



CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Hungary: Upheaval in the Empire

In 1956, two concurrent events transformed the postwar pattern of international relations. The Suez crisis marked the end of innocence for the Western Alliance; henceforth, the Western allies would never again be able fully to believe in their own avowals of a perfect symmetry of interests. Simultaneously, the bloody suppression of the Hungarian uprising showed that the Soviet Union would maintain its sphere of interest, by force if necessary, and that talk of liberation was empty. There could no

longer be any doubt that the Cold War would be both protracted and bitter, with hostile armies facing each other across the dividing line of Europe as far into the future as anyone could see.

The Hungarians' doomed struggle against Soviet domination grew out of an explosive mix of historic Russian imperialism, Soviet ideology, and fierce Hungarian nationalism. In one sense, Hungary was just another victim of the Russian expansionism which had been going on relentlessly since the time of Peter the Great. Historically the Russian state had sought to repress nations trying to conduct a truly independent policy on Russia's borders—a temptation which has persisted into the post-Cold War period. But that was usually only the beginning of Russia's problems. After quelling independence, the Russians were obliged to maintain a costly military presence in the neighboring state, draining Russia's treasury without enhancing Russia's security. As George Kennan wrote, "... the Czars' regime actually perished of indigestion (from) the Western minorities in Europe which it had been foolish enough to bite off."¹

The same pattern was repeated under communist rule. Stalin recovered all the tsarist territory that had been lost at the end of the First World War, and added what came to be known as the satellite orbit in Eastern Europe, occupied by the Red Army and controlled by Soviet-style governments imposed from Moscow. Imperial rule, which was complicated enough under the tsars, grew even more problematic under the communists, who compounded their subject populations' hatred of foreign rule by imposing an untenable economic system.

Soviet-style central planning proved intolerable in the long run, even in the Soviet Union; in the satellite orbit, it was disastrous from the start. Before the Second World War, Czechoslovakia's standard of living had been comparable to that of Switzerland. Afterward, it was reduced to the gray and monotonous pattern which characterized the entire communist sphere. Poland had an industrial base as large as Italy's and greater resources, but was sentenced to subsist at the Eastern European level of institutionalized poverty. East Germans saw the communist system as the sole obstacle to sharing in the economic well-being of the Federal Republic. The population of every country in Eastern Europe was convinced that it was sacrificing its own well-being for the sake of communist ideology and Soviet hegemony.

Whereas in the Soviet Union communism could present itself as an indigenous phenomenon, in Eastern Europe there could be no question that it had been imposed under duress and that ancient national traditions were being suffocated. Even with full control over the police, the mass media, and the educational system, the communists in the satellite states

were—and felt themselves to be—a beleaguered minority. Lenin had written that it would be folly for the Bolsheviks to follow the policies of Tsar Nicholas II by imposing their ways on their neighbors. But by the time of Stalin's death, the main distinction between communist rule and that of the autocratic tsar was that Stalin had in fact been far more brutal and heavy-handed. Ultimately, Soviet policy came up against the same problem that had confounded Russia earlier in its history: Eastern Europe, communized to enhance the security of the Soviet state, consumed resources and high-level attention to the point of becoming more of a burden than a strategic prize.

Stalin believed that the Eastern European satellites could only be held in place by total and intrusive control from Moscow. In 1948, Tito, the only communist ruler in Eastern Europe who had come to power largely by his own efforts, let it be known that Belgrade would pursue its own course independent of directives from Moscow. Stalin retaliated by expelling Yugoslavia from the Cominform. Belying Stalin's expectation that he would collapse quickly, Tito survived, with the aid of the Western democracies, which temporarily suspended their ideological objections to old-fashioned balance-of-power considerations.

Stalin reacted to Tito's show of independence by resorting to his tried-and-true method for restoring discipline—show trials throughout the satellite orbit, leading to the juridical murder of anybody capable of independent thought. As in the Moscow purges of the previous decade, few—if any—of the victims of this latest terror had engaged in opposition. They were, after all, lifelong communists who had served as the instruments of Soviet-imposed communist rule: Rudolf Slansky in Czechoslovakia, Laszlo Rajk in Hungary, Traicho Kostov in Bulgaria, and Wladyslaw Gomulka in Poland (the only one who survived). The purge of these men, all of whom their publics had regarded as tools of Moscow, brought home the moral bankruptcy of the communist system even to those few who still believed in its pronouncements.

