

**Foes Who Grew Better With Time:
The Image of János Kádár and Urho Kekkonen in the
West from 1956 to the End of the 1960s**

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1 Two Statesmen as Symbols and Images

First of all, it must be noted, that this is not a study of János Kádár and Urho Kekkonen as such; no attempt will be made to clarify what kind of politicians they were and what kind of policy they actually pursued. That issue is still very controversial in their respective countries and the sources available for this study do not offer a possibility to answer those questions. Rather, the purpose is to clarify the *image* they had in the West – the “West” meaning in this case the United States and Britain.

This also implies that the conclusions of this research are not judgements on Kekkonen or Kádár as such, but on the Western superpowers. Western opinions and views on these persons are the object. Kekkonen and Kádár are rather spectres and mirrors through which Western policy is illuminated as the actual object of this study. The often very critical assessments on Kekkonen and Kádár are not taken as any value as such – the truth or falseness of those assessments are not as interesting as the attitudes which can be seen lurking behind them. The similarity between reality and the image is of minor importance, because it was the image, not the actual reality, which determined the Western political line towards Finland and Hungary. In this sense the image *was* reality to the West, even if it was –

as it often was – actually erroneous or at least one-sided. This image was based on the information available to the West – not on archives nor on the benefit of hindsight.

Kekkonen and Kádár are in fact quite good ‘tools’ for just this kind of research. Neither Finland nor Hungary was an issue which would have been crucial to Western interests, and both were geographically and also in many cases mentally distant. Prejudices and expectations often prevailed, so the statements reveal the mental climate. It could also be asked whether Kádár and Kekkonen also became kind of scapegoats in the Western psychology – especially Kádár for the tragedy and failure of the 1956 uprising, but also Kekkonen in ‘wasting’ the Paasikivi heritage and letting the Soviets interfere also in Finnish internal affairs.

However, one cannot talk about a real ‘enemy image’ or a method with which the bloc of one’s own is made more solid by ‘creating enemies’. Both Kekkonen and Kádár were, after all, too insignificant for this from the American or British viewpoint. One can say that there were expectations for both Kádár and Kekkonen, and their images differed in various periods, depending on how these expectations were fulfilled. Did the two statesmen live up to the expectation that they would at least try to keep the Soviet influence as minimal as possible with all the means at their disposal? Or did they let the bear in?

The period in question extends from 1956 to the end of the 1960s. Both Kádár and Kekkonen rose to power in 1956 – the former after the Hungarian uprising was crushed, the latter less dramatically in a presidential election. Both had also previously been members of the prominent political élite in their respective countries. The late 1960s is a suitable period to conclude the study because it marks an end of the consolidation era: both Kádár and Kekkonen were still in power, seemed very likely to remain in power for a long time and in fact did, and the Cold War had reached a new stage in which there was a real possibility that these former foes might perhaps be seen in a new role, as moderate stabilisers. This was even more so because the invasion of Czechoslovakia marked a much more dangerous fu-

ture. Also the West was not planning its strategy as aggressively and was not as confident of changes to its benefit in the near future as it had been ten years before.

This study can be described as a history of diplomacy and international relations. As such it might represent the very thing which the so-called 'post-modern' philosophy abhors as 'old-fashioned' and 'elitist.' Even though there might be some truth in this, Finland and Hungary in Western policy actually do represent this old-school history of old-school diplomacy – especially during the Cold War years. A 'post-modern' effort to stress contacts of 'civic societies' in these cases and periods would be too trendy in respect of the realities of the situation. However, from the late 1960s there were undoubtedly new possibilities in this area, but these will have to be considered from other standpoints in possible future studies*. The fact is that the nature for the present study is 'traditional' because it would be quite artificial to pretend that any 'post-modern' or other state of affairs would have existed in this kind of case in the 1956-1968 era.

It must also be added that the domestic events in the United States and Britain do not play a big role in the analysis of the motives of these countries. This is due to the fact that the circles which had opinions on Finnish and Hungarian issues were very small; domestic changes influenced only bigger issues, like the Cold War, fear of Russia and Communism, the situation in Germany, the Third World and Imperialism, etc. In fact, it does not seem that the Western policy line was particularly dependent of the fact which party – Democratic or Republican, Conservative or Labour – was in power in the United States or in England. Because Finland and Hungary were not vital to the West, the policy concerning them was usually decided by the desk officers in the State Department and the Foreign Office; these issues seldom required a ministerial decision or comment.

As previously noted, this study ends in the 1960s. It must, of course, be confessed that the available sources as well set the fi-

* Cf. Oikari's article. [Ed. note]

nishing point in the 1960s. The British archives are available only until the turn of the 1960s-70s and the American archives until the early 1970s. Because it has not been possible to check the National Archives at College Park for material on American-Hungarian relations for this study, most American material is in Hungary's case taken from the FRUS-Online series (Foreign Relations of the United States) from their web-sites. The material concerning Finland was gone through at College Park in 1997. As far as the British material is concerned, the actual papers on Hungary in Public Record Office, Kew Gardens, have also been used, although not as extensively as in the Finnish case.

Because of all this there might be more quotations from the British sources than their actual influence (compared to the Americans) would have warranted, but at least the material available to this study does not suggest that there would have been any serious divergence between the American and British lines. Not at least in the cases of countries like Hungary and Finland. The general trend seems to have been that the only real difference was that the British were a bit more moderate and cautious – which is of course not very surprising since their resources and influence in world policy were much smaller than the ones of the Americans.

2 Hungary

2.1 Aspect of the Cold War: Traitors to be Ostracized

The factual events of the 1956 uprising and the biographical, personal history of Kádár will not be described here, since it can be assumed these are already known* and since this study has

* In today's Hungary Kádár and his legacy are highly controversial issues. See e.g. Rácz, Árpád (Ed.), *Ki volt Kádár?* Budapest, Rubicon-Aquila, 2001. A balanced view is presented by Földes György in his "Kádár János (1912-1989)". In *Nagy képes Millennium Arcképcsarnok. 100 portré a Magyar Történelemtől. Szerk. Rácz Árpád.* Budapest, Rubicon-Aquila, 1999, 355-361. Cf. Huszár, Tibór, *Kádár János politikai életrajza 1. köt. 1912-1956.* Budapest, Szabad tér – Kossuth, 2001. [Ed note.]

to do with image, not with the actual events. More important is to remember the starting points for the West: Hungary was a country which had been under a very strict Stalinist control and which was in the enemy camp. Even the simultaneous disagreements of crisis such as that over the Suez Canal were not relevant in the case of Hungary, where the West thought it could see the Cold War re-emerge violently from the Soviet side.

After the national uprising was crushed it was thus crystal clear to the West who were the heroes and who were the foes. The Hungarian Communists were considered Moscow's puppets and henchmen, the real aggressor being the Soviet Union. The uprising was seen, as the British Envoy Leslie Fry defined it, as a "revolt of a nation", and it had been directed against Soviet exploitation and Communist oppression.¹

In practice, the new Hungarian leaders, Kádár included, were boycotted after the crushing of the uprising. The United States in particular aimed to deny credentials to the Hungarian UN Delegation because of the atrocities in crushing the uprising. The American view can be seen also from the motivations for a UN solution, which the US Legation made to its British counterpart in Budapest:

- a) It should comprise a series of steps, and not be a 'package' proposal.
- b) The measures proposed should be such that no formal acceptance of them either by the Russians or by the Hungarians was necessary.
- c) It should appeal to the 'uncommitted' nations.
- d) It should consist of measures which could be carried out within the existing Hungarian constitution.
- e) It should, if possible, be able to show some advantage to the Soviet Government.

As such, there was also an aspect of *Realpolitik*; it was perceived that not much could be done and that the Russians would need some face-saving measures. But on the whole the American line was uncompromising. The American Legation suggested that it would also be demanded that Hungary should withdraw such legislation (it is illuminating that the word "legislation" was in parenthesis), which made arbitrary arrests, in-

carcerations, summary trials, etc. possible. The UN should also demand new negotiations about the stationing of Soviet troops in Hungary, more cultural freedom, reducing the pressure of the party in schools, increasing the number of workers' councils and the widening of the government. It was, of course, taken for granted that these conditions would not be met, but as the Soviets would reject them, it would be a propaganda victory for the West.²

The American National Security Council – which drafted the policy lines to be approved by the President – also claimed that the uprising was a moral victory against Communism in the long run. This, of course, was partly an ideologically 'compulsory' interpretation and revealed, in fact, that the West had no means to influence events behind the Iron Curtain. The NSC considered, however, that there were possibilities for evolutionary development of the satellites, and thus they could distance them more and more from old-time Stalinism and the influence of Moscow. The future looked most promising in Yugoslavia and in Gomulka's Poland.

