that in Cleveland "Groups of Hungarians and Americans give their names ... they want to volunteer to go to Hungary so that they can fight against the Soviets."<sup>63</sup>

## VI. Effect of RFE Broadcasts on Soviet Decision-Making: Lack of Faith in Nagy

Let us now look more closely at the three ways outlined above in which RFE broadcasts may have affected Soviet perceptions and decision-making during the crisis. First, they appear to have contributed to Moscow's lack of faith in Nagy's ability to control the situation. At the emergency Presidium meeting of 23 October, the Kremlin leaders clearly still had faith in Nagy — enough to install him as Prime Minister on the night of 23-24 October. Mikoyan had believed they could even avoid a military intervention. He had said, "Without Nagy they can't get control of the movement, and it's also cheaper for us." Khrushchev then added, "We should recruit Nagy for political action." Although Soviet leaders concluded that the situation was serious enough to send in troops, they wanted military aid merely to buttress Nagy's new regime.<sup>64</sup>

Yet, while Khrushchev and his colleagues were affirming their belief in Nagy, US diplomats in Budapest had already begun to doubt the Hungarian leader. Documents show that Washington's view of Nagy unraveled much faster than Moscow's did. Similar to his 15 October injunction to "give minimal publicity to Nagyist statements and actions," Barnes again called for moderation in the media *vis-à-vis* Nagy on 23 October. Nagy's cool reception by the crowds on that day must have reinforced Barnes' negative memories of the Hungarian leader's earlier protests regarding Operation Focus. He wrote:

Crowd called repeatedly for Nagy, who when finally appeared, asked demonstrators bide their time and wait for natural developments, which he said would lead to democratization in H[ungary]. Crowd hardly listened and Nagy said "you called me here to give my opinion and I'm giving it." He asked crowd to sing "Szazat" [*Szózat*] and then go home. Crowd's attitude

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> RGANI, f. 3, o. 12, d. 1006, l. 4-4ob, "Protokol'naya Zapis' Zasedaniya Prezidiuma TsK KPSS, 23 oktyabrya 1956 g." V. N. Malin.

after first moderating words very cool. *Legation strongly urges media refrain from taking any kind of stand on Imre Nagy for time being.*<sup>65</sup>

Sure enough, the next day (24 October) RFE issued its broadcasters a new set of guidelines: "avoid to the utmost extent any explicit or implicit support of individual personalities in a temporary government such as the communists Imre Nagy or János Kádár."<sup>66</sup> RFE's defamatory statements about Nagy began on 24 October, the first day of Nagy's appointment as Prime Minister. One RFE broadcaster, János Olvedi, asserted:

Instead of introducing real reforms, the [Nagy] regime tried to solve every problem by introducing only half-measures. They ignore the will of the people. Instead of setting up a popular representation, they continued to govern by way of a sham parliament.<sup>67</sup>

Despite Barnes' advice about neutrality toward Nagy, the US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles assumed that Nagy and Kádár *opposed* the student demonstrators enough to punish them physically. He sent a telegram to the US embassy in Belgrade on 25 October expressing his fears that the Nagy-Kádár government might take "reprisals" against the Hungarian "freedom fighters."<sup>68</sup> By the next day, 26 October State Department officials in Washington assumed the worst about Nagy, asserting in a top secret memorandum: "Nagy's appeal for Soviet troops indicates, at least superficially, that *there are not any open differences* between the Soviet and Hungarian governments."<sup>69</sup>

Meanwhile in Moscow, at the Presidium meeting of 26 October, Kremlin leaders were only just beginning to worry about Nagy's loyalty and managerial skills, but they mostly blamed Mikoyan for not being strict enough with the

<sup>65</sup> Telegram from N. Spencer Barnes to US State Department, 23 Oct. 1956, p. 2, National Security Archive, Washington, D.C., "Flashpoints" Project, Box 2, Record #514. Szózat ("Appeal") written in 1836 during the conflict with Austria, is one of Hungary's most patriotic anthems.

<sup>66</sup> Nowak, "Poles and Hungarians in 1956," p. 7.

<sup>67</sup> Script #2, "Special Commentary III," 24 Oct. 1956, RFE Europe Broadcasts, p. 7-8. C. D. Jackson Papers, Box 54, Folder "Free Europe Committee, 1956 (2)," Eisenhower Presidential Library.

<sup>68</sup> Telegram from Secretary of State Dulles, State Department, to US Embassy in Belgrade, approved by Jacob D. Beam, 25 Oct. 1956, p. 1, "Flashpoints" Project, Box 2, Folder "10/26/56," Record #82362, National Security Archive, Washington, D.C. Dulles wrote, [D]ifficult see how unarmed people however heroic can overcome Soviet tanks. *In circumstances therefore we desire minimize bloodshed, keep Nagy-Kádár regime from taking reprisals [emphasis added].*"

<sup>69</sup> State Department Top Secret Memorandum, 26 Oct. 1956, "Summary of Expected Soviet and Yugoslav Positions on Hungary," "Flashpoints" Project, Box 2, Folder "10/29/56," National Security Archive, Washington D.C. Emphasis added.

Hungarian Prime Minister. Bulganin spoke first, and Molotov, Kaganovich, Malenkov, and Zhukov all agreed. Malenkov said, "We should tell Comrade Mikoyan that he must firmly press Nagy to restore order."<sup>70</sup> Khrushchev concluded the meeting, listing a series of interim measures to take, for example: dispatching Molotov, Zhukov, and Malenkov to Budapest; reinforcing Soviet troops in Hungary; and establishing contact with András Hegedüs, the first deputy chairman of the Hungarian Council of Ministers. "Later we can say definitively [*okonchatel'no*]," he stated.<sup>71</sup>

In Washington the next day, 27 October, a State Department official, W. Park Armstrong, Jr., wrote a secret memo to the Undersecretary of State, summarizing the "points about the Hungarian situation covered" in a meeting with John Foster Dulles:

The new Hungarian cabinet, announced by Radio Budapest at 11:30 Saturday a.m. falls far short of Premier Nagy's promise of a broad national government. Of the top 15 positions, all but one are occupied by Communists. Unlike Nagy, neither one of these communists has been publicly identified as an opponent of Rákosi in intra-party differences, nor as an advocate of "liberalization" in Hungary. Five of the ministers are holdovers from the previous cabinet.<sup>72</sup>

Earlier, Douglas Dillon, the US Ambassador to France, transmitted French opinions on the Polish and Hungarian situations, including the shrewd observation that "Nagy's position will be considerably weaker than Gomułka's because he has been compelled [to] rely openly on [the] Soviets and therefore is precluded from having [the] degree [of] popular support presently enjoyed by Gomułka."<sup>73</sup> Had State Department officials taken Dillon's telegram seriously, perhaps they would not have judged Nagy's selection of cabinet officials on 27 October so harshly and, instead, perceived his moves as part of a political balancing act.

