

Péter Kovács¹ - Jordan Thomas Rogers² - Ernest A. Nagy³:

Forgotten or Remembered?

- The US Legation of Budapest and the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 -

(A virtual and annotated conversation with Jordan Thomas Rogers, Ernest A. Nagy and Géza Katona serving at the American Legation in Budapest in 1956)

I.

Péter Kovács's Introduction – The antecedents of the project

Some months ago, I wrote a short paper about diplomatic telegrams sent during the 1956 Revolution from the Budapest-based American, British and Soviet legations⁴. This article was based on two short booklets, containing a selection of diplomatic documents. „*Secret reports*”⁵ was published in 1989 and it contains British and American⁶ diplomatic telegrams sent from Budapest and some of the replies and instructions received respectively from London and Washington. The „*Yeltsin-dossier*”⁷ is the compilation of different documents⁸ transmitted by Boris Yeltsin in 1992 to Árpád Göncz, the Hungarian President of the Republic. In that

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⁴ Péter Kovács: Understanding or Misunderstanding (About Diplomatic Telegrams sent from the American, British and Soviet Legations in Budapest between 23 October – 4 November 1956), Miskolc Journal of International Law, Vol 3(2006) N° 3 („1956 Hungary”) <http://www.mjil.hu>, pp. 14-27,

⁵ Titkos jelentések 1956 okt. 23-nov.4, Hírlapkiadó Publishers 1989 Budapest (in the following: Secret Reports)

⁶ I assume from a comparative reading of other articles written about diplomatic coverage of 1956 that the booklet published in Hungarian should be the translation of several pieces contained in: Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957, Eastern Europe. Volume XXV, Washington DC 1990 (FRUS Vol. XXV). However, there is no explicit reference to this in the habitual way.

⁷ A „Jelcin-dosszié” Szovjet dokumentumok 1956-ról Századvég, 1956-os Intézet as Publishers 1993 Budapest (in the following: Yeltsin-dossier)

⁸ Most of the documents liberated at that time from the most serious embargo, are reports about different meetings of the Politbureau of the Soviet Communist Party, or reports made by the Soviet ambassador to the UN and the instructions sent to him. This book, however contains also analyses made by Yuri Andropov (at that time ambassador to Hungary) or reports made by top Soviet officials (Mikoyan, Suslov and KGB general Serov) during their mission in Hungary, transmitted by Andropov to Moscow.

article, I have expressed my impression (or at least a feeling) that – contrary to the often-mentioned lack of information and the unpreparedness of American diplomacy in 1956, for which the staff of the Legation is also blamed by some historians⁹. - the cited telegrams give evidence that both the US and the British Legations early on understood the importance of the 1956 events, and attempted not only to inform their home offices, but also to encourage them to move in directions, which in hindsight can be seen as plausible but regrettably missed opportunities.

In the telegrams reviewed, we could perceive a growing need and desire of the American and British Legations for clear instructions, and in their absence, a willingness to take independent initiatives. The burden created by technical (or political) communications difficulties in the first week of the Revolution was clear. In that situation, both Legations undertook to make statements to the Hungarian insurgents, public and crowds of visitors which were responsive, compatible with their diplomatic situation, and pro-Hungarian without committing their governments. Apparently, the Legations were not only in possession of detailed information about military and political events but their prognoses of Soviet actions and of political developments in the Revolution were quite reasonable. Their sources of information were diversified. The proposals from the Legations to their home offices were activist, suggesting very strong political and economic assistance as well as humanitarian help. The involvement of the United Nations, the proper use of the procedural precedents of the General Assembly and the Security Council were considered. They were apparently informed only *via* the international mass media about the steps taken at the United Nations, with little information reaching them from their home offices.

To my mind, a most important issue during this period was the idea of Hungarian neutrality: the possibility of which was discussed in some British and American telegrams, prior to its official proclamation by Imre Nagy's Government.