Compared to them, Hungary was totally black.

The present Communist regime in Hungary, in consolidating its physical control of the nation, has followed a policy of terror and intimidation clearly intended to wipe out all resistance. Although the Hungarian people continue to despise this regime, a surface calm prevails and the normal pattern of life under Soviet Communism has resumed...

Because Hungary has become an important psychological factor in the world-wide struggle of the free nations against expansionist Soviet Communism, U.S. policy must maintain a delicate balance; it must seek to encourage the same evolutionary developments as in the other nations of Eastern Europe, without compromising the symbol which Hungary has become. More restraint will be required in dealing directly with regime officials than in certain other nations of the area, and the timing of U.S. moves will be of great importance.³

In 1958-59 the NSC defined Western goals in Soviet-dominated Eastern Europe. The general line was not totally

militant nor black and white in its perceptions. Of course, there would be a continuous refusal to accept the *status quo* of Soviet domination over the nations of Eastern Europe as permanent, and there would be a continuous affirmation of the right of the dominated peoples to national independence and to governments of their own free choosing. However, simultaneously it was assumed that the West had to deal with the present Communist governments, not to expect them to be overthrown in the foreseeable future. Even so, also in this document Hungary was presented in the most negative light⁴:

There has been no progress toward the achievement of U.S. policy objectives in Hungary. In the absence of any favorable change in the Hungarian regime's defiant and uncooperative attitude toward the UN and its efforts to deal with the problems arising from the 1956 revolution, U.S. relations with Hungary remain strained, and the United States has continued successfully its efforts to keep the Hungarian situation before World opinion and under active consideration at the UN.

The British may not have disagreed with the general line, but having far less superpower resources, they could usually recommend no alternative action. Mere propaganda would not help much if nothing concrete would be achieved. As the British Ambassador in Moscow, Sir Patrick Reilly, pointed out to the Foreign Office, the Soviet Union took no heed of international pressure, and if the UN tried to deny the Hungarian credentials in the UN, it would only reveal the impotence of the UN. The only possible way to get any results would be high level talks with the Soviets – for example between the Secretary General of the UN and the Soviet Ambassador in the UN.⁵

It is hardly surprising that Reilly's colleague in Budapest, Leslie Fry, emphasized more the moralistic view, in conjunction with a certain pragmatism:

While I agree that the Russians should logically be our main target, it seems to me to be going too far to say that 'to take action against the Hungarians would be hitting the wrong target'.

There was nothing illogical about hitting the secondary target, "the Hungarian puppets", if you could not hit the main one, "their Russian masters". Neither did Fry take very seriously the threat that Hungary would in return expel the Western Legations from Budapest.⁶ The atrocities which he had witnessed in Budapest clearly made him the most militant representative of the British diplomatic corps.

When Fry wrote to his superiors a critical evaluation of the UN plan of the Americans, he seems to have seen even that as too moderate. According to him, the UN representative or group should not be a negotiator in any normal sense of the word, but "an 'educator' seeking to convince the Russians that concessions should be made to the Hungarian people". Of course, the Russians would not accept proposals put to them; but they might initiate something else, if they would be convinced that world opinion demanded it and that they would not lose thereby.⁷

On the whole, however, the British were more moderate, or at least less convinced of the usefulness of propagandist gestures. This became evident on a small scale when the Inter-Parliamentary Union was summoned in London in 1957 and Hungary planned to send the hard-line communist Sándor Rónai as the Hungarian representative. Fry recommended that Rónai should be denied access, and his further advice on how the Hungarians should be approached was not particularly diplomatic. He recommended that it be expressed:

that, as the Kadar Government was imposed on the Hungarian people by force of Russian arms, a delegation from a 'Parliament' consisting solely of Kadar's stooges can hardly expect to be recognised in this country as representing the people of Hungary and to complain to the Delegation.

This was too much for the desk officers: they admitted that the British could mention oppression and that the British people regarded with horror "the executions, arbitrary arrests, po-

litical prisons and concentration and forced labour camps which are now such prominent features on the Hungarian scene". But it was doubtful whether Fry's suggestion would pay off in any way. In the first place, there would be several other delegations at the Conference of whom much the same thing could be said; and in the second, it was hardly logical simultaneously to tell people that they were mere stooges and then go on to protest to them about what their Government was doing.⁸ The realities of *Realpolitik* were getting more important as time went by.

The British felt also that the Hungarians saw or wanted to see British policy as more moderate than that of the other Western countries. Especially during Prime Minister Harold Macmillan's visit to the Soviet Union in 1959 the Hungarian attitude towards the British approached, according to the British, "even cordiality and I was forced to listen to clumsy exercises in wedge-driving through contrast between British flexibility and American-German intransigence".⁹ Naturally, the British did not want to see their moderation in this light or take the role of a deserter.¹⁰ Even so, their comments on American policy on Hungary were less and less enthusiastic: the standard British line was that, repulsive as the Kádár Government was, the American approach had been proved "sterile" and it was in the interests of the West to do whatever they could to promote contacts with the Hungarian nation and to prevent the traditional links from being broken.¹¹ Whereas the American line emphasized the isolation of Hungary, the British thought the same goals could perhaps be achieved better from within.

The Americans held to their own line. When State Secretary Christian Herter approved in November 1960 that the Legations in Bucharest and Sofia should be raised to the status of Embassies, he specifically stated that this would not apply to Budapest, since "our current relations with Hungary are anomalous and wholly negative".¹²

2.2 Kádár: the Quisling of 1956 – or a Lesser Evil?

Seen from the starting points and policy strategies mentioned previously, it is hardly surprising that the Western view on Kádár's person was extremely suspicious and negative. At best, Kádár was seen as a mediocrity and a victim of circumstances who had had no choice if he wanted to save his own skin. At worst, he was seen as a traitor and a quisling, who had joined the Russians because of personal ambition. What was worst and most ominous – according to this interpretation – was that he had not done this because he had to, but because he had wanted to gain power in Hungary. Even his personal honesty was in doubt, because he had first joined the Nagy regime but then deserted it and seemed to have willingly adopted the role of a Soviet puppet. In this interpretation it was also taken for granted that Kádár had no popular support at all; he was universally considered a traitor. In fact, some of the Western spectators thought the Hungarian people were so disgusted with him that even the Soviets would have liked to replace him by another, less hated figure.¹³

In January 1957, envoy Fry distinguished Kádár from Imre Nagy in these terms:

M. Nagy, his loyalty confronted during the brief days of freedom with a choice between Moscow and Hungary, stood steadfast by his own country. But his partner in power, M. Kádár, had already betrayed her; and the Russians, as reward, set him up as head of a puppet government in the provincial town of Szolnok.¹⁴

A "Personality"-report on Kádár was hardly more merciful:

Never of first-rate ability or great strength of character, Kádár on his emergence from prison [1954] was unable to decide which brand of communism to support. On August 12, 1956, he publicly dissociated himself from the Rákosi-Gerő line, but when in the autumn he entered the short-lived second Nagy Government, although himself a non-Muscovite, he made common cause with the Russians. It is worth noting, however, that after Nagy's Government fell Kádár was called on to form a Cabinet while he was on a visit to the U.S.S.R. and he was thus without any freedom of choice

whatsoever... the workers' councils (banned except in the factories) which, though disembodied, are still influential, treat Kádár with complete contempt. Kádár, in short, is a leader without a following. His past record suggests that he would prefer Communism shorn of its worst excesses, but that, although he owes his life to the Nagy reforms, he would not go further along the path towards 'liberal' Communism.¹⁵

However, the most sinister interpretation of Kádár's motives gave way gradually to a view which at least admitted that Kádár was not the most Stalinist alternative: there were still even worse options among the old Rákosists.¹⁶ But even this might not be a cause to change the opinion, because even in this case Kádár would hardly have space to manoeuvre. As one of the Foreign Office officials put it colourfully:

Thus, while it may still be true that there are moderate and extremist factions within the party, their interests at the moment largely coincide: they must hang together if they are not to hang separately.¹⁷

At any rate there was no hope on the horizon.