Skepticism about Nagy among the Washington elite further fuelled RFE broadcasters' rhetoric against him. RFE's New York office established regular

<sup>70</sup> RGANI, f. 3, o. 12, d. 1005, l.62, "Protokol'naya Zapis' Zasedaniya Prezidiuma TsK KPSS, 26 oktyabrya 1956 g." V. N. Malin.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, l. 63.

<sup>72</sup> State Department Memorandum from W. Park Armstrong, Jr. to Undersecretary of State, 27 Oct. 1956, p. 1, "Summary of Points About Hungarian Situation Covered in Secretary's Meeting," "Flashpoints" Project, Box 2, Folder "10/27-8/56," National Security Archive, Washington D.C.

<sup>73</sup> Telegram from Douglas C. Dillon, US Ambassador to France, to State Department, Washington, D.C., 25 Oct. 1956, re: French Opinions on Poland and Hungary, pp 1-2, "Flashpoints" Project, Box 2, Folder 10/25/56, National Security Archive, Washington, D.C.

Policy Guidances that all broadcasters were supposed to follow. The RFE transcripts broadcast during late October and early November 1956 reveal a strong bias against Nagy.<sup>74</sup> One commentator said "The [Nagy] government and its armed units are no more masters of the situation."<sup>75</sup> Still a second stated:

We know that the President of the Council of Ministers in his speech on Sunday promised to fulfill a part of these demands. Instead of promises, however, and instead of words, action is needed.<sup>76</sup>

A third broadcaster admitted his lack of knowledge of the situation in Hungary and attributed his confusion to the Nagy regime:

We don't know exactly what is going on in Budapest and ... in the entire country. But ... from [Nagy's] speech one can draw a conclusion how great a confusion exists within the government itself.<sup>77</sup>

Actual calumny of Nagy at the height of the crisis only came to light at the Budapest conference in 1996, when Maria Wittner, a former insurgent imprisoned from 1956 to 1970, read some RFE quotations aloud.

Imre Nagy agreed to the invasion of Soviet troops. Already on this very day this step of his is put down as one of the greatest acts of treachery in Hungary's history. And this will be remembered forever.

Imre Nagy, who covered his hands in Hungarian blood....

Where are the traitors.... Who are the murderers? Imre Nagy and his government ... only Cardinal Mindszenty has spoken out fearlessly.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>74</sup> RFE Europe Broadcasts [29 Oct. 1956-9 Nov. 1956], C. D. Jackson Papers, Box 54, Folder "Free Europe Committee, 1956 (2)," Eisenhower Presidential Library. After the crisis, C. D. Jackson commissioned translations of some of the Hungarian scripts and sent to him from Munich. Researchers can now find them in the Eisenhower Presidential Library.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 13-14.

<sup>78</sup> Interview of Maria Wittner by author, Budapest, 28 Sep. 1996. Cited also in Nelson, *War of the Black Heavens*, p. 82. See also Jane Perlez, "Budapest Journal: A 1956 Crop of Fearless Teen-Agers," *New York Times* (3 Oct. 1996), p. A4.

Wittner was citing the anti-Nagy statements of Andor Gellért, RFE's chief Hungarian editor, broadcast on 25 October.<sup>79</sup>

The indirect influence of these negative broadcasts now reached Moscow. On 27 October, KGB Chief Serov — a direct route to Kremlin leaders' ears — reported to Moscow: "It is significant that proclamations have appeared around town at night, in which *Imre Nagy is declared a traitor* and Béla Kovács is proposed as a Prime Minister. They are summoning people to organize demonstrations in Kovács' favor."<sup>80</sup> Kovács, the former Secretary General of the Smallholders Party, had been rehabilitated in August 1956 and appointed Minister of Agriculture by Nagy on 27 October. If the Khrushchev leadership worried about him, they should have. Kovács would later give a speech on 31 October for the Independent Smallholders Party in Pécs that specifically advocated neutrality well before Nagy did. He said:

When the Hungarian freedom fighters battled against the Russian tanks, they fought for the country's independence. This does not mean that we regard the Russian people as our enemies, but one cannot follow a unilateral policy.... It is necessary to establish relations, based on equal rights, with all nations, and *one cannot tie the country's fate to one or another military bloc. The Hungarian people want a neutral Hungary.*<sup>81</sup>

Ironically, a major cause of the negative atmosphere in Budapest toward Nagy stemmed from the confusion in Hungarian and American minds about who had originally called in Soviet troops on the night of 23-24 October. In fact, Gerő

<sup>79</sup> Similar statements by Gellert denouncing Nagy were also cited by János Berecz. See "Impact of Western Broadcasting during the Cold War on Hungary," p. 6. Unpublished paper presented at the Conference on Cold War Broadcasting Impact, Hoover Institution, Stanford University, 13-15 Oct. 2004. As a party historian and communist party member before the 1989 revolution and 1991 Soviet collapse, Berecz led the defence of the 1956 crackdown. Since then he has written candidly about the 1956 events. For his views on the October-November 1956 events, see his latest memoir, *Vállalom* (Budapest, 2003).

<sup>80</sup> RGANI, F. 89, Op. 2, D. 2, L. 132, "Informatsiya Serova iz Budapeshta, 27-ogo oktyabrya 1956 g." (emphasis added).