The decision of the Nagy Government about neutrality, made on the 1st of November, was linked in both oral and written arguments to the unexplained and rapidly increasing reentry of Soviet troops¹⁰. We know already that the day before, the British Legation proposed once again to the Foreign Office that it reconsider an Austrian-type neutrality for Hungary.¹¹ We know also that the American legation made a similar proposal.¹²

But I have already expressed my opinion that it is completely unrealistic to imagine that the Nagy government would not have previously consulted the Legations, which had already shown ample signs of their sympathy, with regard to such an important step as a declaration of Hungarian neutrality. I have also written that the suggestions or ideas prepared later for use

⁹ Veszített illúziók. Moszkva, Washington, Budapest és az 1956-os forradalom Osiris 2006 Budapest p. 168 (Hungarian translation of the book: Gáti, Charles: Failed Illusions, Moscow, Washington, Budapest, and the 1956 Hungarian Revolt, (Stanford University Press 2006)

¹⁰ It is worth noting that one of the despatches of John MacCormack, the local correspondent of New York Times refers to the broadcasting of such a promise already on October 31. The despatch refers to the joint declaration of ministers János Kádár, Zoltán Tildy and Ferenc Erdei. (NYT, October 31, 1956, p.1, 21) See also in the text in: Richard Lettis: The Hungarian Revolt, <http://www.hungarian-history.hu/lib/revolt/>

¹¹ Telegram of October 31 from the UK Legation, n° 517 and NH 10110/202 (Secret Reports p.94-95);

¹² Telegram of October 30 from the US Legation, n° 188, checking number 18108 (Secret Reports p.80-81); See also Gáti: *op. cit* p. 165-166

within the US Government by Spencer Barnes,¹³ the Chargé d'affaires, could have been expressed by him, perhaps without specific intentions, in Hungary and thus reached the Nagy Government, quite possibly through others. I also wrote that "In this historically unique climate of my country, the diplomats' thinking and unintended statements could have reached the Nagy government and influenced its decisions concerning Hungary's neutrality. And based on what I said above, that would not be at all unexpected..."¹⁴

In all of this, I expressed my feelings.... and not historically proven facts. I have emphasized in the earlier article that I am a professor of international law and by no means a historian. However, even from a short diplomatic experience on my part, the Legations' feelings of isolation from their home offices were familiar. But having read the diplomatic reports of 1956, I had a feeling of perplexity: how can one explain that we hear nothing of any direct or indirect contacts between the Legations and the Nagy government? About ten years earlier, Hungarian diplomacy carried on secret talks with British and American diplomatic and intelligence circles concerning conditions and timing for Hungary to leave the Axis in World War II. When official diplomats could not (or even might not) take a formal step, scholars, intellectuals, journalists, artists were used as messengers. But, as I have written in the introduction of the earlier article, "the documents referred to herein are from two books containing only a selection of documents which have been made available to the public."¹⁵

So, the question remains open: effectively, the contacts did not exist. If not, why not? And who was responsible?

After having published the article in the 1956 special issue of the *Miskolc Journal of International Law*¹⁶, I had the great pleasure of receiving reactions not only from colleagues but also from other most eminently qualified persons, authors of many of the diplomatic telegrams under review, retired US Foreign Service Officers. *Jordan Thomas Rogers* (85) who was serving at the American legation from August 1953 until December 1957. At the time of the 1956 Revolution, he was Second Secretary and Political Officer. We have exchanged a good number of E-mails and at Mr Rogers's proposal, *Ernest A. Nagy* (79) - who was Consul in Budapest until September 1956 and who is the author of a short but interesting and detailed monograph¹⁷ about 1956 - also joined us¹⁸. They have had several discussions with *Géza Katona* (90), who served in the Legation from 1953 through most of 1957. He has been interviewed and quoted by a number of authors and books dealing with the Revolution. I was particularly happy about this interesting exercise when thanks to modern technology, we could exchange

¹³ After his return to Washington, Spencer Barnes was working in the Policy Planning Staff of the State Department and he was author of such internal prognosis and documents about the relationship of the United States vis-a-vis the Central and Eastern European countries which can be considered as more or less followed in the later decades: he emphasized also the necessity to place some distance between the Communist power and civil society, he pointed out the importance of active links *inter alia* by well chosen scholarships, etc. We have the impression that he was a recognized expert in Central European and Hungarian affairs.