Too insecure to pursue the tyrant's brand of repression, Stalin's successors were also too divided to permit heterodoxy within the Soviet bloc. They were caught up in two contradictory fears: that repression in Eastern Europe would thwart the much-needed relaxation of tensions with the West, and that liberalization in the satellite orbit might lead to the collapse of the whole communist edifice. (Fear of Western reaction had not, however, kept them from sending tanks to put down an East German uprising in June of 1953.) By 1955, they had decided to live with Eastern European nationalism as long as a country's leadership remained safely communist, and they chose reconciliation with Tito as the appropriate symbol of their

new approach. In May 1955, Khrushchev and Bulganin visited Belgrade to patch things up. However, as was to be the case with every subsequent attempt at reform, the effort to liberalize served to open the floodgates.

After Khrushchev's speech to the Twentieth Party Congress in February 1956 detailing Stalin's crimes, communism was discredited even further. The exception was Yugoslavia, where it had grafted itself onto a nationalistic cause. It soon transpired that Stalin had correctly understood the Titoist threat to the Soviet Union. For the leaders of the satellite countries faced the paradox that, in order to achieve any kind of public approval, they needed to acquire some nationalistic credentials. They had to present themselves as Polish, Czech, or Hungarian communists rather than as puppets of the Kremlin. In the wake of Khrushchev's visit to Belgrade, the Kremlin's control over the satellite regimes of Eastern Europe came under increasing stress.

Throughout these events, the United States maintained an essentially passive attitude. A central premise of containment had been to leave the liberation of Eastern Europe to the erosion of time and not to challenge Soviet control frontally. During the 1952 presidential campaign, John Foster Dulles attacked this policy as being too passive in an article in *Life* magazine entitled "A Policy of Boldness." Dulles argued that the nations of Eastern Europe—for which he coined the term "captive nations"—were close to despair, "because the United States, the historic leader of the forces of freedom, seems dedicated to the negative policy of 'containment' and 'stalemate.'" He urged the United States to make "it publicly known that it wants and expects liberation to occur."²

Yet what did "liberation" mean operationally? Dulles was too serious a student of Soviet affairs to respond brutally to doubt that the Soviet Union would suppress any upheaval. After all, Stalin was still alive when Dulles wrote his article. Dulles therefore explicitly rejected the encouragement of "a series of bloody uprisings and reprisals." What he had in mind, Dulles said, was "peaceful separation from Moscow" on the Tito model, helped along by American propaganda and other nonmilitary measures.

Whereas Acheson had supported Tito after his break with Moscow based on *Realpolitik*, Dulles imbued essentially the same policy with a touch of universal idealism by calling it "liberation." In practice, Dulles' liberation theory was an attempt to increase the cost to Moscow of consolidating its conquests without increasing the risks for the United States. Dulles was encouraging Titoism, not democracy, and the difference between his ideas and those of Acheson turned out to be an oratorical nuance.

To be sure, Dulles' critics ascribed to him views on freeing Eastern

Europe which he had not actually expressed. But it was also the case that he refrained from correcting them. Dulles had been a principal patron of institutions such as Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty, the major purpose of which was to keep the principles of freedom alive in Eastern Europe while encouraging sentiments capable of igniting revolt. There was nothing subtle about Radio Free Europe's approach. On the theory that its pronouncements were not official, it advocated "liberation" in the most literal and militant sense of the word. Unfortunately, the distinction between the "private" and "official" musings of government-financed American institutions proved too elusive for East European freedom fighters to comprehend.

It thus happened that, at almost precisely the same moment that the Western democracies were preoccupied with Suez, the Soviet Union found itself in severe straits in two of its key satellites, Poland and Hungary.

Poland was the first to ignite. In June, riots in the industrial city of Poznan were bloodily suppressed and resulted in dozens of deaths and hundreds more wounded. In October, those leaders on the Polish Communist Party's Central Committee who had survived Stalin's purges of the previous years decided to ally themselves with the cause of Polish nationalism. Gomulka, purged and disgraced in 1951, was asked to return as First Secretary of the Communist Party, attending his first Politburo meeting on October 13, 1956. Soviet Marshal Konstantin Rokossovsky, who had been installed as Defense Minister and had been imposed as a member of the Polish Politburo since 1949, was dismissed, ending one of the most humiliating symbols of Soviet tutelage. The Polish Communist Party issued a proclamation that Poland would henceforth pursue a "national road to socialism," a statement which, given Poland's passionate nationalist feelings and indifference to socialism, could hardly have sounded reassuring to Moscow.

For a moment, the Kremlin toyed with the idea of military intervention. Soviet tanks began to move toward the principal cities when, on October 19, Khrushchev, accompanied by his Politburo colleagues Kaganovich, Mikoyan, and Molotov, descended on Warsaw.