<sup>81</sup> (Emphasis added). Kovács' speech was reported on the second page of *Kis Újság*, the party's newspaper, in its first new issue on 1 Nov. 1956. Kovács was secretary general of the Independent Smallholders Party until 1947. On 25 Feb. 1947 he was arrested on a charge of conspiracy against the Soviet occupation forces and incarcerated in a Soviet prison until the fall of 1955. He returned to Budapest from Pécs in November 1. After the revolution he served for one year (1958-1959) in Kádár's new regime and died in 1959. This translated excerpt is published in Edmund O. Stillman, *The Ideology of Revolution: the People's Demands in Hungary, October-November 1956* (New York, 1957), p. 31-32. See also footnote 3 in E. D. Orekhova, V. T. Sereda and A. S. Stykalin, *Sovetskii Soyuz i Vengerskii Krizis 1956 Goda*, p. 493.

verbally requested them, and Hegedüs actually signed the official written invitation *ex post facto*.<sup>82</sup> Nagy could not clarify the situation until after his reputation had already been tarnished. Nevertheless, he did request Soviet military reinforcements on 25 October according to Mikoyan and fellow Presidium member Mikhail Suslov.<sup>83</sup>

By the 28 October Presidium meeting Soviet hardliners had almost completely lost faith in Nagy, who was busy conceding to the masses' demands, which in turn had been piqued in part by RFE broadcasts. Voroshilov said "We should not withdraw troops — we must act decisively. Nagy is a liquidator." Molotov added: "Nagy at any moment will speak against us."<sup>84</sup> Yet, as pointed out earlier, while Soviet leaders contemplated a second intervention, they ultimately decided against it, preferring a Nagy regime to no regime and wishing to avoid the Egyptian "mess" in which the British and French were embroiled. They hoped Nagy would regain control of the situation once Brezhnev and others wrote an "appeal" to the workers, peasants, and the intelligentsia; once the Chinese, Bulgarians, Poles, Czechs, and Yugoslavs appealed to the Hungarians "independently"; and once "negotiations" for the withdrawal of Soviet troops began.<sup>85</sup>

<sup>82</sup> It is now known that Gerő summoned the military attaché of the Soviet embassy for military assistance. Soviet ambassador Andropov then attempted to call into action the Special Corps [*Osobii Korpus*] in Hungary, headed by Pyotr Lashchenko, who replied that he needed a direct command from Moscow. See the report written in Czech by Novotný's aide, Jan Svoboda, of a key meeting on 24 Oct. of top CPSU Presidium members and East European Communist leaders (except Gomulka and Gerő). Státní Ústřední Archiv [Central State Archive in Prague, or SUA], Fond 07/16, Svazek 3, "Zpráva o jednání na UV KSSS 24. října 1956 k situaci v Polsku a Maďarsku" ("Account of a Meeting at the CPSU CC, October 24, 1956, on the Situation in Poland and Hungary"). See Tibor Hajdu, "Az 1956 október 24-i moszkvai értekezlet," *Évkönyv I.* (Budapest, 1992), pp. 149-56. For an English translation, see Mark Kramer, "Hungary and Poland, 1956: Khrushchev's CPSU CC Presidium Meeting on East European Crises, October 24, 1956," *Cold War International History Bulletin* (1995), pp. 1, 50-56. Also Fyodor Lukianov, "Khrushchev Ostorozhen; Andropov Nastaival," *Izvestiia*, no. 169 (24 Jul. 1992). The Soviet Presidium could not take action, however, until it received a formal request from the Hungarian leadership. Strangely enough, when Khrushchev called Gerő (after Gerő's call to the Soviet military attaché) to invite him to the emergency meeting on 24 October in Moscow, the latter declined, saying the Hungarian situation was too serious, but he did not say a word about his earlier call for military assistance. Only after Andropov called Moscow to inform Khrushchev, did the Soviet leader then call Gerő again to tell him the request would be fulfilled, but only if it were in writing. Gerő refused, saying he did not have time to summon a meeting. The formal request did not actually arrive in Moscow until five days later. Andropov sent it in a ciphered telegram on 28 Oct. 1956. See AVP RF, f. 059a, o. 4, p. 6, d. 5, l. 12. "Shifrtelogramma" 28 Oct. 1956.

<sup>83</sup> AVP RF, f. 059a., o. 4, p. 6, d. 5, l. 4. "Telegramma A. I. Mikoyana i M. A. Suslova iz Budapeshta v TsK KPSS, 25-ogo oktyabrya 1956 g."

<sup>84</sup> RGANI, f 3, o 12, d 1006, ll. 59ob-60, "Protokol'naya Zapis' Zasedaniya Prezidiuma TsK KPSS, 28-ogo oktyabrya 1956 g." V. N. Malin. Molotov used the future tense of *vstupat'*: *Nad' vot-vot vystupit protiv nas*. This is slightly mistranslated as "Nagy is speaking against us" in the English translation published by the Woodrow Wilson Center's Cold War International History Project ("Virtual Archive"), <http://wwics.si.edu>.

<sup>85</sup> RGANI, f 3, o 12, d 1006, l. 58ob., "Protokol'naya Zapis' Zasedaniya Prezidiuma TsK KPSS, 28-ogo oktyabrya 1956 g." V. N. Malin.

The next day, 29 October — still two days before the Soviet Union decided to invade Hungary — the State Department believed that a “war” had developed in Hungary “between the Hungarian people on the one hand and the *USSR and a small group of Quislings* on the other.”<sup>86</sup> That same day Dulles discussed with top White House aide Bernard Shanley the expediency of meeting Edward T. Wailes, the new US Minister in the Budapest legation, before the latter flew to Budapest to take up his post. Dulles did not think this would be a good idea, since: it was “not important in the sense of carrying a message, because *the present [Nagy] government is not one we want to do much with*”; and “from the domestic standpoint,” it would “advertise that we have not had an ambassador there for several days.”<sup>87</sup>

RFE broadcasters meanwhile vigorously promoted József Mindszenty, the Hungarian cardinal and Archbishop of Esztergom since 1945, who had been released from prison on 31 October 1956. On that day, Hungarian *émigré* László Béry praised Mindszenty, implying that he — rather than Nagy — should be followed.