See the relevant documents in: Foreign Relations of the United States Vol X, Part 1, FRUS 1958-60 Section 3 of 19. See namely the document of August 26, 1958, PPS Files: Lot 67 D 548

¹⁴ Kovács: *op. cit* p.27

¹⁵ Kovács: *ibid*

¹⁶ <http://www.mjil.hu>

¹⁷ Nagy, Ernest A: Crisis Decision Setting and Response: The Hungarian Revolution, National Security Affairs Monograph 78-1, March 1978 Washington DC, National Defense University

¹⁸ There is no kinship between the Prime Minister Imre Nagy and Mr. Ernest Nagy.

views, feelings and acquired information. I had the conviction that our exchange of e-mails was of more than just personal interest and could provide as well a small (but certainly interesting) contribution to the true history of 1956. That's why we have come to the conclusion that the outcome of our electronic conversation could be a kind of interview, based on the exchanged e-mails and annotated where necessary according to the available scientific sources. The electronic conversation was done during December 2006 - February 2007 and the final edited version was approved by them. It is very important to note however – as Tom Rogers rightly put it in one of his E-mails - that we're working on the caveat that fifty years is a long time, and we recognize that the human tendency to remember what one wants to remember and not what actually happened is a powerful force that probably cannot be eliminated altogether, however much we may try. He also pointed out the human tendency to place oneself at the center of significant activity, to the detriment of others, who in this case may be deceased but whose contributions were very important even if unrecognized here.

II.

Arrival in Hungary

Kovács: Mr Rogers, how close have you been to the 1956 events? What were your first impressions about a Hungary in turbulence?

Rogers: We arrived in Budapest in August 1953, my wife and I and three daughters. A fourth daughter was born at the Sport Kórház (Athletes' Hospital) in December 1954. My previous post had been in Germany, in Berlin at the outbreak of the Berlin blockade in 1948, and then Frankfurt. I was assigned to Budapest as Economic Officer, the only one in the Legation who paid any attention to that side of the economy. The US had no significant trade relations with Hungary, and sought none, so I attempted to keep track of prices, the national budget, and such matters. We were interested in what Nagy was trying to do with his "New Course" in 1953, but that didn't last long. We enjoyed Hungary, made a few Hungarian friends, we were close to Vienna, and so after two years, when the Political Officer was transferred, I requested to take his place and return for another two years. This was granted.

All during the summer of 1956, as we all know, Hungary was beginning to seethe, responding to Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin, and then later to events in Poland. What surprised us in the Legation was that the Soviets did not respond as they had in the past to the increasing demands for greater forms of freedom, and as we expected that they would, by arrests and other retaliation. Their failure to do this led to more demands, and we described the Soviet dilemma at one point as a slippery slope. We suspected that there was disagreement within the Kremlin over the proper response to developments in Hungary.

As we got closer to October. 23, I attended the Rajk reburial in early October, and then some of the meetings of students, etc. in mid-October, including the march to Bem tér (Bem square) on October 23. Contrary to what Gati says in his book we actually had three native Hungarian speakers in the Legation for much of 1956: Géza Katona, Political attaché. Anton Nyerges as

press officer, and Ernest Nagy as Consul, who left I believe in September. Nyerges and I would go together to the meetings and parades; through diligent effort I had picked up some Hungarian, but not enough.

Kovács: Mr Nagy, you left the country before the outbreak of the Revolution, didn't you? You could however closely follow the changes in the spring and summer of 1956.