But it seems that now, paradoxically and gradually, Kádár had become to represent some sort of "lesser evil", compared to the old Rákosi guard. And if there were to be hope of any improvement or even the end of deterioration and oppression, it would probably be connected in association with his name. A short time later the defeat of the Molotovians in Kremlin was seen as an advancement for Kádár.¹⁸ However, in the Western eyes Kádár's position was still very unstable and there was certainly no respect connected to his name. And the bottom line at the end of 1957 was still that the resistance of the Hungarian people against Communist oppression was strong.¹⁹

2.3 A Gradual Change to the Better

Gradually, however, also the West had to adapt itself to the situation. Besides, even though the Kádár regime was still considered emotionally repulsive, no onlooker could deny that the

situation in Hungary seemed to be normalising – and the economy even prospering. Even the NSC admitted this in 1958:

A certain degree of moderation has been evident in the economic policy of the Hungarian regime. Collectivization of agriculture remains the ultimate goal, but Kadar has asserted that this will be achieved by 'Leninist' persuasion rather than 'Stalinist' coercion. A degree of private enterprise among artisans and small tradesmen has been tolerated though not encouraged, and there has been an effort to keep the market reasonably well supplied with consumer goods. With the aid of extensive grants and loans from the Soviet Union and the other Communist nations, the Hungarian economy has recovered from the effects of the revolution more rapidly than had been anticipated, though grave economic problems remain.²⁰

Although the aspect of economic development was often partially moderated with the expression "according to Eastern European standards", it was still a fact. On one hand, this was a positive development. On the other, it could be also politically worrying: would the Kádár regime thus be able to 'buy' the popular support which the people of Hungary had thus far denied him? At the same time, the belief that the Hungarian people would continuously resist oppressive regime diminished.

Also, Kádár's personal position and standing seemed to change. Even this was a dilemma with at least two aspects. On the one hand, if one took the moralistic view of 1956, it was not mentally comfortable to see how the quisling and demon of 1956 was becoming tolerable. On the other hand, if Kádár gained more personal authority, it was not inconceivable that he would some day be able to stand up against the Soviets, at least on some issues.

The execution of Imre Nagy produced a shocked moral outcry, but even that did not have any permanent effect. The Americans did not, in fact, blame Kádár for the execution in their own secret negotiations. The execution was considered a factor which, if anything, would tend to damage his position. The Head of the CIA, Allen Dulles, expressed his conviction that the signal for the executions had almost certainly come

from Moscow and that they had been intended as warnings first to Tito and thereafter to Gomulka. "He (Dulles) thought it likely that in the sequel Kadar would drop out of the political picture quite soon."²¹

But despite Dulles' comment above, at least the British did not expect Kádár to fall soon, and when Kádár visited the Soviet Union in April 1958, the West considered his position in Hungary safe: the extremists had not gained the upper hand.²²

In late 1959 the British also concluded a new "Personalities"-list in which they analyzed the leading circles of Hungary and even some of the potential opposition forces. It should be added that according to the information of the archive catalogue an even more extensive list also exists, but this is still secret.

The analysis of the list available is, however, very illuminating. Kádár is, of course, the obvious target of interest, but also some other personalities are worth mentioning.

Kádár, János: Immediately after the revolution, Kádár offered many concessions to the workers and the revolutionary councils, including the principle of multi-party free elections and the withdrawal of Soviet troops. At this time he did his best to represent himself as a moderate. But his term of power has been marked by steadily increasing repression in all fields and the elimination of most of the political concessions won by the Revolution. It has been rumoured that, particularly in the summer of 1957, he favoured the introduction of a more moderate line but was overruled. His speeches have been harsh, he accepted without protest the execution of Nagy and his associates in June, 1958, and, whatever his personal views, he appears to be a reliable tool in the hands of his Soviet masters, ready to carry out any excesses which are demanded of him. It is believed that his nerve and will-power have never recovered from his sufferings in prison; but his public appearances present a facade of confidence and determination. The great majority of Hungarians detest him as devoid of every vestige of political and moral integrity.²³

But it is illuminating that this critical tone seemed to be more and more the compulsory mental adherence to the old moralistic values, which, however, would no more be permitted to

stand in the way of a pragmatic policy. It would have been too much to admit to an erroneous analysis, but the very fact that Kádár had remained in power and was likely to be the strong man in the future also made it essential to find also good sides of him. And at the very least his success had to be admitted.

Besides, the other characteristics showed that there was no better option. To take a couple of examples:

Kiss, Károly: Kiss is one of the key figures in the party today and is thought to be in favour of repressive policies. He is the main party organiser and disciplinarian and has been largely responsible for carrying through the reconstruction of the party since the revolution.

Marosán, György: He did not play a prominent role in the revolution of October, but has since repeatedly declared that he voted in favour of calling in Soviet troops at the outset on October 23... Marosán has been one of the Kádár régime's principal spokesmen since its inception, although less has been heard of him in recent months. He has made numerous speeches at party meetings and Workers' Conferences, the majority marked by their harsh uncompromising attitude. His style is extremely coarse and the published versions of his speeches are carefully edited. He has frequently stated that there can be no question of the revival of a separate Social Democrat Party... He is uneducated and regarded as something of a buffoon; but he is dangerous.

Münnich, Ferenc: He is a tough and determined Communist who would have been happy to share responsibility for the excesses of Rákosi but for his personal friendship with Rákosi's victim, Rajk. He is still said to distinguish himself from those members of the leadership who are out and out Rákosists, but he is probably as reactionary and inflexible as they are. His allegiance to the Soviet Union is probably absolute.

It is interesting that the personality of Ernő Gerő is not commented on at all – his career is only cited as an extended curriculum vitae.²⁴

The difference between the British and the American attitude about tactics became clearer and the British were very con-

scious of it. The Head of the Northern Department, R. H. Mason, answered to the Budapest Legation: "I entirely agree with your view that we must try to encourage a more forward policy towards Hungary by the NATO powers as a whole. The American attitude has been an obstacle to this, but we must hope that the new Administration [that of Kennedy] will be prepared to take a more positive view."²⁵

Thus necessity became a virtue, and it is of minor practical consequence whether this was due to a conversion or tactical considerations. A year later it was essentially Kádár's authority and personal respect which was emphasized in the British analysis, and this trend became more and more obvious in the following years.²⁶ A phrase which was frequently repeated was that it was accepted that although Kádár would never be able to get the real confidence of the Hungarian people, the Hungarians thought Kádár to be the best Prime Minister they were likely to get. He was essentially a mediocrity who had risen to the top because of events – but Hungarian history was full of men who in similar circumstances had adopted the realistic policy of doing what was possible. One Hungarian writer had even called him the Hungarian Christ because "some one had to save the Hungarian people".²⁷ And even after Khrushchev fell in October 1964 the British did not think that this would harm Kádár's position.²⁸

Also, the American image of Kádár was gradually changing, although the Americans were slower in this mental rehabilitation process and did not concentrate so much on Kádár's person. They saw the situation of Hungary in a wider scale – as a part of the Communist bloc and as one in which only the Soviet Union really mattered. When Kádár visited the United Nations, the Americans did not meet him and restricted his travels. Even so, after Kádár had visited the UN the American attitude began to show more signs of interest in him.

A report which was issued from "a reliable source" in December 1960 described Kádár's informal comments during this visit. They were also thought to be interesting because it was assumed that Kádár had actually wished that they would reach

the Americans. This is most probably plausible, since the comments show Kádár's desire to convince the Americans of two starting-points: he was in power to stay, but he was also a pragmatic man. He would bear no grudge for the suspicions and the boycott, and he was a man with whom one could have dealings with – only a few circumstances had to be understood at first. And thirdly: it paid off to take him seriously, since he was no puppet.

Since the events of 1956, there have been a lot of childish (*gyerekes*) things going on between our two countries. I want to be frank with you. Both the U.S. Government and we Hungarians have been acting like a couple of kids. Periodically, we expel one another's diplomatic representatives: one American for one Hungarian. I don't think this is an intelligent (*okos*) thing to do. Let us explore the possibility of an understanding.

I don't like the Germans (I mean Adenauer's Germany) but to illustrate my feeling on this subject, I would use the German word 'Realpolitik' to describe the way this matter should be treated. We do not hate the Americans. After all, let us be realistic: Who are we? We are only a 'little louse' (*kis tota* [sic!]) in this big world. However, the prerequisite for normal relations is a willingness on the part of the U.S. Government to recognize the hard facts. The People's Republic of Hungary is an accomplished fact. It is here today. It will stay here tomorrow. All you have to do is to recognize this fact. The rest is simple. We could then resume normal diplomatic representations instead of this ridiculous (*navetaeges* [sic!]) Charge d'Affaires business.

The U.S. Government talks about Hungary being a Soviet satellite. Now on this subject let me tell you the following. It has cost the U.S.S.R. a lot of money to help normalize our conditions after 1956. Today we are happily engaged in constructive work. Our people enjoy freedom. No more of the Rakosi terror. Believe me, we don't take people to prison in the middle of the night any more. If you don't believe me, then talk to our writers, our intellectuals who were released from prison. Talk to Tibor Dary [Déry], the writer. And all this nonsense about Khrushchev dictating everything in Hungary – it is simply not true...