The Polish leaders did not blink. They informed the Soviet General Secretary that his visit was not being treated as a party-to-party meeting and that he would therefore not be received at the Communist Party Central Committee headquarters. Instead, the Soviet delegation was asked to repair to the Belvedere Palace, which was reserved for state guests.

At the last moment, Khrushchev recoiled. On October 20, Soviet troops were ordered to withdraw to their bases. On October 22, Khrushchev

endorsed Gomulka's installation as General Secretary of the Communist Party in exchange for the promise that the new leaders would preserve the socialist system and maintain Poland's membership in the Warsaw Pact. Formally, the Soviet defense system had remained intact. Nevertheless, the reliability of the Polish troops in any war with the West could no longer be considered unqualified, to put it charitably.

The Soviet Union backed down and permitted national communism to carry the day in Poland, in part because repression would have meant coping with a population of over 30 million whose proven courage and willingness to resist foreigners was magnified by memories of historic Russian oppression and Soviet atrocities. But most important, at the same moment the Kremlin was being tested even more severely in Hungary.

A country of 9 million people, Hungary had undergone the same cycle of Soviet oppression as its neighbors. Since the 1940s, it had been governed by the ruthless Mátyás Rákosi, an orthodox Stalinist. In the 1930s Stalin had actually ransomed him from a Budapest prison in return for Hungarian flags captured by the tsar's army in 1849. Many Hungarians would have reason to regret that bargain when Rákosi returned with the Red Army and set up a system of repression that was considered severe even by Stalinist standards.

Shortly after the Berlin uprising of 1953, Rákosi's time finally ran out. Summoned to Moscow, he was told by Beria in the inimitably brutal Stalinist fashion that, although Hungary had been ruled by diverse nationalities, it had never had a Jewish king, and the Soviet leadership was not about to allow one now.³ Rákosi was replaced by Imre Nagy, who had the reputation of being a reform communist and, as it happened, was a Jew as well—though he applied less tyrannical methods. Two years later, after the overthrow of Georgi Malenkov in Moscow, Nagy was dismissed and Rákosi returned as Prime Minister. Once again, strict communist orthodoxy was imposed. Artists and intellectuals were repressed, and Nagy was expelled from the Communist Party.

Stalin's successors lacked his deadly single-mindedness, however. Not only was Nagy permitted to survive, he published a treatise challenging the Soviet Union's right to intervene in the domestic affairs of fellow communist states. Meanwhile, Rákosi, now in his second tour of power, proved to be no more responsive to the aspirations of his people than he had been during his first. After Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin at the Twentieth Party Congress, Rákosi was again replaced, this time by his close associate Erno Gero.

Though Gero proclaimed himself a nationalist, he was so closely identified with Rákosi that he was unable to stem the patriotic tide sweeping

the country. On October 23, the day after Gomulka's formal return to power in Poland, public outrage boiled over in Budapest. Students distributed a list of demands that went considerably beyond the reforms that had been achieved in Poland; these included freedom of speech, a trial for Rákosi and his associates, the departure of Soviet troops, and Nagy's return to office. When Nagy appeared before a huge throng in Parliament Square, he was still a reform communist and his program consisted of introducing some democratic procedures into the communist system. He asked the disappointed crowd to have confidence that the Communist Party would implement the reforms needed.

But it was too late to ask the Hungarian people to entrust the hated Communist Party with rectifying its own transgressions. What happened next was straight out of a movie in which the main character is induced, reluctantly and perhaps even uncomprehendingly, to undertake a mission he did not choose that then turns into his destiny. A staunch, if reformist, communist his entire life, Nagy seemed determined in his initial appearances during the uprising to salvage the Communist Party, much as Gomulka had done in Poland. But as the days passed, he was transformed by the passions of his people into a living symbol of the truth laid down by de Tocqueville a century earlier:

... experience suggests that the most dangerous moment for an evil government is usually when it begins to reform itself. Only great ingenuity can save a prince who undertakes to give relief to his subjects after long oppression. The sufferings that are endured patiently, as being inevitable, become intolerable the moment it appears that there might be an escape. Reform then only serves to reveal more clearly what still remains oppressive and now all the more unbearable.⁴

Nagy was to pay with his life for the vision of democracy that overtook him so belatedly. After the Soviets crushed the revolution, they offered Nagy the opportunity to recant. His refusal and subsequent execution assured him a place in the pantheon of those martyred to the cause of freedom in Eastern Europe.