Nagy: I arrived in Budapest on April 4, 1952. It was my very first post of assignment. As a bachelor, I tasted quite a bit of Budapest's night life, including the Pipacs and the Budapest Kávéház/Moulin Rouge. I became quite friendly with a number of Hungarians whom I met in this manner, notably Chappy (Csöpi) Orlay Jenő, the orchestra leader at the Moulin Rouge, and Ferenc Aszódi, a member of Chappy's trumpet section. I believe both were present at Minister Ravndal's residence on October 11, 1953 (along with Tom & Géza and many others) when I married Helen Stephens who, since May 20, 1952, was a Secretary at the Legation. (May I note parenthetically, night life and the bachelor existence came to an end at this time). Our only child, David, was born at the Sport Kórház on October 7, 1954.

As Consul, and with the ability to speak Hungarian, any and every Hungarian who ventured into the Legation was sent to me. I can assure you that I encountered a broad gamut of visitors, ranging from *agents provocateur* to naive, desperate people seeking political asylum, including the very occasional American citizen who, for one reason or another, had found himself embroiled in the Soviet gulag. There were also occasionally legitimate, conventional visa or emigration applicants. The only Hungarians who stood a chance of being allowed by the Communist authorities to emigrate were the very elderly whose pensions the government was happy to be rid of. Among my more unusual visitors were Zoltán Kodály and his muse, and the father of Zsa Zsa Gabor and the Gabor sisters.

It is a matter of continuing deep regret to me personally that I was not present at the Legation during the period of the Revolution. Fortunately, I was sent from Cincinnati, where we were spending part of our home leave, to Salzburg where I helped open up Camp Roeder where thousands of Hungarian refugees were processed for emigration to the USA and elsewhere. Happily, among those whom I helped to forward to the USA were three of my best friends from the clandestine Budapest Hot Club, a group of rabid jazz fans who listened surreptitiously to "Music USA," a jazz broadcast on the Voice of America conducted by Willis Conover, who was the most famous American throughout the Soviet bloc and virtually unknown in America.

The fact that we were transferred a month before the Revolution's outbreak is indicative of how utterly unexpected were the dramatic events which commenced on October 23. I'm quite sure the State Department would not have transferred me at that time, nor would I have readily agreed to such a transfer, if one had an inkling that the seemingly impregnable Communist grip on the nation was capable of being challenged and even overthrown. Yes, of course, there was ferment, the Petőfi Circle and other reverberations from the XX Congress of the CPSU, but a virtually successful revolution? Unthinkable.

Finally, due to the chronology of my service in Budapest, I am unable to contribute firsthand to the reconstruction of the events which transpired during the Revolution itself, except to the

extent that I observed those events from afar and researched them in the preparation of my monograph on the subject during my attendance at the National War College in 1972-73.

Rogers: I went to the October 23 parade alone. That night my wife and I were at the radio station before shooting took place. We witnessed the fury of the crowd when four or five truckloads of Hungarian infantry attempted to drive down Bródy Sándor street but could not because of the crowd; and then the joyous reaction when the trucks backed out. (This was an hour or so before the first shooting.)

I was in Budapest through the first period of the uprising, except for a quick overnight trip with the Assistant Military Attache to Vienna on October 29, returning October 30. During that period we were altogether or largely cut off from telegraphic and telephone connections with Washington, and so we carried several days' supply of coded messages for transmission through the Embassy in Vienna. We were able to send messages from Budapest, I believe, only late on the 23rd through our usual method as coded commercial cables, but at that point the Hungarian post office (I guess) claimed they were unable to transmit. A few days later, they accepted messages again.