Let me assure you, once the U.S. recognizes that there was such a thing as the People's Republic with Kadar as its leader, we would

not have a single problem. I cannot emphasize that strongly enough.

I must tell you in earnest: We have no illusions concerning the possibility that the U.S. will become a socialist or a communist state. We Hungarian Communists are realists. We know that your country is capitalist, and it will not adopt our system. (Source: Mr. Kadar, this does not seem to be in line with Mr. Khrushchev's remark to the effect that our grandchildren in the U.S. will live under Communism.)

What makes you think that we have to go along with everything our Comrades say? We Communists like to argue with each other. That is the democratic thing to do. The principal thing is that the East and West must co-exist in peace and that we must negotiate. Take this present UN debate. It is much better to shout (*kisbalai* [sic!]) at each other than to shoot (*loni* [sic!]) at each other.²⁹

The message is clear: Kádár wanted to show that he was not a man who would hang himself for any dogma. He even took the trouble to emphasize his peasant (!) origin and love for nature and animals, even to joke about how he would not like to live in New York: "Not enough trees and (laugh) too many policemen." And then he appealed to American nationalism by confessing his and his people's admiration for Ulysses Grant. The document does not, however, reveal the American reaction to Kádár's words.

Even as the image of Kádár became better, one thing still annoyed even the British: they thought that Hungary was buying internal independence by being extra loyal and rigid in foreign policy.³⁰ The Americans had even more to complain about, since according to their view Hungary was one of the most eager supporters of North Vietnam and so vehement in its condemnation of 'American imperialism'. In 1965 there even occurred a demonstration of Asian and African students in Budapest against the American Legation, and the sanctity of the Legation premises was violated – according to the Americans, with no effort on the part of the Hungarian authorities to prevent this.

2.4 The end of the 1960s: Stability and Expectations

At the end of the 1960s the image of Hungary and Kádár had become relatively stable and even positive – if one bore in mind the starting points and the obvious differences.

Also, the American policy line had softened remarkably. The standard line, which can clearly be seen in the document *Changing Patterns in Eastern Europe* in 1964, was now that the Communist regimes were there to stay in Eastern Europe. But now they were seen as representatives of national communism, and they would consciously and methodically attempt to free themselves as much from the dominance of Moscow as possible. In this way the Communist bloc would lose its monolithic nature.

It was assumed that this political evolution was not likely to proceed at a speed which would threaten the Communist regimes as such, but the logic of this development would make the difference – against Moscow anyhow. The national Communist regimes were now the main force which could oppose Moscow in Eastern Europe, so it was not practical any more to treat them as oppressive and undemocratic quisling governments, but to try to develop relations with them. It was also assumed that the Soviets would consider direct military intervention in Eastern Europe only in extreme circumstances, when they believed vital Soviet interests to be threatened. Even the fall of Khrushchev did not change this analysis.³¹ In any case the principle was that the United States should improve its relations with Eastern European countries – even to strengthen their Communist regimes.³²

All this was a far cry from the old moralistic view which drew a sharp distinction between the cause of the free, democratic world and that of the evil communist bloc. No immediate victory was in sight; probably there was even some thought of a possible convergence of the two systems in the long run.

As the British Ambassador in Budapest, Alexander Morley, stated in his Annual Report in January 1967:

the Hungarian leadership abjured old-fashioned dogmatist Communism and became committed to the search for a new brand of Communism, aimed at giving the people of this country material benefits similar to those enjoyed by their neighbours to the West... I have the impression that if it is possible to combine a workable economic liberalism with full public ownership of production and strict central political control, which to us are the essence of communism, it is as likely to be seen in Hungary as anywhere.... Contrary to the usual stereotype of how Hungarians behave (which is not always wrong) the Hungarian party and governmental apparatus has been moving slowly and methodically.³³

The Hungarians had noticed the change and seemed to sense that they did not need to be begging to be released from the boycott. They knew it was in the interests in the United States to dispell the old animosity. So thus Hungary could wait and make its peace with the Americans on its own terms. The chargé d'affaires in Washington, János Radványi, could afford even a slightly sarcastic tone in his negotiations with the Americans:

As to RFE [Radio Free Europe], Radványi said that Premier Kadar had decided to cease jamming of this station to bring some humor into the life of Hungarians, since RFE broadcasts were so ridiculous they could not be taken seriously... Radványi next adverted to Cardinal Mindszenty. The US, he said, should put pressure on the Vatican to find a solution of the case. It was unfortunate that there was no provision in the Catholic Church for the pensioning of Cardinals, he continued, since this might permit a solution of the issue.³⁴

True, the Vietnam issue was still stressed by the Hungarians, but even here the Americans now seemed apt to interpret it in a new light. It was now considered to be mostly lip-service and necessary political currency which enabled a greater degree of internal independence to be bought from the Soviets. The issue was not in reality important to Hungary, so the West could afford this price. Hungary was considered to be much more moderate than the Soviet Union or the German Democratic Re-

public, and it was also understood to take a charitable view on the reforms in Czechoslovakia in 1967-68. It was thought that Kádár would not allow himself to be forced either to follow the Czech model or to actively attack it.³⁵

In May 1968 the British Ambassador Millard had a long talk with Kádár and naturally sent a long report to London. Kádár's remarks resembled those he had made in 1960 (the ones which were probably addressed to the Americans): he thought the quarrels were mostly due to misconceptions, and as he had assured to the Americans that he foresaw no socialist revolution in America, he now assured that he did not want to destroy the British Empire. But there was even more confidence in his tone now: he was firmly in the saddle and would remain so. And he pointed out that even though political relations with the West Germans were bad, the Germans had made an effort to develop economic relations. The British should do the same:

Reverting to this theme of the need for our two countries to understand each other, Kádár said that we would be aware of what had happened in Hungary during and since the war. They had suffered much, and for the events of 1956 they had paid a very high price. They were not now going to sell cheaply what had been won. If I knew the Hungarians, I would know that this was how most of them felt.

Concerning the Czechs, Kádár took an almost patronising tone: the Czech reforms were not a threat to socialism, and in many ways the Czechs were now catching up with the Hungarian reforms: "They were dealing with their problems in their own way, and he was confident of their ability to succeed."

The Ambassador's analysis to London ended in a manner which combined respect with a somewhat calculating tone:

To some extent the strength of Kádár's position is the lack of credible alternatives. Hungarians are cynical about their leadership and of course they have no means of changing it, but he is the best First Secretary they have. More positively his prestige is due to his strong personality and the relatively humane quality of his rule.

Although there is little communication between Government and people, the Hungarians sense that under the pressures of office he has revealed statesmanlike qualities. Many are disposed to give him credit for this, although there is much else about the regime which they would condemn. The policy of reconciliation has produced results and to a limited extent Kádár has capitalised national feeling. From this brief contact he appears confidently in control.³⁶

The desk officers in London agreed – and were especially interested in Kádár's views on the Czech reforms and their future.³⁷

Kádár had a roughly equivalent meeting with the American representative. This was all the more important because this marked the final normalisation of US-Hungarian relations. And also in this meeting he played the part of the good-humoured father of the nation – and of a statesman who was big enough to forgive his counterpart's blunders. In a sense, he had a valid opportunity to pose as the winner in the US-Hungarian controversy, since this was the first time an American Ambassador had met him after the long boycott. "There was no false modesty, and he spoke with the assurance of someone who is not only party boss but the real power in this country."

According to the Ambassador, Kádár had emphasized the need for peaceful coexistence as the only rational approach between countries whose systems were based on differing theories of society. It might not have been possible to say this twenty years earlier, when the pressure of ideological differences had been much more intense, but the basic problem now was to avoid the outbreak of nuclear war between the two superpowers. And once again, referring to the previous bad relations between the USA and Hungary, Kádár made a practical analogy:

He had compared the situation at that time as similar to two boxers who had been slugging at each other for seven rounds (from 1956 to 1963). Neither could hope to knock the other out, neither was prepared to capitulate, and neither could ultimately hope to gain very much from the contest. Hungary was not prepared to

come on its knees to the US, and he knew the US was not prepared to assume this posture before Hungary. As I knew, he went on, the UN problem had now been solved in an acceptable way. If we approached current problems in the same spirit which had finally led to a solution of the Hungarian question in the UN, based upon realistic acceptance of the facts of life, then there was good possibility of advancing towards agreement in other areas... Both sides would, of course, indulge in propaganda against each other, but firm and realistic acceptance of this truth would not let the possibilities of improving our relations be submerged by such propaganda.