Dear Listeners, they selected [a path] without being able to see the proper and intelligent path, and no one knew who the director was. The answer to that question ... is Cardinal József Mindszenty. The primate was a prisoner, not an officer. He did not distribute arms; he did not give out a political program; he did not give commands to the people. But in spirit he was there in the streets of Budapest.<sup>88</sup>

Mindszenty himself did not aspire to political leadership, but when he sought refuge in the American Embassy on 4 November, Robert Murphy, under secretary of state for political affairs, sent a teletype from Washington, urging Wailes — now sitting alone in the Legation’s Telex room with safes propped against the windows to block bullets — to “get a statement” from Mindszenty.<sup>89</sup> The cardinal obliged: “Under the pretense of serious negotiations, the assembling Soviet

<sup>86</sup> Top Secret Department of State Memorandum, “Afternoon Summary of Latest Developments in Dual Crises,” 29 Oct. 1956, p. 1, “Flashpoints” Project, Box 2, Folder “10/29/56,” Record # 65222, National Security Archive, Washington D.C. (Emphasis added).

<sup>87</sup> Memorandum of Telephone Conversation between Dulles and Shanley regarding US Ambassador to Hungary, Wailes, 29 Oct. 1956, 10:56 a.m., p. 1, “Flashpoints” Project, Box 2, Folder “10/29/56,” Record # 64562, National Security Archive, Washington D.C. (Emphasis added).

<sup>88</sup> Script #6, RFE Special Commentary, 31 Oct. 1956, László Béry, RFE Europe Broadcasts [Oct. 1956–Nov. 1956], C. D. Jackson Papers, Box 54, Folder “Free Europe Committee, 1956 (2),” Eisenhower Presidential Library. *N.B.* The documents in C. D. Jackson’s collection are in awkward English — apparently translated by native Hungarian speakers in order to help the New York-based RFE officials investigate the reports broadcasted during the crisis.

<sup>89</sup> 4 Nov. 1956, Unnumbered Telegram from US Legation in Budapest to US State Department in Washington, D.C., p. 7, “Flashpoints” Project, Box 2, National Security Archive, Washington, D.C.

troops at dawn occupied the Hungarian capital and the entire country. I protest against this aggression and *I ask for forceful and speedy defense of my country from the USA and other powers.*"<sup>90</sup> This statement, later broadcasted by RFE, further escalated Hungarians' expectations of American military aid. Ironically, the noncommunist Kovács (who advocated Hungarian neutrality) and other Hungarian officials also appeared on the US Legation's doorstep a few minutes later. "I will have to turn them away," Wailes typed.<sup>91</sup>

By 31 October Khrushchev had decided to intervene, concluding "We have no other choice."<sup>92</sup> The most direct evidence of RFE's influence on the Kremlin leader's thinking on the eve of the second Soviet crackdown on Hungary is perhaps Malin's record of the emergency Presidium meeting on 2 November 1956 in Moscow. Ferenc Münnich (former Hungarian ambassador in Moscow, and later Belgrade), who had been flown secretly to the Russian capital along with Kádár, told the Kremlin leaders forthrightly that the radio broadcasts were the source of anti-Soviet sentiments. He mused in broken phrases: "Why did this situation arise? The isolation of the leaders from the masses. Certainty that the regime exists and is preserved only through the support of the USSR. This is the source of anti-Soviet sentiments (facts: ... *radio broadcasts*)." <sup>93</sup> Münnich thus construed the radio broadcasts as directly contributing to the unpopularity of Nagy's leadership (as propped up by Moscow and isolated from the masses). Münnich's statement does show that Khrushchev and his colleagues heard the complaint about the impact of foreign radio broadcasts on the Nagy regime's popularity before the 4 November crackdown, although not before they had decided to intervene a second time (31 October).<sup>94</sup>

As for Washington's perspective, even on 4 November, when the second, more massive, Soviet intervention overthrew Nagy's government, US diplomats, including US Minister Wailes, still suspected Nagy's loyalties. They apparently believed that Nagy had fled to the Soviet (not Yugoslav) Embassy.<sup>95</sup> In fact,

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14. Murphy then wrote back to Wailes: "You are authorized to grant shelter tentatively to Kovacs and his lieutenants. We will to consider disposition later."

<sup>92</sup> RGANI, f. 3, o. 12, d. 1006, l. 18ob., "Protokol'naya Zapis' Zasedaniya Prezidiuma TsK KPSS," 31 oktyabrya 1956 g., V. N. Malin.

<sup>93</sup> RGANI, f. 3, o. 12, d. 1006, l. 28, "Protokol'naya Zapis' Zasedaniya Prezidiuma TsK KPSS, 2 noyabrya 1956 g." written by V. N. Malin (emphasis added). Although Münnich served as Minister of Internal Affairs in Nagy's government, he flew secretly to Moscow with János Kádár on November 1. He joined Kádár's post-revolutionary regime as Minister of Defense and Deputy Chairman of the Hungarian Revolutionary Worker-Peasant Party.

<sup>94</sup> As we can see from RFE's Policy Handbook published in 1951 (which employees were forbidden to take outside RFE offices), the organization aimed to do just that — "remind listeners constantly that they are governed by agents of a foreign power whose purpose is not to further the national interest, but to carry out the imperialistic aims of the rulers of Soviet Russia." The planners believed that this would help "to sustain the morale" of the peoples in the "captive nations" until their liberation. See Radio Free Europe Policy Handbook, 30 Nov. 1951, copy #80, p. 2. Willis D. Crittenberger Papers, Post Retirement, US Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania.

<sup>95</sup> 4 Nov. 1956, Unnumbered Telegram from US Legation, p. 3.