Then on November 2, faced with the rumors of Soviet re-invasion, a convoy of wives and children of the US plus several other Legations, plus some Red Cross and other NGOs, was formed and left for Vienna in late morning. We had one officer from our Legation with them. They were turned back by Soviet troops at the border, and returned to Budapest in heavy snow, after a number of us had driven out to meet them. Our new Minister had arrived that day, and he called a meeting as soon as they had returned, and decided that they would make another effort the next morning, having received assurances from the Soviet Embassy that day that they would not be held up at the border. Tom Wailes, the new Minister, instructed husbands, including myself, to accompany their families to the border, see them safely across, and then return to Budapest. Bob Clark, Admin Officer, was in charge of the convoy. So we did, on the morning of November 3, but were held up once again at the border (all this is a story in itself), but by this time the road back to Budapest was blocked by Soviet troops. Dan Sprecher, Economics Officer, who led the convoy on November 2, was able to find a school in Mosonmagyaróvár which put us up (some 50 people or more) and fed us! Amazing! Next morning, of course, November 4, we heard on the radio of the second Soviet attack. Meanwhile, the group was negotiating with the Soviets in Mosonmagyaróvár, and the State Department was screaming at the Soviet Embassy in Washington, and we were finally permitted to leave on November 5. However, the Soviets refused to let the husbands return to Budapest, so the entire group went through to Vienna. My old passport shows that I returned on November 14, and again, this time with my family, on December 5.

So, in effect I was present in Hungary until November 3, and absent until November 14. But of course I heard a good bit about the events during that period.

Kovács: How can you describe assignment of tasks at the legation in the intermediate period – after the leaving of Minister Ravndal and before the arrival of Minister Wailes - when the direction was assumed by the *Chargé d'affaires* Spencer Barnes?

Rogers: After the departure of Minister Christian Ravndal in July, and Consul Ernest Nagy in September, the legation personnel consisted of Spencer Barnes, Chargé, Daniel Sprecher as economic officer, Anton Nyerges as press attaché, Géza Katona as political attaché, and Brice Meeker as agricultural attaché. I was the political officer. There were also one or two code clerks, plus secretaries and Marine guards. Nyerges and Katona spoke perfect Hungarian. In addition, there were the military attachés who sent their messages separately. However, during the period of the revolution, normal activities were put aside and the whole staff worked very much as a team, particularly by moving around the city (when it was possible to do so) to observe what was going on. This was first done at about 9 PM on October 23, when Barnes assembled many of the staff and had us drive around the city for an hour or so and then reassemble at the legation, and put together a telegram. Most of the reporting cables and cables recommending actions would be drafted by Barnes or myself, frequently information containing contributions gathered by others. Nyerges would pay particular attention to the press and would put together advice for the Voice of America and other media. Katona spent a good bit of time at the front door, receiving the many visitors, who frequently provided timely information re events both in Budapest and around the country and/or requested assistance of one kind or other. This proved to be a vary valuable source of information. Meeker was very active, particularly in moving around the city and reporting on his observations. Barnes of course would normally approve all messages, as well as drafting a number himself. Any that I wrote would be subject to his modification and approval, but he did not disapprove very much.

Communications Difficulties

Kovács: *Telegraphic communications between the Legation and the State Department were broken several times during the period of the Revolution, were they not, and this certainly caused problems, I am certain.*

Rogers: Yes, that is correct, although we also had an open telex line at times as well. Normally, we would send and receive coded telegrams through the Hungarian Post Office. As already stated, we were told quite early on, perhaps as early as around midnight of the 23rd, that because of technical problems no more cables could be sent or received, but we were certain that the decision was political, not technical. The British Legation had its own radio facility, but as I understood it, our FBI had refused permission for the Hungarian Legation in Washington to have its own radio, so we were not permitted to have one in Budapest.

Whether we were able to send them or not, we of course continued to prepare cables, and to date and time them. On October 29, the Assistant Military Attache and I drove to Vienna with all the coded messages we had not been able to transmit, and had them sent by the Embassy in Vienna. I do not know whether the cables referred to in your earlier article showed the dates and times of preparation or of receipt in Washington. The Attache (Capt. Tom Gleason) and I returned the next day, but I believe that by then the Revolution had progressed far enough so that the "technical" problems at the Post Office had been cleared up, i. e., the insurgents by then controlled the Post Office, and we were able to communicate normally. In any event, we brought back radio equipment with us, and used it for a time when communications were

again shut off on November 4. But this equipment was not very satisfactory and could not be used for long messages. In any event, the new government under Kádár discovered in about ten days that we were using it and told us to desist. But by that time, we were able to use the Post Office normally.