...Kadar was in an obviously relaxed, good humoured, sometimes semi-ironic mood. He was well-briefed and had apparently carefully thought out the line of argument he wished to use. He seemed to enjoy playing the role of a confident leader big enough to forget the past, and hopeful for betterment of Hungarian-American relations though very mindful of present difficulties.³⁸

Even after the invasion of Czechoslovakia no real fears were expressed about Hungary's own reforms in the field of economic freedom and the extended self-government of the people – at least as long as the Hungarians were allowed to decide these things themselves.

Hungary was one of the occupying powers in the Czechoslovakian crisis, but this did not destroy Kádár's record and image in the Western eyes – rather the reverse. Of course, it was noted that Hungary had participated in the invasion, but simultaneously it was taken for granted that this had been something which Kádár would have wanted to avoid; he had finally had to accept it in order not to endanger Hungary's position towards the Soviets. No enthusiasm was detected on the Hungarian side, rather extremely half-hearted efforts to find excuses for the invasion, excuses which they did not in fact take seriously themselves, but had to perform as some obligatory lip-service. It was evident that the Hungarians had no wish to see the Cold War positions return.

As far as Kádár himself was concerned, there were different interpretations whether his position had weakened or not, and

a British letter reported also a joke: "A current joke here is that among the telephones on Kádár's desk, it is easy to tell which is the hot line to Moscow, because it has only a receiver." Also the American report included a joke: "Why are the five armies still in Czechoslovakia? They are trying to find the guy who called them to help."³⁹

In 1968, the standard tone seems to have been that Kádár had tried to ride on two horses at the same time and had been forced to participate in the invasion – and, had the Czech reform policy succeeded, would have "tried to manoeuvre himself into a Dubcek-like posture and tried to ride the whirlwind". In any case it was thought to be essential that the West would do nothing to blame Hungary or harm its position. It was in the Western interests that contacts with Hungary would increase and the Hungarian economic reform survive, because in the long run this would strengthen Hungary's freedom towards the Soviet Union.⁴⁰ The American conclusions were no different.

It is also interesting to see that whereas in Leslie Fry's time the Legations had been more critical towards Kádár than the desk officers in London, now the tables were turned in this respect. Yet again the occupational hazard of diplomats – identification with the local conditions – was at work, but this time it meant a sort of identification with *Kádár's* policies, not with his opposition or his victims, as after 1956. Moralizing was now absent.

At any event, in the late 1960s the image of Kádár had thus stabilised. It was more positive than negative, and it was expected to improve, not deteriorate. Hungary belonged, of course, to the opposing bloc, but bearing in mind this starting point and Hungary's conditions and possibilities, the results were as good as could be expected. The Hungary of Kádár did not seem to be very rigid, orthodox or sincerely convinced about its own Socialism as such. It was anything but ideologically expansive and it seemed to want to absorb as much market economy and political breathing space as it possibly could without provoking the Soviets. This did not mean implementation of capitalism or democracy as such, but it was pragmatic

policy which caused very little trouble to the West. Hungary represented the *status quo* in a liberal shade and this was the best that was expected of it – especially after the invasion of Czechoslovakia and the declaration of the Brezhnev Doctrine.

And the riddle of János Kádár remained in many sense unsolved. As the Superintending Under-Secretary of the Northern Department in the Foreign Office, P. Hayman, stated: "The enigma about Kadar remains: how has he been able to combine a record of close association with the Soviet Union (in 1956 and at other times) with an appearance of national leadership?"⁴¹ The answer remained uncertain, but more important was that Kádár had indeed succeeded.

3 Finland

3.1 Moderate goals: Maintaining the Paasikivi Line

Finland was in many sense a very different case compared with Hungary. It was a neutral country, or at least striving to be neutral; there were no Russian troops in Finland; the country was a democracy and had a multi-party system, free elections and a press which on the whole was free. However, there are astonishingly many similarities: the Soviet shadow, the tightening Soviet grip, a strong leader who remained in power for a long period, suspicions in the West, increased political freedom and independence and hence a new view towards the formerly disliked national leader.

In the case of Urho Kekkonen, there are many interpretations on how successful he in fact was in maintaining Finnish independence and neutrality. According to his supporters, he was a genuine success: he managed to obtain recognition of Finnish neutrality in the West and thus to win over Western confidence. This was something which the cautious Paasikivi had not dared even to attempt. In particular the American and British recognitions of Finnish neutrality in 1961 are taken as evidence of Kekkonen's success, the Summit of European Security in 1975 in Helsinki being the final jewel in his crown. This was conclusive confirmation of the fact that he had become a true European statesman of the first order.

According to Kekkonen's opponents and critics, these achievements were not necessarily due to the merits of Kekkonen, but something which would have been achieved anyhow – possibly achieved even earlier, had Kekkonen not been so pro-Soviet in his speeches. The critics emphasize that Paasikivi had operated in much more difficult circumstances, held his own against the Russians in domestic policy and also enjoyed much more personal respect and confidence in the West than Kekkonen. According to them, Kekkonen allowed the Soviets to interfere with internal Finnish issues and domestic policy – the so-called Finlandisation* – which Paasikivi had managed to avoid. The main point of the criticism is that the basic line had been set by Paasikivi and that Kekkonen had played the Soviet card to his own benefit to gain a political hegemony in Finland. Kekkonen had also created a stifled mental climate in Finland and weakened the Finnish backbone by demanding that the friendship with the Soviet Union should be treated as a virtue, not as an uncomfortable necessity.

But what was then the Western view on Finland? How much did the internal conditions of Finland matter to it, and what was expected from the Finnish leaders and thus also from Kekkonen?

Finland was a sort of a reluctant test-case for the Russians, but also for the West. As such it was not vitally important to the West. It was useful mainly for the fact that its independence denied the Soviets many military and political advantages which membership of the Warsaw Pact or becoming a Soviet province like the Baltic countries would have given them. It was useful also in the sense that the collapse of Finland would weaken other small nations threatened by Communism, as the American National Security Council (NSC) concluded in the

* Cf. the Hungarian positive meaning of "finlandising" (*finlandizálás*). Romsics, Ignác, Hungary in the Twentieth Century. Trans. Tim Wilkinson. Budapest, Osiris 1999, 309; Kende, Péter, "Afterword". In The Hungarian Revolution of 1956. Ed. Litván, György. London, New York, Longman 1996, 168-169. [Ed. note]

1950s.⁴² But, not being vital, Finland might also be expendable if the price – for example Sweden’s possible membership of NATO – would be tempting enough. In any case, Finland would never be defended by NATO troops: it was recognized that the country lay in the Soviet-dominated sphere of interest.

The NSC stated in 1954 its moderate goals concerning Finland:

To review NSC policy with respect to Finland with a view to continuance of an independent, economically healthy, and democratic Finland, basically oriented to the West, (but with no attempt to incorporate Finland in a Western coalition) neither subject to undue reliance on Soviet Bloc trade nor vulnerable to Soviet economic pressure.⁴³

In 1959 the NSC also stated:

Furthermore, if Finland is able to preserve its present neutral status – that of a nation able to maintain its independence despite heavy Soviet pressure – it could serve as an example of what the United States might like to see achieved by the Soviet-dominated nations of Eastern Europe.⁴⁴

Finland was a warning of what a neutralist Scandinavia might become, yet it was not Eastern Europe by any real standards, and it could be seen also as a positive prospect when the Eastern European Bloc was concerned; perhaps it could be a model for the “Finlandization” of Eastern Europe?

It was clear that more was expected and hoped for on the part of Finland than from that of Hungary, because Finland had some space to manoeuvre – which a Warsaw Pact country like Hungary could not have, especially after 1956. So it was important that Finland would not make too many compromises and put this room for latitude in manoeuvre in jeopardy. The Finnish statesmen were expected to defend the degree of ‘Westernness’ they had. It was expected that they would preserve the *status quo*, make the necessary concessions to the Soviets to keep them content, but simultaneously defend their right to take care

of their own domestic affairs without any interference from Moscow. Domestic drifting towards Communism would be a blow to Western interests in the Cold War and would disturb the whole balance in Northern Europe.

A sort of a test case was the ability to keep the Communists out of the government. The standard American and British line in the 1950s and 1960s was to support co-operation and coalition governments between the Social Democrats and the Agrarian Union, no matter how much they or their leaders might be distrusted as individuals. This was called "the red soil" government in Finland. The most important aspect in grading the importance of the Finnish parties was ultimately not a question of which party was 'right' in internal disputes or even the most pro-Western one. The most important thing was to guarantee Finnish domestic stability and to avoid an internal chaos, in which the trade unions and the farmers' union struggled for material and social benefits. This struggle would undermine the democratic parties, strengthen the Communists and thus make Finland more vulnerable to Soviet pressure. Stability was also the highest goal considered possible to achieve.