Nagy was still working in his office in the Parliament building on the morning of the attack. He broadcast a report on the radio at 5:20 a.m. on 4 November, shortly after Béla Király, commander-in-chief of the National Guard, telephoned Nagy to inform him that Soviet tanks were advancing toward the Parliament building.<sup>96</sup>

### VII. RFE Broadcasts Aroused Soviet Fears of Hungary's Withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact

The RFE programs may have precipitated the Soviet crackdown in a second, corrosive way: by repeating the messages from local Hungarian radio stations — messages that Kremlin leaders may otherwise not have heard — which were calling for Hungary's withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact. Due to the sheer speed of events and difficulties in acquiring information, RFE broadcasters in Europe were instructed to copy the demands made through these local Hungarian radio stations that had been taken over by insurgents.<sup>97</sup> In some cases, this was a useful method by which to discover the true desires of the people. Sadly, however, RFE unwittingly became at times the mouthpiece of the most radical Hungarian elements. Local "freedom radios" had begun calling for Hungary's withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact long before Nagy did officially on 1 November. Since these radio stations broadcasted on extremely low frequencies in the Hungarian language, Kremlin leaders and Soviet diplomats might easily have missed them, had RFE not repeated their messages. If Hungarians often had difficulty hearing the RFE and Hungarian broadcasts due to jamming, Kremlin leaders had a doubly hard time hearing local Hungarian radio stations, due to the geographical distance, speed of events, and language barriers. They did, however, receive daily digests of foreign broadcasts — including the RFE — about the events in Hungary and Poland in 1956.<sup>98</sup> Also, Ambassador Andropov and some other

<sup>96</sup> Interview with Béla Király, 4 Jun. 2002. Király visited Nagy in the Parliament on 2 Nov. and telephoned him several times on the evening of 3 Nov.

<sup>97</sup> Unpublished paper by James McCargar, "Remarks at the International Conference, 'Hungary and the World, 1956: the New Archival Evidence,' 26-29 September 1996, Budapest."

<sup>98</sup> See Vladimir Tol'ts, "1950-e: Sovetskaya Reaktsiya na Inostrannoe Radioveshchanie," p. 6. Unpublished paper presented at the Conference on Cold War Broadcasting Impact, Hoover Institution, Stanford University, 13-15 Oct. 2004. Tol'ts states that the "personnel changes in the Soviet leadership" and the popular revolts led to an expansion in the number of "consumers in the Kremlin" (*kremlovskie potrebiteli*) and "changes in the themes of radio reception" (*izmeneniya tematiki radioperekhvata*). Tol'ts disclosed the existence of a complex of Russian documents, still classified, relating to foreign radio broadcasts, which he called "OZP" (*Osobyie Zakrytye Pis'ma* or Special Secret Letters). For his paper he drew on a set of documents entitled "Information of TASS Sent to the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party and the Council of Ministers: Translations of Articles, Recordings of Political Statesmen, and Foreign Radio Broadcasts)." In the index, he provides a table indicating the topics of broadcasts each of the Presidium members were exposed to in 1956, which included the events in Poland and Hungary.

Soviet diplomats stationed in Budapest did not speak Hungarian.<sup>99</sup>

As shown above, not until 28 October had Soviet Presidium leaders begun to doubt Nagy and those were only the hardline “hawks” like Molotov and Voroshilov. Before 28 October, moreover, the Russians did not mention anything during the Presidium meetings about withdrawals — neither of Soviet troops from Budapest (or Hungary as a whole), nor of Hungary from the Warsaw Pact. On the other hand, US State Department officials knew at least as early as 27 October that “renunciation of the Warsaw Pact” was a key item on the demonstrators’ list of demands.<sup>100</sup> According to Nowak, US strategists issued a specific RFE “guidance” on 28 October, instructing broadcasters to support “demands for the removal of all-leading communists from the government, free elections within six months, and *withdrawal of Hungary from the Warsaw Pact*.”<sup>101</sup>

Sure enough, on the very same day that RFE urged broadcasters to support demands for Hungary’s withdrawal from the communist alliance, Khrushchev and his colleagues first contemplated a military intervention in Hungary. Khrushchev posed the question: “Will we have a government that is with us, or will there be a government that is not with us and will request the withdrawal of troops?”<sup>102</sup> Contemplation of a post-Nagy government, or lack thereof, apparently sobered Khrushchev and his colleagues. Bulganin said, “In Budapest there are forces that want to get rid of Nagy’s and Kádár’s government. We should adopt a position of support for the current government. Otherwise we’ll have to

<sup>99</sup> A month after the Soviet invasion, for example, Andropov wrote to I. K. Zamchevskii, director of the Fifth European Division of the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs: “I request that you send to the Soviet embassy in the very next diplomatic post all TASS material concerning the events in Hungary from 23 Oct. to the present. This material is essential for the practical work of the Embassy, since the majority of the dossiers and other documents were destroyed.” AVP RF, F. “Referentura po Vengrii,” d. 034 (Notes of Conversations of Foreign Ministry Division Personnel),” Telegram from Iu. V. Andropov to I. K. Zamchevskii, 4 Dec. 1956. The document does not say how these documents were destroyed, i.e., whether the Soviet Embassy was attacked or whether the Russians shredded documents themselves as a precaution. Third Soviet secretary in the embassy, Vladimir Kriuchkov (later KGB chief during the August 1991 putsch attempt) did speak Hungarian, however. See his memoir in two volumes: *Lichnoe Delo* (Moscow, 1996).

<sup>100</sup> Department of State Memorandum from W. Park Armstrong, Jr. to Undersecretary Containing Summary of Points about Hungarian Situation Covered in Secretary’s Meeting, 27 Oct. 1956, p. 2. National Security Archive, Washington D.C., “Flashpoints” Project, Box 2, Folder “10/27-8/56.” This memorandum lists the insurgents’ demands as: “1) a new provisional government, including leaders of the insurgent youth; 2) immediate cancellation of martial law; 3) *immediate renunciation of the Warsaw Pact and the peaceable departure of SU troops from Hungary*; 4) punishment of those responsible for the bloodshed and a general amnesty; 5) construction of Hungarian socialism on a democratic basis; 6) disarming of the security police and assumption of responsibility for order by the Army. The statements pledge continued demonstrations until victory is won.” (emphasis added).