The question arises, why did we wait almost a week after the Revolution was under way to utilize the Embassy in Vienna? The road to Vienna was open throughout that period, in fact, I believe it was open all the time until just before the US convoy reached the border and was turned back on November 2.

I don't know the answer to that question. We had the telex open for part of the time, and in fact may have been able to send a few messages through the Post Office. We tried phoning through our Embassies in other countries, Prague, Moscow, Belgrade, etc. but with limited success. And I don't know who suggested we drive messages out to Vienna. It may have been Barnes, it could have been Clark (the Admin. officer), it could have been any of several others. I don't remember suggesting it myself.

And in any event, we felt very much on our own, having at best limited communications with Washington, and not receiving messages from Moscow and other posts, and so with little knowledge of the activities and attitudes in Washington. I would like to believe, that had we had a better comprehension of what was or was not taking place in Washington, our own communications would have been more useful. As you point out, this feeling of isolation is somewhat endemic to this profession. You are not told very much, but yet in times of stress you are expected to behave as though you have full knowledge not only of events but also of the thought processes of the Great Men at home!

Kovács: As you look back to October 1956, can you recall contacts with the Legation established or initiated by Imre Nagy's government?

Rogers: The Nagy government did not approach the Legation at all, that is, until the declaration of neutrality on November 1. Nor did the Legation approach the Nagy government. Let's recall our staffing situation: Christian Ravndal had been Minister (equivalent to Ambassador) since 1952, when he was sent in with a primary objective the release of several US military pilots who had accidentally strayed over Hungarian territory¹⁹. In this he was successful, and then became a great friend of the Hungarian people, learned the language well, and made frequent suggestions to Washington on ways to improve relations. An example is a significant flood relief program which I believe he proposed and then became very active in when the Danube was flooded in 1953 or 1954. But he was transferred out in the summer of 1956, to become Ambassador to Ecuador. No new Minister had replaced him when the Revolution broke out in October of 1956, which I consider a serious dereliction on the part of the Department. I don't know how Ravndal would have conducted himself had he been in Budapest during the Revolution, or what he would have done, but I'm convinced that he

¹⁹ Because of the Hungarian refusal to recognize the competence of the International Court of Justice, the United States unsuccessfully tried to put this issue on the agenda of the ICJ, and the Court had to close the case without a decision *in merito*.

Case of the Treatment in Hungary of Aircraft and Crew of the United States of America (United States v. Hungary), order, July 12, 1954, ICJ Reports 1954, p. 99

would have taken the bit in his teeth and made any number of proposals, with a principal objective that of building a fire under the Department of State.

Whether he would have attempted to see Nagy when he became Prime Minister, of course I don't know. But it certainly cannot be excluded. Neither can I say what he would have considered to have been the most promising actions to be taken or attempted by the US and other countries, or the UN. But Ravndal was a man both of ideas and of action, and we can be confident that both would have been forthcoming.

With Ravndal gone and no new Minister in place, Spencer Barnes was in charge of the Legation. Barnes was a cogent analyst, perceptive and careful. An excellent writer. But he was not an activist, and in personality was quiet and could even be called timorous. He could not express himself forcefully. Early on, he asked that a white flag be raised over his home and that the Legation shutters be closed, although he was persuaded to cancel both instructions. He would have been reluctant to attempt to approach Nagy unless instructed to do so by Washington. He did think up the idea of proposing a cease-fire to the Foreign Office, stating that the Legation would be "glad to do whatever possible to assist in ending carnage." This message was delivered by telephone to the Deputy Foreign Minister on October 28, and was rejected out of hand. Conceivably, that message could have been taken by the Nagy Government as an opener had it wished to engage the Legation further, but the Ministry was evidently still under pro-Soviet control when it was delivered.