On October 24, public demonstrations turned into a full-blown revolution. Soviet tanks, hastily entering the fray, were set on fire and government buildings were seized. On the same day, Nagy was appointed Prime Minister and two members of the Soviet Politburo, Mikoyan and Suslov, arrived in Hungary to assess the situation. By October 28, the Soviet visitors appeared to have reached a conclusion similar to the one Khrushchev had drawn in Warsaw—to settle for a Titoist Hungary. Soviet tanks

began to withdraw from Budapest. But even that move could not calm matters as it had in Poland. The demonstrators were now demanding nothing less than the establishment of a multiparty system, the departure of Soviet troops from all of Hungary, and withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact.

As these events unfolded, American policy remained ostentatiously circumspect. Despite all its talk of "liberation," Washington had clearly not anticipated so elemental an outburst. It seemed torn between a desire to help the process along as much as possible and its fear that too forward a policy would give the Soviets a pretext for intervention. Above all, Washington demonstrated that it is rarely able to handle two major crises simultaneously. While Hungarian students and workers battled Soviet tanks in the streets, Washington stood silent. Moscow was never warned that the threat or the use of force would jeopardize its relations with Washington.

The United States did appeal to the Security Council on October 27, in light of "the situation created by the action of foreign military forces in Hungary."⁵ But it was dealt with in so desultory a fashion that a vote on the resulting Security Council resolution did not come until November 4, after the Soviet intervention had already occurred.

The interval was filled by Radio Free Europe, which took it upon itself to interpret American attitudes, urging Hungarians to step up the pace of their revolution and to reject any compromise. For example, on October 29, Radio Free Europe greeted Imre Nagy's installation as the new Prime Minister with this hostile broadcast:

Imre Nagy and his supporters want to revise and modernize the Trojan Horse episode. They need a cease-fire so that the present government in power in Budapest can maintain its position as long as possible. Those who are fighting for liberty must not lose sight even for a minute of the plans of the government opposing them.⁶

When, on October 30, Nagy abolished the one-party system and appointed a coalition government composed of representatives of all the democratic parties that had participated in the last free elections, in 1946, Radio Free Europe remained unconvinced:

The Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of the Interior are still in Communist hands. Do not let this continue, Freedom Fighters. Do not hang your weapons on the wall.⁷

Although Radio Free Europe was funded by the American government, it was run by an independent board and by administrators who did not

receive official instructions from the administration. However, it was too much to expect Hungary's freedom fighters to understand the distinction between the United States government and the pronouncements of a radio station which had been expressly created as a vehicle for promulgating the "liberation" policy which the Secretary of State had claimed to be his own invention.

On the few occasions the Eisenhower Administration did speak out, it seemed above all eager to reassure the Soviets. Unintentionally, its pronouncements proved nearly as inflammatory as the Radio Free Europe broadcasts. On October 27, as Soviet troops seemed to be pulling out of the Hungarian capital, Dulles delivered a speech in Dallas which made it seem as if the United States was hoping to lure Hungary out of the Soviet orbit without Moscow's noticing it. Any Eastern European country that broke with Moscow, said Dulles, could count on American aid. Nor would this aid be conditioned "upon the adoption by these countries of any particular form of society." In other words, to be eligible for American aid, an Eastern European country did not need to become democratic; it was enough for it to pursue the Titoist model, and to leave the Warsaw Pact. In an archetypal American statement, Dulles coupled this comment with an assertion of selflessness. According to its Secretary of State, the United States had "no ulterior purpose in desiring the independence of the satellite countries," nor did it look upon them as "potential military allies."⁸

Far from proving reassuring, that staple of American diplomatic rhetoric—the claim to an absence of any ulterior motive—has usually been interpreted as a sign of either unpredictability or arbitrariness, even among non-Marxist leaders. At any rate, at that point Moscow was far more anxious about American actions than about American motives. Eight years earlier, Moscow had vetoed Eastern European participation in the Marshall Plan because it had perceived American economic aid as a form of capitalist ensnarement. Dulles' offer of economic aid to defectors from the Warsaw Pact was bound to confirm that specter. The potential political earthquake was rendered all the more credible by Dulles' flamboyant implication that Hungary's reversal of its military alliances was being prevented, above all, by American self-restraint.