It was accepted that the SDP and the Agrarian Union (later the Centre Party) were the only forces imaginable which occupied a position to control the economic interest groups and make them stabilise the economy. The red soil government was also considered the only coalition strong enough to make a stand against Communist and Soviet demands and threats. In theory, the National Coalition Party (the Conservatives) was clearly the most pro-Western and anti-Communist party as such, but it was left in the political wilderness for pragmatic reasons. Co-operation with this party would provoke the Russians and antagonize Leftist parties, the Agrarian Union and President Kekkonen – and whereas these could do much harm to Finnish stability, if left in Opposition, the Coalition Party could not. Thus, it was expendable. The desirability of the red soil government was due to tactical considerations and was a means, not an end. This standard line did not even depend on what party was in government in the USA or in Britain, nor on

the personality of the Ambassadors or the desk officers in Washington and London.

This sort of government had been the norm in the 1950s; however, between 1959 and 1966 this coalition became impossible because of the bad relations between the SDP and the Agrarians, or, between the SDP and Kekkonen.

So no pro-Western heroism was required, because it was taken for granted that any exaggerated move towards the West, let alone help on the part of the Western Powers, would only provoke the Russians to demand even more than they had originally intended. In short, it was expected that the Finnish President and Government would maintain the *status quo* of the mid-1950s.

Paasikivi seemed to have managed all the essentials of this; of Prime Minister Kekkonen's abilities and intentions or even of his bottom-line sympathies one was not always equally sure. As a British memorandum, which could be compared with the American NSC outlines, stated in 1955:

...the attitude of the Finnish government towards Russia has of late been unnecessarily subservient. This is principally the fault of Dr. Kekkonen, the Prime Minister, an able and an extremely ambitious man who, though no Communist or fellow traveller, is prepared to follow almost any policy which will suit his personal book and further increase his popularity with the weak and ageing President Paasikivi, whom he hopes to succeed at the next Presidential elections... there is a risk that he may allow his ambition to outrun his country's interests.⁴⁵

The West also seemed to appreciate a cartoon by Kari Suomalainen, the leading Finnish cartoonist, which appeared in *Helsingin Sanomat*, in 1954, when Kekkonen ousted Ralf Törngren from the Premiership and became Prime Minister himself again. The cartoon depicted a mass of Soviet-type soldiers carrying Törngren away and Kekkonen saluting the soldiers from a balcony. The text was: "Long Live the People's Republic of Kekkoslovakia!" It is significant that both the American and the British ministers sent the cartoon to their foreign ministries.

Since the West could not do much to defend Finland politically, not at least in the area of foreign policy, the Finnish domestic forum was the only one in which the Communist and Soviet influence could be fought effectively – without a risk of an American-Soviet conflict over Finland. The best weapon would be to aid the non-Communist parties and to further non-Communist co-operation.⁴⁶ And this should be done with as little noise as possible.

Despite the criticism of Kekkonen it was mostly taken for granted in the Western diplomatic circles during Paasikivi's Presidency that Kekkonen would become the next President. Kekkonen's political talent was considered to be a class of its own in Finland; moreover, he was clearly the favourite of the Soviets, and the forces opposing him could not join their forces.⁴⁷ But after he indeed was elected, the fears seemed to become true, and the first real evidence of subservience seemed to come during the Hungarian uprising. The Finnish attitude was considered very evasive. When the British Ambassador in Helsinki asked the Finnish Ambassador in London whether Finland would contribute to the work of the *UN Special Committee on the Hungarian Uprising* the Finnish colleague expressed reluctance. The London officials were not surprised: as one of them noted in the minutes with a short but illuminating sentence: "This is what we expected."⁴⁸ And after the Nagy execution it was yet again Kekkonen who was seen as the culprit in Finland or at least as the censor whose line prevented some of the moral outcry which the executions would have deserved from every democratic and free man.⁴⁹

3.2 Rock Bottom – Permitting Soviet Interference 1958-62

The convictions of Kekkonen's sins were accentuated even more after the so-called Night Frost Crisis in 1958-59 and Note Crisis in 1961. It is not possible to describe these crises in detail here, but in both cases the Americans and the British thought they could see their worst fears being confirmed: they thought that Kekkonen was yet again making undue concessions to the Soviets – concessions which Paasikivi would not have made.

The Night Frost crisis came after the 1958 elections. The Communists became the biggest party (50 out of 200 MPs), but the negotiations to form the new Government brought a pleasant surprise for the West. Instead of the dreaded popular front government just the opposite emerged: a coalition government of all parties except the Communists. Even Kekkonen's party, the Agrarians, participated. The most influential position was held by the anti-Kekkonen Social Democrats, and also the ostracism of the Conservatives was ended. In Western eyes, this was even better than the red soil government: a government with such a substantial parliamentary majority would effectively isolate the Communists. Western diplomats sensed Kekkonen's coolness towards the new Government, but as the American Ambassador reported to Washington, "all Emb contacts assume, and we agree, Communists will not repeat not be admitted to government unless President Kekkonen in effect goes nuts".⁵⁰ It was recognised that Kekkonen could not prevent the government from being created, and it was expected that the government would control his undue subservience to the East.

However, when the West was satisfied, it was evident that the same reasons would make the government anathema for the Soviets. The discontent was soon apparent: the trade negotiations were cancelled, and Ambassador Lebedev left the country without even the usual courtesy visit to President Kekkonen. The relations between the two countries froze to a zero-point.

Kekkonen's own attitude towards the Government had been negative from the very beginning, since he regarded the Government as dangerous in foreign policy and consisting of his most ardent opponents in domestic policy. The question of his actual role in the making and breaking of the government is still debated among Finnish historians, but it can be said with certainty that he and the Soviets had at least some co-operation against the government – and both were trying to bring about its downfall. For example, Kekkonen inquired through his political confidant Ahti Karjalainen whether the Soviets would continue resisting the Government without compromise to the

end – because only then could he use his authority in the game against the government.⁵¹

Whereas Paasikivi, ten years earlier, had defended a government in a somewhat similar situation against Soviet discontent (the first Fagerholm Government in 1948-50), Kekkonen seemed to work against his government right from the start and then to give in to the Russians almost immediately – if not even to collaborate against the Government. Finally, the Government resigned.

In the Western Embassies, Kekkonen was seen as the culprit. It was thought that the Soviet pressure would not have warranted such submission on his part, especially since the Americans had promised to give economic aid, and now he had set a dangerous precedent and the Soviet influence in Finnish domestic matters had increased. As the British Ambassador Douglas Busk put it:

President Kekkonen is apparently genuinely persuaded that the degree of submissiveness to Russian wishes indicated in his speech is necessary to the safety and prosperity of his country... the President is still playing party politics... apparently granting the Russians the right to object to any government and from that it is but a short step to a Russian right to choose a government... The President may think he is adopting '*divide et impera*' as his motto, but it may work out as '*divide et Russia imperabit*'. At the very least the Russian appetite must surely have been whetted.⁵²

The Western image of Kekkonen was of course partly a stereotype. But Kekkonen did not improve this image – of which he could hardly be ignorant – in his meetings with the Western diplomats, especially in the years 1959-60. He repeatedly stressed to them that the real danger to world peace was not the Soviet Union at all, but the unwise, revanchist policy of Western Germany. He also maintained that the Soviet Union was in ascendancy in the Cold War, whereas the West had suffered many setbacks.⁵³

It has often been said that the Western diplomats had too one-sided contacts and listened too much to Kekkonen's oppo-

nents. According to their reports, however, Kekkonen and his supporters were listened to as well; it was especially those opinions of Kekkonen mentioned above (and thus given by himself) which made them most worried, not the horror stories of his opponents, which were taken with a pinch of salt.

Kekkonen's opinions, of course, led to negative reactions in the West. It was difficult to decide whether Kekkonen had capitulated mentally or let the fear or even some sort of pro-Soviet conversion guide him. However, the Western conclusion was not that disenchantment should lead to distancing oneself from Kekkonen. It was taken practically for granted that he would be re-elected President in 1962, so the West had to find ways to influence him, not to discredit itself by backing his adversaries, who had little chance of defeating him. The West should rather try to improve Kekkonen's knowledge of the world situation and particularly make him aware of American might, compared to that of the Russians. At the same time the West should maintain a low profile in Finnish affairs in order not provoke Kekkonen and the Russians.⁵⁴ "Finland must walk a tightrope; the local Blondin is the only one available, so we must try to guide him", was a sentence used by more than one diplomat.

Even the question of inviting Kekkonen for a state visit to the United States and to Britain was seen in this light. So, paradoxically, when Kekkonen made these visits to both England and the United States in 1961, this seemed to be a recognition of neutrality, and the Finns made the most of them. But, in fact, the invitations were not proof of Western recognition of Kekkonen's policies or his success or authority, but quite the reverse.