One important point should be kept in mind in consideration of contacts with the new Nagy Government. The United States was not many years away from its McCarthy experience, and Imre Nagy was, at the beginning of the uprising, a Communist, and after that, an ex-Communist. We know that the US Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, was very suspicious of Nagy because of his background (I'm not sure about President Eisenhower), and that Dulles raised a question about Cardinal Mindszenty providing a focal point for the insurgency if support for Nagy wavered too much. What we are considering here, in one example, is the US Legation, whether personified by Ravndal or by Barnes, going in to Nagy and saying to him, "Cool it; don't let this thing go too far," in other words, don't let it become too anti-Communist. Despite the US experience with Tito, it's difficult for me to visualize such an instruction coming from Dulles, or of his reacting with anything but horror had one of his subordinates taken such a step on his own (as Ravndal might well have done).

But your question related to the Nagy Government taking the initiative in approaching the Legation. So far as I know, the Nagy Government approached no western representation with respect to its political makeup, its neutrality, possible action by the UN, etc., until November 1. On that date, at 6 p. m. or later, Spencer Barnes was called to the Foreign Office, where he was met, I believe, by the head²⁰ of the American desk and given an Aide-Memoire. This stated that Hungary was withdrawing from the Warsaw Pact and declaring itself a neutral nation, and (I believe) appealing to the UN and to the western powers for their support in Hungarian efforts to bring about the removal of Soviet troops from Hungary. I do not recall that they had any extensive discussion. I believe similar messages were presented to several other western Legations. Barnes called me to the Legation on his return. The text of the

²⁰ Péter Mód received Spencer Barnes.

message was forwarded immediately to Washington, and we then prepared comments and sent those.

I must say, that in hindsight, the inaction in this regard on the part of Nagy does not appear very surprising to me. Events moved with dizzying speed and almost total confusion. I believe Nagy had no history of contacts with westerners. Had he approached the US or other Legations, what would have been his objective? At what point in the uprising could he have come forward with a well thought-out query or proposal, likely to have achieved its purpose? In my understanding of his personality, he was not a forceful or decisive leader. He would have known that an appeal or even an approach to the West would have been viewed as the ultimate evidence of anti-Soviet purposes by the Soviets, and he might have feared by many among the Hungarian leadership.

In an earlier telex with Washington, we were asked what was Nagy's degree of support, but at that point it was too early to say. Also, as you might imagine, the Legation was approached by a great many Hungarians, seeking assistance, even asking the Legation to act as intermediaries, or just singing the national anthem. One group came to my house and gave my wife a lengthy appeal to the UN, which she immediately read over the telephone to a secretary and it was then promptly forwarded to Washington.

Kovács: What were your relations with the UK Legation? They were not contacted by the Nagy Government either, were they? The US was at the same time a NATO ally of the British and opposed to the UK-French-Israeli action in Egypt. Did this affect your relations? What was the British thinking on an eventual settlement?

Rogers: I had very warm relations with the British Head of Chancery, Christopher Cope (Kit Cope), who suffered from a bad leg injured during an escape from a German prisoner-of-war camp in World War II. He died at least ten years ago. We were in regular contact prior to October 23. I do not recall seeing him during the Revolution until October 28, though we may have spoken on the telephone. His Minister was named Fry, rather conservative and hide-bound. So far as I know, he and Spencer Barnes were not in touch during the Revolution, though they may have been.

As indicated above, the British had radio facilities. On October 28 (or possibly, October 27), when we had had no communications with Washington for several days, and with Barnes' approval, I phoned Kit Cope and asked if I could bring over a message. I don't recall now how open I was about our purpose on the phone, but in any event I went over, and my recollection is that it was in a Hungarian tank, the streets at that time being quite dangerous. It's possible that I went in a Hungarian armored car. In any event, I carried a message, and requested that the UK Legation forward it to the UK Foreign Office, for passage to the US Embassy in London for transmission to Washington. I know that it was sent to London, but have never seen a reference to it in US documentation.