Paralleling Dulles' course of incendiary reassurance to the Soviets, Eisenhower delivered a speech on October 31 which was particularly notable for its omission of so much as a hint that the Soviet Union would incur penalties if it resorted to repression. Eisenhower was probably persuaded to adopt a conciliatory tone because, the day before, the Soviet Union had promulgated seemingly forthcoming, if ambiguous, criteria

for the stationing of Soviet troops in Eastern Europe. At the same time, Eisenhower must have been aware of the massive movement of Soviet reinforcements into the rest of Hungary, which had begun simultaneously. Eisenhower's restraint toward the Soviet Union was all the more remarkable when compared to his castigation of Great Britain and France regarding Suez in the same broadcast.

With respect to Hungary, Eisenhower emphasized that, although the United States hoped for an end to Soviet domination of Eastern Europe, "we could not, *of course*, carry out this policy by resort to force."⁹ For such a course would be "contrary both to the best interests of the Eastern European peoples and to the abiding principles of the United Nations,"¹⁰ a truth which had clearly eluded both Radio Free Europe and the freedom fighters, who were at that moment pleading for American help. Meanwhile, Eisenhower continued, he had endeavored "to remove any false fears that we would look upon new governments in these Eastern European countries as potential military allies. We have no such ulterior purpose. We see these peoples as friends, and we wish simply that they be friends who are free."¹¹

America's disavowal of ulterior motives sounded no more persuasive to the Kremlin coming from the President than it had been from the lips of his Secretary of State. The Soviets, who conducted foreign policy according to a mixture of Marxist ideology and Russian national interests, simply could not understand the American disavowal of having any selfish motives. But the renunciation of force was something the Politburo could comprehend, for this would eliminate its greatest fear should it decide to settle scores in Eastern Europe, as it was obviously preparing to do.

The irony of the Eisenhower Administration's two formal statements in the midst of the Hungarian Revolution was that both should have been so unintentionally provocative. The reassurance that America sought no allies in Eastern Europe disquieted the leaders in the Kremlin because it sounded as if Eastern Europe were acquiring the option to reverse alliances; America's renunciation of force inflamed the crisis by easing Soviet apprehensions about the American reaction if the Red Army crushed the uprising.

In the meantime, matters in Budapest had spun out of the control of even the reformist political leadership. On October 30, revolutionaries seized the Budapest office of the Communist Party and massacred its occupants, including, oddly enough, one of Nagy's closest associates. That afternoon, Nagy announced the formation of a new government on the basis existing in 1945, during the regime of the democratic parties' coalition. The end of communist one-party rule was symbolized by the pres-

ence in the Cabinet of Béla Kovacz as a representative of the bourgeois Small Holders' Party. A few years earlier, Kovacz had been indicted for treason. In addition, Cardinal Mindszenty, long a symbol of opposition to communism, was released from prison and spoke before enthusiastic crowds. Demanding the withdrawal of Soviet troops from all of Hungary, Nagy began negotiations with the two Politburo emissaries, Mikoyan and Suslov, to that effect. A host of political parties opened offices and began to publish newspapers or pamphlets.

After giving Nagy the impression that his proposal was negotiable, Mikoyan and Suslov left for Moscow, ostensibly to prepare for the next round of talks. That same evening of October 31, both *Pravda* and *Izvestia* published an official Kremlin statement, promulgated the day before, that the stationing of foreign troops in a fellow communist country required the approval of the host country and of the entire Warsaw Pact:

... stationing the troops of one or another state which is a member of the Warsaw Treaty on the territory of another state which is a member of the treaty is done by agreement among all its members and only with the consent of the state on the territory of which and at the request of which these troops are stationed or it is planned to station them.¹²

On the basis of these words, Eisenhower included a highly optimistic interpretation of the Soviet Government declaration in his October 31 broadcast, noted above: "... if the Soviet Union indeed faithfully acts upon its announced intention, the world will witness the greatest forward stride toward justice, trust and understanding among nations in our generation."¹³

As forthcoming as the Soviet statement sounded on the question of general principle, Washington had ignored two crucial caveats: first, the implication that the withdrawal of troops required the same procedure as their stationing, which gave the Soviet Union a veto; second, the paragraphs specifically addressed to Hungary with the ominous warning that the Soviet Union would not "permit" what it defined as Hungary's "socialist achievements" to be abandoned, and would defend them together with the other socialist countries if necessary:

To guard the socialist achievements of people's-democratic Hungary is the chief and sacred duty of the workers, peasants, intelligentsia, of all the Hungarian working people at the present moment.