<sup>101</sup> Jan Nowak [Zdzisław Jeziorański], “Poles and Hungarians in 1956,” unpublished paper delivered at conference “Hungary and the World, 1956: the New Archival Evidence, 26-29 September 1996,” Budapest, p. 7. (emphasis added).

<sup>102</sup> RGANI, f. 3, o. 12, d. 1005, l. 58, “Protokol’naya Zapis’ Zasedaniya Prezidiuma TsK KPSS, 28 oktyabrya 1956 g.” V. N. Malin.

undertake an occupation."<sup>103</sup> Khrushchev later added "the English and French are in a real mess (*kasha*) in Egypt. We shouldn't get caught in the same company."<sup>104</sup>

Yet, on 31 October, after a crescendo of radio broadcasts calling for withdrawal of Soviet troops and Hungarian neutrality, the Kremlin leaders lost hope. "We should reexamine our assessment and should not withdraw our troops from Hungary and Budapest," Khrushchev said. "We should take the initiative in restoring order in Hungary. If we depart from Hungary ... the imperialists [Americans, English, and French] will interpret it as weakness on our part and will attack."<sup>105</sup> In the Soviet officials' Manichean Cold War mindset, there could be no neutrality. If they withdrew troops, they assumed NATO troops would rush into the power vacuum, and Hungary would leave the Warsaw Pact to join NATO.

Thus, RFE's role in Soviet decision-making is worth examining. By parroting the local Hungarian radio stations' calls for Soviet troop withdrawal and for Hungary's withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact, RFE — with its nineteen transmitters in both Germany (Munich) and Portugal (Lisbon) — possibly amplified the public groundswell of expectations, which Nagy then felt obliged to heed. The Hungarian peoples' demands for withdrawal and Nagy's attempts to placate them apparently convinced the Moscow leaders that they had better launch an invasion before it was too late and Hungary left their alliance. Where Nagy's own decision-making is concerned, however, the Soviet invasion was clearly the cause, and his declaration of neutrality the effect.<sup>106</sup> If one can judge from Nagy's testimony while in captivity in Romania, he had gone along with the decision to withdraw Hungary from the Warsaw Pact because it was the consensus of the cabinet.<sup>107</sup> Even Nagy's "malfeasance" (disobeying Soviet orders by promising

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., l. 57ob.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., ll. 59-59ob.

<sup>105</sup> RGANI, f. 3, o. 12, d. 1006, l. 18, "Protokol'naya Zapis' Zasedaniya Prezidiuma TsK KPSS," 31 oktyabrya 1956 g., V. N. Malin.

<sup>106</sup> The Soviet Presidium decided to invade on 31 Oct. and Nagy declared neutrality on 1 Nov. On 31 Oct. and 1 Nov., Nagy protested against the invasion at the Soviet Embassy in Budapest, while Hungarian diplomats did the same in Moscow. Nagy also cabled the UN Secretary General and the permanent members of the UN Security Council for help. Only when he received no reply did Nagy declare neutrality. The Soviet Presidium met on 31 Oct. to reevaluate the decision of the previous day not to use force. Marshal Zhukov was instructed "to work out a plan and report on it." RGANI, f. 3, o. 12, d. 1006, l. 17ob, "Protokol'naya Zapis' Zasedaniya Prezidiuma TsK KPSS," 31 oktyabrya 1956 g., See also RGANI, f. 3, o. 64, d. 484, l. 41: "Postanovleniie Prezidiuma TsK KPSS: O polozenii v Vengrii. Vypiska iz protokola # 49, P49/VI ot 31 oktyabrya 1956 g."

<sup>107</sup> MOL (Budapest) XX.-5-h, 8 kötet, 13 doboz (1956-1958), "Jegyzőkönyv, Nagy Imre kihallgatásáról, Budapest, 1957 szeptember 2," old. 106. Nagy told his interrogators, "In that cabinet session on November 1, 1956, in the morning and afternoon, where the declaration of neutrality and the canceling of the Warsaw Pact were on the agenda, János Kádár, first deputy president of the party,

to negotiate the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Hungary) resulted more from this grassroots momentum than from any personal inclinations.

### VIII. RFE Broadcasts Accelerated the Disbandment of the Hungarian Security Police

The RFE broadcasts also possibly contributed to the Soviet decision to intervene because they accelerated the disbandment of the Hungarian security police (ÁVH). The resulting power vacuum most likely convinced Kremlin leaders of the need to send in Soviet troops. Disbanding the ÁVH had been one of the earliest of the student protesters' "sixteen points." They universally regarded ÁVH agents as having served as Rákosi's personal tool of terror in the late 1940s and 1950s.<sup>108</sup> They also believed that the ÁVH had started shooting on 23 October, transforming an innocuous student demonstration into a brutal shoot-out that launched the revolution.<sup>109</sup> By regularly broadcasting the demands to dismantle the ÁVH, together with anti-ÁVH slogans in general, the RFE most likely exerted a key multiplier effect, further intensifying the popular pressure on Nagy for change. A tragic figure, Nagy truly believed that, by conceding to all the peoples' demands, he might prevent a second Soviet intervention. As he told his Hungarian colleagues on 28 October: "We only have two options: if we call this movement a counter-revolution, then we have to subdue it by tanks and artillery. This is tragedy! ... If we're not careful we will be subjected to an intervention. We should lean on, and lead, the huge national forces that are on the move."<sup>110</sup>

minister of state, as I mentioned earlier, was also there, besides the other cabinet members. The cabinet made the decision with his participation. As far as I can remember, we invited Andropov on Kádár's suggestion. Andropov was informed of the cabinet's decision.... I don't think it's right to hold me responsible because I didn't discuss these questions with the party.... [T]he first deputy of the party [i.e. Kádár] took part at the session."

<sup>108</sup> Even other Hungarian Politburo (Political Committee) members viewed the ÁVH as such. At a meeting of the Political Committee on 25 Jun. 1953 at 5:00 p.m. Ernő Gerő said: "The party, and comrade Rákosi personally, directed the State Security Authority (ÁVH). It was wrong that comrade Rákosi gave direct orders to the ÁVH about how to investigate, whom to arrest, and who deserved corporal punishment, which is banned by the law." See MOL, KS-276-53/o.e. 123, old. 17. "Jegyzőkönyv a Politikai Bizottság 1953 június 25-i d.u. 5 h-kor tartott üléséről.