How can this paradox be explained? One must bear in mind that Kekkonen was not accused of being a traitor or an agent of the Kremlin. He was almost always, also in the most critical Western analysis, considered to be a Finnish patriot. His greatest error was not a lack of patriotism, but one of judgement: he had made a wrong assessment of world politics and the outcome of the Cold War, since he had overestimated Russian

might and underestimated American. State visits were considered the only means to try and influence him and to make him see that Finland had a chance to hold its own against the Soviets. It was also considered useful to talk about Finnish neutrality most when it was considered to be at its weakest and in a danger – because this was the only way to make it as difficult as possible for the Soviet Union to crush it. So the invitations for state visits and recognitions of Finnish neutrality during these visits were paradoxically not the fruit of Kekkonen succeeding in convincing the West, but of his failure to do this.⁵⁵ It was an effort to “convert” him, and this would be done with a carrot, not a stick.⁵⁶

The success, seen from the Western point of view, was meagre. Kekkonen maintained his official line and gave no signs of ‘hidden’ Western sympathies. A disillusioned British memorandum stated after Kekkonen’s visit that Kekkonen had behaved in London as if he recognised that the Soviet Government had a right to involve themselves with Finnish internal politics, and he had betrayed a leaning towards the Soviet point of view in world politics.⁵⁷ Another one stated: “It must be hard to be a good Finn. What disappointed me most about the whole visit was the President’s pointed omission of any indication that he was basically on our side.”⁵⁸

In October 1961, when President Kekkonen was still on his state visit to the United States, a crisis erupted which damaged Kekkonen’s reputation even further in Western eyes. The Soviet Union sent a diplomatic note to Finland and suggested that consultations based on agreements in the 1948 Treaty of Friendship, Co-operation and Mutual Assistance should be commenced due to the rising militarism and revanchism in West Germany. The ‘true’ motives of the Note are a constantly debated issue in Finland, and the main question has been whether Kekkonen had some collaboration with the Soviets in order to ensure his re-election.

While it is not possible to describe the aspects of the Note Crisis with any degree of confidence here, the result was that Kekkonen’s name became more suspect than ever in Western

eyes. First the West had considered that Finland was in real danger and that the Note was a threat also to Kekkonen, who should now defend Finland; the Americans were ready to give extensive economic and even diplomatic support – they had agreed on this with the British already in April 1961.

But when Kekkonen yet again gave in, agreed with most of the Soviet arguments and attacked his domestic political opponents in his speech, suspicions rose. These suspicions gained more substance from the stories of a Soviet defector that Kekkonen and Krushchev had arranged the note together. Kekkonen travelled to Novosibirsk to meet Krushchev, and when the Soviets dropped their suggestion for consultations at almost the same time that Kekkonen's rival stepped down from the presidential elections, the Western analysis began to see some sort of conspiracy. This time the West was disappointed not only in Kekkonen, but also in the whole nation, which seemed to have no fight left in itself against the Soviets – where had the spirit of the stubborn nation of the Winter War gone?

3.3 The Pessimistic View Stabilises – Slippery Slope to the East?

The American and British views on Kekkonen's personality during these crucial years can also be traced from various reports in different forms. They are presented in a most illuminating way in two documents: a British "Personalities" list of influential Finns, consisting of 217 names, written in 1959, and an over 60-page 'mini-biography' of Kekkonen, *A Study of the Career and Policies of Urho Kekkonen, President of Finland*, which was written in the American Embassy in 1963. The latter even included notes.

Neither of these documents favour the interpretation that Kekkonen was in any way a sinister demon, a traitorous power-hungry satellite or an agent of the KGB. Neither was, in fact, based on information taken exclusively from anti-Kekkonen circles – as has repeatedly been suggested by Kekkonen's supporters when the question of Kekkonen's strained Western relations are debated. Both documents were reasonably neutral and attempted to give an unbiased view.

The key sections of the American 'biography' were in the introduction and in the conclusion. Since these confirm the analysis already alluded to in this study, they are cited here quite extensively⁵⁹:

Urho Kaleva Kekkonen is the unchallenged ruler of Finland and he is likely to remain so for many years to come. At 62 he has just begun his second six-year term as President of Finland. A third term seems probable and a fourth term is within the realm of possibility... He likes the Presidency which he actively sought and for which he evidently considers himself well qualified. No individual even remotely threatens his political pre-eminence. There is no current prospect of a coalition of domestic opponents capable of reducing Kekkonen's authority and eventually turning him out of office. In the unlikely event that Kekkonen at some point proves unable to protect his own position, the Soviet Union can be expected to take steps to preserve his authority.

Kekkonen had effectively monopolised Finnish foreign policy and had also made use of it as no predecessor had done before. And no one had made domestic developments serve foreign policy or used foreign policy for domestic political purposes like him before. His domination of Finland was primarily the product of the application of political skill and calculated exploitation of fear of Russia, and he had also remained active in partisan politics. Contrary to the idealized view of the Finnish President as a unifying force, he had continued to be the real leader of his Agrarian Party and had controlled the actions of the Cabinet during most of his presidential term. And no one had dared to challenge him – it was known that it would be useless to try to convert him, and he would retaliate by discrediting his opponents in Russian eyes. To make the President's task even easier, he often had the support of the large Communist Party and factions of the other parties; his opponents were disorganised and lacking in skilful leadership.

The 'biography' described a very autocratic leader and personality:

Kekkonen is not a popular President. Confident, tough, often resentful of advice, and markedly sensitive to criticism, he seems to have few close friends or confidants. He neither seeks nor received the adulation or affection of his people. His relationship to them is cold, distant. The public seldom sees the congeniality of which Kekkonen is capable. He is offensively pedagogical in his attitude toward the Finnish people. Kekkonen asks for their confidence while often demonstrating that he has little confidence in them. He does not appeal for understanding and cooperation; he demands it. Despite his unassailable political position Kekkonen is seldom if ever magnanimous or conciliatory, even in moments of national crisis. He tolerates corruption in high places and deals harshly with opponents. Even among some of those who would not consider denying him their support, Kekkonen has incurred an intense dislike.

But even so, Kekkonen's views had a popular following: it was taken for a fact that Finland could not rely on the support of western nations despite their sympathies. And Kekkonen had concluded that the greater confidence the Soviets had in Finland, the freer Finland would be to develop its western associations. Within the limits he had set for himself, Kekkonen indeed desired considerable contact with the West, which was demonstrated by his visits to the West in the previous two years.

Outwardly Kekkonen appears confident that he has been successful, even remarkably successful, in protecting Finland's independence. This is an attitude he must adopt, however, and it is at least questionable that he really believes Finland's position is as secure as he pretends. Nevertheless, despite the doubt he may have, the trying moments in relations with the Soviets, and the irritation and possible serious concern caused him by those who suggest he may have undermined Finnish independence, Kekkonen has a taste for the burden he has assumed and seeks to retain. He seems to be stimulated by his encounters with the Russians and he has had the satisfaction of seeing his domestic political position reinforced as a consequence of these encounters. In 1961 he told an American audience that he found it fascinating to conduct Finland's foreign affairs. Even shortly after what must have been a harrowing journey to Novosibirsk later that same year Kekkonen said privately that it was thrilling and stimulating to be President of Finland.

It can easily be seen that the tone was critical and not very respectful, but it was not hopeless; and Kekkonen was certainly not considered to be a mere stooge or a mediocrity. The main worry was still that he would overreach himself in his zealotness to appease the Soviets at almost any price. It is rather a picture of a ruthless nationalist who was too convinced that only he could save Finland and nothing could change his grand plan to do this.

The British personalities-list made the same kind of remarks:

One of the ablest men in Finland. His sardonic humour and cynicism are unusual in a Finn; his colleagues do not entirely like him, perhaps partly because they do not understand him, and he is easily criticised. Although a die-hard Finnish patriot during the early part of the war, he is now prepared to follow the 'Paasikivi line' of ostensible friendliness towards the Soviet Union. The apparent change of Soviet foreign policy in a more moderate direction has probably increased the support for such a policy and most Finns feel that it is the only realistic line for their country to pursue. But this policy has, in the past, been deeply distrusted in Finland, where it has been held to be a dangerous substitute for a tougher reaction to Soviet pressure. The prolonged Government crisis of the autumn of 1958 and early 1959 showed the President in a poor light. In the first place he was clearly not playing an impartial role, but favouring his old party, the Agrarians; in the second he allowed himself to be alarmed by Russian coldness and showed a subservience to the Russians which much decreased his popularity.⁶⁰

This is not the place to argue whether these analyses were actually valid. However, they represent the attitude which lay behind Western suspicions of Kekkonen's person.