The Soviet government expresses confidence that the peoples of the socialist countries will not permit foreign and domestic reactionary

forces to shake the foundations of the people's democratic system. . . . [T]hey will strengthen the fraternal unity and mutual aid of the socialist countries to buttress the great cause of peace and socialism.¹⁴

What the statement referred to as the "people's democratic Hungary" had ceased to call itself that and was, in fact, no longer in a position to preserve either itself or its so-called socialist achievements. Nagy, a life-long member of the communist cadre, could not have failed to understand the import of the Soviet warnings, or of the changes he was himself fostering. Yet, by this time, Nagy, caught between the fury of his people and the implacability of his communist allies, was riding a tide he could neither control nor direct. Unlike the Polish people, the Hungarians were demanding not the liberalization of the communist regime but its very destruction; not equality with the Soviet Union, but a total break from it.

On November 1, having already created what was in effect a coalition government, Nagy took the final, irrevocable step of declaring Hungary's neutrality and its withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact. This too went far beyond anything Gomulka had attempted in Poland. In a dignified statement that was to serve as his death sentence, Nagy announced on Hungarian radio:

The Hungarian national Government, imbued with profound responsibility toward the Hungarian people and history, and giving expression to the undivided will of the Hungarian millions, declares the neutrality of the Hungarian People's Republic.

The Hungarian people, on the basis of independence and equality and in accordance with the spirit of the U.N. Charter, wishes to live in true friendship with its neighbors, the Soviet Union, and all the peoples of the world. The Hungarian people desires the consolidation and further development of the achievements of its national revolution without joining any power blocs.¹⁵

At the same time, Nagy asked the United Nations to recognize Hungarian neutrality. He never received a reply.

The pathos of Nagy's appeal was matched by the indifference with which the so-called world community received it. Neither the United States nor its European allies took steps to induce the United Nations to deal with Nagy's message on an urgent basis. And the Soviets were beyond appeals to moderation. On the morning of November 4, the Soviet forces which had been pouring into Hungary for days struck without warning and savagely suppressed the Hungarian Revolution. János Kádár,

a former victim of Stalin's purges whom Nagy had elevated to General Secretary of the Communist Party and who had mysteriously disappeared a few days earlier, returned with the Soviet troops to establish a new communist government. Pal Maleter, the Commander of the Hungarian army, was arrested while negotiating Soviet troop withdrawals with the Commander of Soviet forces in Hungary. Nagy, who had taken refuge in the Yugoslav embassy, accepted a promise of safe passage to Yugoslavia but was arrested when he left the building. Cardinal Mindszenty took refuge in the American legation, where he was to remain until 1971. Nagy and Maleter were later executed. Stalin's spirit remained alive and well in the Kremlin.

Not until November 4 did the United Nations, which, throughout this entire critical period of Soviet troop buildup, had been exclusively occupied with denouncing Great Britain and France over Suez, finally turn to what was by then the Hungarian tragedy. A Security Council resolution asking the Soviet Union to withdraw was quickly vetoed by the Soviet Ambassador. A special session of the General Assembly voted on a similar resolution affirming Hungary's right to independence and demanding the dispatch of United Nations observers to Hungary. It was the second resolution of that fateful day, the General Assembly having meanwhile created a United Nations emergency force for the Middle East. The Middle East resolution passed unanimously, with even Great Britain and France joining the consensus. The Hungarian resolution passed by a vote of fifty to eight with fifteen abstentions. The Soviet bloc voted against it, while such leaders of the Nonaligned group as India and Yugoslavia abstained, as did every Arab country. The Middle East resolution was implemented; the Hungarian resolution was ignored.

In the aftermath of the brutally suppressed Hungarian uprising, the question arose whether a more forceful and imaginative Western diplomacy might have forestalled or eased the tragedy. Clearly, Soviet troops in Hungary had been massively reinforced over a period of many days. Was it within the power of the democracies to have kept them from striking? The American government had itself first raised the banner of liberation. Its propaganda via Radio Free Europe had produced a surge of hope exceeding even what Dulles had predicted in his 1952 *Life* article. When Hungary exploded, the American legation in Budapest must have conveyed to the State Department what every journalist knew: that the political structure of communist Hungary was dissolving. With the remarkable array of Kremlinologists such as Charles Bohlen, Llewellyn Thompson, Foy Kohler, and George Kennan available for advice, it is hard to believe that the State Department did not at least consider the possibil-

ity of Soviet military intervention. In any event, the Eisenhower Administration made no effort to raise the cost of Soviet intervention.