<sup>109</sup> According to one detailed chronology of the revolution stored in the Hungarian National Archive citing a newspaper account from the 24 Oct. 1956 issue of *Szabad Nép*, demonstrators began to throw stones at the windows of the radio station at around 6:00 p.m., after which tear gas bombs were thrown into the crowd and warning shots were heard. The demonstrators began shooting at the building around 11:00 p.m., and around 1:00 a.m. the inhabitants of the building began shooting from within. See MOL 1676/2000/XX-5-h, 1 doboz, 1 kötet, old. 138. "Eseménynaptár, 1956."

<sup>110</sup> PIL (Budapest) 290, f. 1/15. ő. e. old. 57-68.... [*Azt jelenti, ha nem vigyázunk, intervenciónak vagyunk kitéve. Nagy, hatalmas népi erőkre, amelyek mozgásban vannak, támaszkodni kell és élére kell állni*]. See also "Jegyzőkönyv a Politikai Bizottság által 1956. október 28-án tartott üléséről," *Ötvenhat októberre és a hatalom: a Magyar Dolgozók Pártja vezetői testületeinek dokumentumai 1956 október 24- október 28* (Budapest, 1997), old. 105.

That day he promised to dissolve the ÁVH, and the Hungarian government approved this decision on 29 October.

RFE's *émigré* broadcasters were unstinting in their descriptions of the ÁVH men. Supposedly quoting an Austrian journalist, one said over the air: "The people look at the ÁVH men creeping out of their hideouts with hatred and contempt. In some places the Russian soldiers themselves look at the Hungarian ÁVH men with disgust; in the days of the revolution they disappeared and now, shadowed by foreign arms, they come out again in order to continue with [what] they did before."<sup>111</sup>

The absence of security forces in Hungary and "low morale among the loyal comrades" alarmed the Kremlin leaders, despite the Nagy regime's formation of a Revolutionary Armed Forces Committee on 31 October that was authorized to create a new army. In their telegram to Moscow from Budapest on 29 October, Mikoyan and Suslov warned that the absence of security forces had emboldened the "reactionary forces."<sup>112</sup> Soviet officials in Hungary had noted how ÁVH agents dreaded fellow Hungarian citizens. Serov mentioned in his telegram that they disguised themselves in police uniforms.<sup>113</sup> Most significantly, Khrushchev brought up the subject with his Presidium colleagues on 30 October, noting that the Hungarian security agents were fighting alongside Soviet troops. It was understood that the agents did so for self-protection.<sup>114</sup>

This realization of the ÁVH agents' ineffectiveness probably affected the Soviet decision-making process by shifting the balance of power toward the hardliners. It heightened the Kremlin officials' distrust of their colleague Mikoyan, a "dove" who, just one week earlier, during the midnight Presidium meeting on 23 October, had opined that the Hungarian security organs could handle the situation themselves and that Moscow did not need to send in troops.<sup>115</sup>

<sup>111</sup> Script #6, RFE Border Reports, "Report of an Austrian Journalist," 7 Nov. 1956, p. 38. RFE Europe Broadcasts [29 Oct. 1956-9 Nov. 1956], C. D. Jackson Papers, Box 54, Folder "Free Europe Committee, 1956 (2)," Eisenhower Presidential Library. *N.B.* Most of the lynching took place between the two interventions, but this excerpt is representative of the descriptions of ÁVH men and calls for the ÁVH's disbandment broadcasted earlier. On 27 Oct., for example, RFE broadcast the Hungarian students' demands, which included: "#2: that the ÁVH be discontinued and that it be replaced by a national guard which will include members of the freedom fighters, the armed forces, the youth and workers." [21-28 Oct. 1956], C. D. Jackson Papers, Box 53, Folder "Free Europe Committee, 1956 (1)," Eisenhower Presidential Library. Also see Paul B. Henze, "Recollections of Radio Free Europe: Its Evolution in the 1950s and the Hungarian Revolution," p. 3, unpublished paper delivered at "Hungary and the World, 1956: the New Archival Evidence, 26-29 September 1996, Budapest."

<sup>112</sup> RGANI, f. 89, per 45, dok 11, l. 1, Telegramma A. I. Mikoyana i M. A. Suslova iz Budapeshta v TsK KPSS, 29 oktiabria 1956. [*Samoe opasnoe v tom, shto svoei deklaratsiei razlozhiv moral'no kadry gosbezopasnosti — naibolee stoikikh boitsov, oni poka ne sumeli nichevo sozdat' vzamen, chem pol'zuetsia reaktsiya.*]

<sup>113</sup> RGANI, f. 89, per 45, dok 11, l. 3, Informatsiia I. Serova, 29 oktiabria 1956.

<sup>114</sup> RGANI, f. 3, o. 12, d. 1006, ll. 6-14, "Protokol'naya Zapis' Zasedaniya Prezidiuma TsK KPSS, 30-ogo oktyabrya 1956 g." V. N. Malin.

<sup>115</sup> RGANI, f. 3, o. 12, d. 1006, l. 4-4ob, "Protokol'naya Zapis' Zasedaniya Prezidiuma TsK KPSS, 23 oktyabrya 1956 g." V. N. Malin. [*Rukami samikh vengrov navedem poryadok.*]

The leaders of the Hungarian Workers Party (*Magyar Dolgozók Pártja* or MDP) had known better. At a meeting in Budapest earlier that same evening, 23 October, between 9:00 and 9:30 p.m., they had convened in First Secretary Ernő Gerő's room to weigh the pros and cons of the Soviet intervention. One of the most compelling pros was their certainty that to employ ÁVH troops to squelch the student demonstration was to pour gasoline on a fire. They did not trust the Hungarian army either. A conclusive crackdown by the Soviet army might nip the problem in the bud as one had in East Berlin in June 1953, they concluded.<sup>116</sup> By 31 October, the day the Kremlin decided to intervene for the second time, the hard-line Presidium member Vyacheslav Molotov opposed Mikoyan's view, stating that Moscow should not rely on local security organs, including those outside of Budapest, but instead "act simultaneously in the center and in the localities."<sup>117</sup>