During the 1960s these suspicions gradually diminished, but at intervals it always seemed that there was a new cause for suspicion of Kekkonen's uncritically pro-Soviet views and dictatorial leanings. For example, in 1965 Kekkonen stated in Moscow that Finland could only be neutral during peace; in the West this was seen as a deviation from official neutrality and as yet another concession to the Soviets, and the American State

Department Assistant Secretary expressed American surprise at this to the Finnish Ambassador and inquired whether there had been a change in the Finnish foreign policy.⁶¹ The Finns assured him that this was not the case.

In domestic policy, Kekkonen's role in defeating the Agrarians' chairman V. J. Sukselainen because the Soviets had criticised him was regarded in an American analysis as "another successful foray into Finnish domestic affairs" by the Soviets. It was not even the Soviet interference that was the worst, it was the fact that Kekkonen had made extensive use of it.⁶² The British called the spectacle "unedifying".⁶³

What was then to be done? Kekkonen was there to stay, but he seemed unapproachable. If you compare the Western view of him it might even seem to be a worse case scenario than that of Kádár – at least Kádár was gaining more freedom from the Soviets and increasing domestic freedom.

The only option to control Kekkonen seemed to be to strengthen Finnish civic society and to let the eulogy of Finnish-Soviet friendship go past unnoticed. As a British Foreign Office official put it in 1965: "while leaving President Kekkonen free to flirt with the Russians as much as he likes", connections between Finnish and Western individuals and organisations should be reinforced. "What we need, I think, is a strong pro-Western public opinion in Finland capable of preventing President Kekkonen from going too far with the Russians."⁶⁴

3.4 The Late 1960s: the Old Foe as the Guarantor of Stability

In the late 1960s, however, the Western image of Kekkonen improved significantly. This was due to many reasons. The Cold War entered a new phase or gave way to détente, the old diplomats with the old personal stereotypes of Kekkonen moved on away, and, most important of all, the worst fears had not materialised. Finland had not become a satellite or lost its democracy. Quite the contrary, it seemed to gain more breathing space as it carefully, step by step, joined the economic integration of the West. So Kekkonen's cautious policy now seemed to

have gained dividends and not to have led Finland finally down the 'slippery slope'.

Kekkonen, even with all the traditional misgivings attached to him, was no longer looked upon as a spineless dictator. He was still not 'liked' in any true sense of the word, and he was still difficult to influence and too pro-Soviet. But the emotional repugnance against him had disappeared, and, like Kádár, he seemed to guarantee stability. He now seemed to be the elder statesman, who guaranteed that Finland would maintain the *status quo* and even move slowly to the Western model of society – and all this was still the best that could be expected.

There was also a new reason to have a better opinion of Kekkonen. In the 1950s and early 1960s it had seemed that Kekkonen's policy meant more compliance and even possible 'fellow-travelling' radicalism than that of other Finns (the Communists were, of course, a case of their own). The Social Democrats and the Conservatives in particular, and even the grass-roots Agrarians and the civic society in general had previously been considered much more reliable.

In the late 1960s, however, a new danger seemed to be looming in Finnish foreign policy. This was the emergence of the young New Left radicals, the new intellectual élite of Finland, which was the counterpart of the radical generation in Western Europe. They were not usually Communists, but nevertheless they characterized the West as "Imperialist" and "reactionary", and, even if they did not advocate outright Warsaw Pact policy, they overwhelmingly favoured the Soviet interpretation of *détente* to the Western interpretation. Especially the Social Democratic Party – previously so reliable – was influenced by these young New Left intellectuals. Seen especially from the American point of view, these radicals, some of whom were recruited in the Foreign Ministry of Finland, were very outspoken about Vietnam, Latin America, etc. – issues which were inconvenient for the Americans.

Compared to them, Kekkonen might be difficult, obstinate and a bit too close to the Soviets, but he was traditional and stable. He had voiced no opinions about Vietnam and had ad-

vocated strict *Realpolitik* which meant that no idealist surprises were to be expected from him. Since there was now a warning example also in the Western world, and this only next door to Finland – Sweden and especially Prime Minister Olof Palme, who took a very moralistic stand on the Vietnam issue and was very anti-American also in other matters – Kekkonen seemed a much better option than before. The confidence was also strengthened by the fact that the Finnish society – if you did not count the new intellectuals – seemed to be far from breaking apart, rather it was on the move in the right direction, towards Scandinavia and Western Europe.⁶⁵

And now Kekkonen was admitted to be the best interpreter of Finnish interests and Finnish space to manoeuvre. As the British Ambassador in Helsinki, David Scott Fox, had analysed already in 1967: "President Kekkonen can, I think, probably be trusted to understand better than anybody how far Finland can safely go. He seems to be moving Finnish neutrality very cautiously into a position where it is less slanted towards the Soviet Union, although we should not be surprised if he feels obliged to throw an occasional sop to Cerberus in the process." And, what mattered most to the West, was the fact that the development in Finland seemed to be tending to move gradually towards the Western way.⁶⁶

After the crisis in Czechoslovakia a British official reported on the moods of Kekkonen and the Finnish people:

... virtually nobody denies that in the things that matter, he is Finland, and that when he speaks to the outside world he is both honest and accurate in his interpretation of the way that Finland thinks and feels. If he pretended to us that he was entirely free to go his own way in foreign affairs, he would misrepresent both the facts and the beliefs of his own people... And behind him, and identifying with him to an astonishing degree, are a people who desperately want to be part of the West, who are afraid of the present and the future, and who badly need a boost.⁶⁷

In these estimations Kekkonen was by no means a spineless man of compliance, nor even primarily anymore an over-

ambitious and power-hungry partisan politician. It seems that now he was thought to have a cunning plan to not only defend Finland's neutrality but also to gain even more space for manoeuvring. And while he was seeming to be able to achieve this, the official lip-service to Soviet friendship was not of equivalent importance. It also seems that the West was now counting on the fact that Kekkonen did not take this lip-service seriously either.

Even the fact that the Communists had entered the Government in 1966 – although as a very junior partner compared to the Social Democrats and the Centre Party – was not held against Kekkonen now. This had been the test-case before, and when the Communists joined the government in 1966, there were initial worries. But now it seemed rather that in integrating the Communists within the government Kekkonen had actually managed to tame them. In the beginning of the 1960s the participation of Communists in the Government would have been regarded as the final taming of Kekkonen.

One would not have been so optimistic in this, had not also the image of the Communists and Left-wing socialists changed. The new generation was not considered to be the same as the old, Stalinist monolith, which had only echoed their Russian master's voice. According to the West, even the extreme Left had now made its choice: it was more important and paid better dividends – in fact it was the only way to gain any dividends – to integrate within Finnish society, not to be a crony of the Russians without a will of their own. The Stalinist fervour of the young intellectuals in the early 1970s caused some concern, as did the Exceptional Law in 1973 (Kekkonen's re-election was ensured without a regular election). But by and large the stabilisation of Finland's international status and domestic policy had given the West what it mainly wanted; the 1970s seemed safe, and at the very least the Conference of European Security and Co-operation in 1975 – Finland acting as the host – secured Finland's position. Also the Soviet policy seemed more predictable than before.

On the other hand, the Finnish debate about finlandization has stressed that the 1970s were actually more dangerous than the 1960s. This was so because the previous unpleasant inevitability – the close relations with the Soviets – had now been made a virtue. Self-censorship, discrimination on foreign policy grounds and Kekkonen's dominant position had meant a mental capitulation, a limited democracy and a limited freedom of opinion. In the 1960s everyone, except the Communists, had still thought in terms of necessary compliance, not in terms of collaboration or true friendship with the Soviets. In Finnish eyes, this transformation was the actual 'slippery slope'.

However, this was not equally important to the West. And thus the circle was completed in the early 1970s. The West, even though it might have some complaints on individual issues and think that Finnish neutrality had some odd pro-Eastern flavour, now believed genuinely in Finnish neutrality, the recognition of which had been more a tactical concern to it in the 1960s. And it now had this belief in Finnish neutrality for the very same reason for which it had not had this belief previously: namely, President Kekkonen.

4 Closure

So the formula in both Kádár's and Kekkonen's image is astonishingly similar: moral dislike – disapproval of erroneous policy – a recognition of other, worse alternatives – the improved image of the old foe whom you at least knew – a feeling which was not admiration but some sort of appreciation of the achievements anyhow – satisfaction with the stability and even respect. This suggests that basically the phases of the Cold War and the grand strategies in it decided the image, not their domestic policy or democratic freedom. This was even more so since one could never do much else than hope for the best and do nothing concrete. But also the persistence and traditionalism of Kádár and Kekkonen was an important factor: when one could not expect revolutionary improvements, no news was the best news.

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