During the upheaval in Hungary, America fell far short of its rhetoric. The unwillingness to risk war to overturn communist control of Eastern Europe had been explicit American policy for a decade. But Washington's failure to explore seriously any option short of war in order to affect events opened up a huge gap between what Washington had proclaimed and what it was actually prepared to support. The United States never explained the limits of American support to the fledgling, inexperienced Hungarian government. Nor did it, through the many channels available to it, ever advise the Hungarians about how to consolidate their gains before taking further, irrevocable, steps. In its communications with the Soviet leadership, the United States relied largely on public statements which ended up creating incentives that were quite the opposite of what the Eisenhower Administration had intended.

A firmer, clearer American stance would have been essential to render the Soviet decision to intervene less calculable, or at least not quite so seemingly devoid of consequence. The Kremlin could have been warned that repression in Hungary would involve major political and economic costs, and put a freeze on East-West relations for the foreseeable future. The American and United Nations stance on Hungary could have been made more consistent with the reaction to Suez. Instead, America and its allies acted as if they were bystanders, with no direct stake in the outcome.

The democracies were in no position to go to war over Hungary, but they could have raised the specter of the political and economic costs of Soviet repression. As it was, the Kremlin paid next to no price for its actions, not even economically. A little over two years after the Hungarian tragedy, and despite a Soviet ultimatum over Berlin, British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan visited Moscow in what was the first visit there by a prime minister since the war; within three years, Eisenhower and Khrushchev were celebrating the spirit of Camp David.

Suez provided an occasion for the Arab nations, as well as for such leaders of the Nonaligned as India and Yugoslavia, to assail Great Britain and France. Yet, when it came to Hungary, this same group of nations refused to criticize Soviet actions, much less to condemn them in the United Nations. Some relationship between United Nations votes on Hungary and Suez would have been desirable. At the least, American measures against Great Britain and France should have been geared to reciprocal attitudes by the Nonaligned nations toward Soviet actions in Hungary. As it turned out, the Soviet Union's acts in Hungary cost it no

influence among the Nonaligned, while the United States garnered no additional influence among that group as a result of its stand over Suez.

In the 1950s, the so-called Nonaligned group represented a novel approach to international relations. Neutral nations had, of course, always existed, but their distinguishing feature had been a passive foreign policy. By contrast, the Nonaligned of the Cold War period did not perceive their neutrality to require noninvolvement. They were active, occasionally shrill, players promoting agendas established in forums designed to pool their strengths and enhance their influence, in effect forming an alliance of the Nonaligned. Though they were highly vocal in their complaints about international tensions, they knew how to profit from them. They learned how to play the superpowers off against each other. And since they feared the Soviet Union more than they did the United States, they generally sided with the communists without feeling any reciprocal need to apply the same moral stringency to the Soviet Union as they did toward the United States.

On November 16, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru presented to the Indian Parliament his own turgid rationale for why India had refused to approve the United Nations resolution condemning Soviet acts in Hungary.¹⁶ The facts, he said, were "obscure"; the resolution was improperly worded; and the call for free elections supervised by the United Nations was a violation of Hungary's national sovereignty.

The facts had been anything but obscure, and India's reaction was entirely in keeping with the practices of *Realpolitik*. Quite simply, India did not want to give up Soviet support in international forums; it saw no point in incurring Soviet wrath and sacrificing potential arms supplies over some distant European country when China and Pakistan stood on its own borders, and the Soviet Union itself was not so very distant.

India did not conceive of foreign policy as a debate in the Oxford Union, however its diplomats might pretend that they were in the discriminating audience with the right to choose a winner purely on the basis of moral merit. India's leaders had attended schools in England and had read American classics. They combined the rhetoric of Wilson and Gladstone with the practices of Disraeli and Theodore Roosevelt. From the Indians' point of view, this made eminent sense as long as their interlocutors did not delude themselves into thinking that Indian rhetoric was a guide to Indian practice, or that Indian foreign policy was governed by abstract, superior morality.

On December 18, six weeks after the Hungarian tragedy, Dulles explained the reasoning behind America's response to the uprising at a

press conference. Amazingly, he was still trying to reassure the Soviet Union of America's peaceful intentions:

... we have no desire to surround the Soviet Union with a band of hostile states and to revive what used to be called the *cordón sanitaire*, which was developed largely by the French after the First World War with a view to circling the Soviet Union with hostile forces. We have made clear our policy in that respect in the hope of facilitating in that way an evolution—a peaceful evolution—of the satellite states toward genuine independence.¹⁷

It was an astonishing statement. What, after all, was containment if not an attempt to surround the Soviet Union with forces capable of resisting its expansionism? Equally remarkable was Dulles' apologetic tone so soon after a demonstration of Soviet ruthlessness in Hungary and a simultaneous display of saber-rattling in the Middle East. At a press conference in Australia on March 13, 1957, Dulles bluntly summed up the American attitude. A lawyer at heart, he rested his case on the absence of any legal obligation:

... there was no basis for our giving military aid to Hungary. We had no commitment to do so, and we did not think that to do so would either assist the people of Hungary or the people of Europe or the rest of the world.¹⁸

Dulles continued missing the point. The issue was not a legal one; not whether America had fulfilled its commitments but whether it had lived up to the implications of its pronouncements.