Apart from possibly contributing to the disbandment of the security forces, RFE's invective against ÁVH agents in all likelihood led to their bloody lynching. Photographs of corpses hanging from trees and lamp posts appeared on front pages of newspapers worldwide and embarrassed Kremlin leaders. Such photographs provided the West with powerful propaganda: the USSR cannot protect fellow communists from local lynch mobs. "We must look after the Hungarian Communists," Molotov insisted during the 28 October Presidium meeting.<sup>118</sup>

## IX. Conclusion

In sum, US officials' loss of trust in Nagy seems to have indirectly caused the Kremlin to mistrust him. Archival documents show that the RFE's activities most likely abetted the Soviet invasion by: encouraging Hungarian citizens during Operation Focus to challenge Nagy's regime, thus undermining it and helping Rákosi oust Nagy; publicizing incendiary messages that promised US military aid during the crisis; defaming Nagy, thus convincing the Kremlin that he had lost control; duplicating local radio stations' calls for withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact; and reviling ÁVH agents, which put further pressure on Nagy to disband the security police altogether. While some of Nagy's own unilateral actions, apart from RFE's denunciations, aroused the oligarchs' suspicions (for example, announcements of negotiations about Soviet troop withdrawal on 25

<sup>116</sup> Zoltán Ripp, "Hiba a rendszerben-október 23," *Ötvenhat októbere és a hatalom: a Magyar Dolgozók Pártja vezető testületeinek dokumentumai 1956 október 24-október 28* (Budapest, 1997), p. 186.

<sup>117</sup> RGANI, f. 3, o. 12, d. 1006, l. 17ob, "Protokol'naya Zapis' Zasedaniya Prezidiuma TsK KPSS," 31 oktiabria 1956 g." V. N. Malin.

<sup>118</sup> RGANI, f. 3, o. 12, d. 1005, l. 59, "Protokol'naya Zapis' Zasedaniya Prezidiuma TsK KPSS, 28 oktyabrya 1956 g." V. N. Malin. It is doubtful that Molotov was referring to Hegedüs, Gerő, Bata and a few other hard-line MDP officials, who had flown to Moscow on 28 Oct.

October and of a ceasefire on 28 October): those actions themselves were mostly desperate attempts to appease the insurgents (who were avid RFE listeners) and thus prevent a Soviet intervention.

As mentioned, RFE had four main objectives in the 1950s. While it achieved the first two (blocking the integration of Iron Curtain countries into the Soviet empire and employing *émigrés*), it failed in 1956 to achieve the last two (serving as the "voice of the internal opposition" and sustaining the morale of captive nations). By mimicking amateur radio stations in the regions, RFE failed to abide by the standards of objective journalism. Rather than acting as the conveyer of constructive criticism, it became the voice of nay-saying, rightist extremists.

Certainly RFE itself did not actually cause the Hungarian Revolution. The insurgents would be insulted if anyone even suggested that some foreign radio station had caused their revolution! But the more archival documents that are declassified, the more it appears that the radio broadcasts did probably colour the Kremlin's assessment of the Hungarian situation and Nagy's ability to control it, hence indirectly contributing to the ultimate decision on 31 October to invade. To be sure, there were other macro-level factors that influenced the Kremlin's decision to intervene and caused the casualties: the thaw in US-Soviet relations in the wake of Stalin's death and Khrushchev's shocking Secret Speech, the Hungarian people's long-repressed rage at policies that contorted Hungary to fit into the Soviet procrustean bed, their determination to break free of Soviet domination, and the Kremlin leaders' fear of losing a communist satellite and thereby appearing weak in Western eyes.

The Americans' premature distrust of Nagy points to a larger pattern of bias in US foreign policy during the Cold War: a fundamental prejudice toward communist leaders. Eisenhower's successful covert operations in Iran (1953) and Guatemala (1954) to remove leaders of suspected leftist or pro-Soviet tendencies probably emboldened him to write the above-mentioned letter to Paul Hoffman. Eisenhower belonged to the generation of statesmen indelibly marked by World War Two and the earlier crisis of Munich in 1938 when Hitler deceived the world: "Give an inch, and they'll take a mile." They found it both safer and simpler not to trust, not to even try to differentiate among communist leaders. Just as Soviet officials were blind to the concept of neutrality, so Eisenhower and other US policymakers in the 1950s appeared blind to the existence of scrupulous, reform-minded communists. This prejudice led them to discredit national communists such as Imre Nagy of Hungary and Ho Chi Minh of Vietnam and to prefer non-communists such as the Catholics Mindszenty of Hungary and Ngo Dinh Diem of Vietnam, however unsuitable the latter's personalities for national leadership.

Nevertheless, while Eisenhower perhaps should have discriminated among foreign communist leaders, in the long run, getting "caught with jam" on his fingers helped him and the NCFE/RFE planners. The Hungarian revolution in 1956 served as an important learning experience for the institution, spurring its officials and broadcasters on to greater precision and objectivity. While the RFE broadcasts were not the single cause of the Soviet crackdown, the Kremlin lead-

ers certainly exploited it as an *ex post facto* excuse. Frank Wisner, director of the CIA's Office of Policy Coordination, took this in stride. "[T]hey do this because ... they can't stand the truth; they can't stand the thing being understood throughout the world or within the Soviet Union as a genuine revolt."<sup>119</sup> But the Hungarian Revolution was genuine, and the bloc did eventually disintegrate by itself.

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<sup>119</sup> Transcript of Conversation between Charles E. Bohlen, American Embassy, Manila, Phillipines, with Frank G. Wisner, Cord Meyer, Richard Helms, Robert Amory, et. al. summarizing Bohlen's four years of service as US Ambassador in Moscow, "Research Notes, 1957," p. 28, secret, NARA, RG 59, Records of Ambassador Bohlen, 1952-1963, Lot 74D379, Box 10.



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