Having proclaimed a universal mission, it was inevitable that America would encounter gaps between its principles and its national interest. The confluence of Suez and Hungary was one such occasion. America's great dream had always been a foreign policy which carries all before it by the compelling and universal nature of its maxims. Yet for a decade, American policymakers had been frustrated by the ambiguities of world leadership—by the concessions to imperfect causes that are grist for the mill of day-to-day diplomacy, and by the attention that must be paid to the views of allies with very different historical perspectives. Suez had seemed to provide an occasion for remedying this defect and for bringing policy into correspondence with principle. The very pain associated with the act of turning on its closest allies had the effect of penance in that it served to reconsecrate America's moral purity.

Hungary was a more complex case, for it would have required the application of power in some form. Yet America's leaders were not willing to risk American lives for a cause which, however offensive to their consciences, involved no direct American security interest. Principle permits no ambiguity and no gradations. In Suez, America could insist on the pure application of its maxims because the consequences involved no immediate risk. In Hungary, it acquiesced to *Realpolitik*, just as other nations do, because insistence on principle would have carried with it the unavoidable risk of war, perhaps even nuclear war. And when lives are at stake, the statesman owes it both to his people and to himself to explain the relationship between the risks and the interests, however broadly and generously these may be defined. The Soviet Union was clearly prepared to run bigger risks to preserve its position in Eastern Europe than the United States was willing to brave in order to liberate Hungary. Nothing could get around this equation. In terms of its rhetoric prior to the uprising, America's policy on Hungary was weak indeed; in terms of its interests, the refusal to run the risk of war was both inevitable and fitting—though it does not explain the reluctance to raise the cost of Soviet intervention by nonmilitary means.

The juxtaposition of Hungary and Suez established the coordinates of the next phase of the Cold War. The Soviet Union had managed to preserve its position in Eastern Europe; the democracies—including the United States—had suffered a relative decline in their position in the Middle East. The Soviet Union had found a way to bypass containment. The day after its troops had ravaged Budapest, and while the fighting was still going on, Khrushchev was threatening rocket attacks on Western Europe and inviting the United States to undertake joint military action in the Middle East against its closest allies. The United States had left Hungary adrift in the sea of historical evolution, and American allies with a sense of their impotence.

What was not clear at the time was the inherent weakness of the Soviet Union. Ironically, the communist proponents of the relationship of forces had launched themselves on an enterprise they would prove incapable of sustaining. The communist leaders might declaim about objective factors to their hearts' content, but the fact remained that the only revolutions taking place in developed countries were occurring inside the communist sphere. In the long run, the Soviet Union would have been safer and economically stronger if it had surrounded itself with Finnish-style governments in Eastern Europe because it would not have needed to assume responsibility for the internal stability and economic progress of those countries. Instead, imperialism in Eastern Europe drained Soviet

resources and frightened the Western democracies, without enhancing Soviet strength. Communism could never translate its control of government and media into public acceptance. If the communist leaders of Eastern Europe did not want to sit entirely on Soviet bayonets, they were obliged to adapt to the programs of their nationalist opponents. Thus, after an initial period of bloody terror, Kádár gradually moved toward the goals charted by Nagy, though he stopped short of withdrawing from the Warsaw Pact. A generation later, latent Soviet weakness would cast the Hungarian uprising as a harbinger of the ultimate bankruptcy of the communist system. Despite all that had happened, within ten years Hungary was to be internally freer than Poland and its foreign policy more independent of the Soviet Union. And thirty-five years later, in the next phase of Moscow's attempt at liberalization, the Soviets would entirely lose control over events.

The outcome of 1956 contributed to another generation of suffering and oppression. However short the interval before the final collapse may seem to historians, it cannot begin to measure the anguish which the totalitarian nature of the system imposed on its countless victims. In the immediate aftermath, Moscow—misreading the balance of forces as much as the capitalists had—found every reason to be satisfied. Interpreting the year's events as a tilt in the balance of forces in its favor, the Politburo embarked on its gravest challenge yet of the Cold War—the ultimatums over Berlin.