In that message we were attempting to describe the type of Hungarian coalition which we thought would have the greatest chance for Soviet acceptance; I know we favored the inclusion of Social Democrats and were opposed to the Catholic Right (i.e. Cardinal Mindszenty). I am not sure now how we felt about the Smallholders (though a couple of days

later²¹ Nagy included Béla Kovács in the cabinet he announced had been formed). In any event, Fry agreed to send the cable, though he demanded that it be shortened significantly and he argued vehemently that we should move the "acceptable" mixture to the right. The tank commander had given me twenty minutes in the Legation, so Fry, Cope and I had a very strong argument, with Cope siding with me.

I was not aware of the Suez crisis at that point, and in any event it did not affect our relations with the UK Legation. Kit Cope and I remained in touch after both of us had left Hungary, and in 1987 (in response to a letter I had written him concerning a forthcoming paper by Martin ben Swartz²²) wrote to me as follows:

„First, to judge by the several 1956 letters from our Moscow Embassy that I saw, and a long personal letter of the period to me from the Foreign Office Hungary desk: (1) the British government did not think we had any levers to use on the Russians; (2) never thought that an outcome even as good as Gomulka's could be achieved in Hungary; and (3) would never have been able to interest British ministers in pursuing *any* objective regarding Hungary, since they were 100% obsessed with Suez. Mark Russell, our 3rd Secretary and I wanted Fry to urge the Foreign Office to adopt as objective something like a Gomulka solution. Fry believed all Commies equally evil; the only acceptable outcome for him was, say a Bela Kovacs solution. Did he not change your famous telegram in that direction?

I had several meetings with Anna Kéthly²³, before and during the Revolution, and very frequent messages from her (news about the struggles within the Communist Party, etc. and I met her the evening she received Nagy's invitation to join the Government.--and she wanted advice whether to accept: she and I both believed a multi-party regime would be the last straw and would decide the Russians to come back in. She still felt obliged to accept.

I don't believe that, once Nagy broadened his government, the Russians, even the doves, felt they had any choice but to invade. Nothing the West could have offered (or threatened?) would have deflected them at that point (or earlier?) I don't believe that Suez brought them back in, or that with the absence of Suez they would have stayed out. As Krushchev said to Tito on I think November 2 at Brioni: "Thank heaven for the Anglo-French action: it gives me the

²¹ Béla Kovács was appointed first as minister for agriculture (October 26-31), then state-minister (November 2-4) which meant cca. deputy PM without portfolio.

²² The referred paper is a Ph. D. thesis for the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, 1988. by Martin Ben Swartz, entitled "A New Look at the 1956 Hungarian Revolution: Soviet Opportunism, American Acquiescence." UMI Dissertation Information Service 1991 Ann Arbor, Michigan

²³ Anna Kéthly (1889-1976) was one of the leaders of social-democratic party. She was an MP between 1922-1948, imprisoned between 1949-1954 and state-minister in Imre Nagy's government (November 3-4). Sent to the session of the Socialist International in Vienna, on November 2, she was appointed to be member of the Hungarian delegation to the UN and she flew to New York. She did not return to Hungary and she was a leading, charismatic personality of the Hungarian emigration in Western Europe.

opportunity, even the pretext, for what I must do anyway in Hungary." (Source: the Yugoslav Ambassador in Moscow, I recall.)²⁴

Today, given the lines we have to Moscow, we might in similar circumstances try to negotiate for a sort of Gomulka solution but that would mean 1) no Suez and 2) strong US- British pressure on Nagy, Kéthly, etc., to accept continued Communist monopoly of power, with Nagy or even Kádár as the Gomulka. Perhaps the situation in Hungary in 1957 would not in fact be all that different from what it is now! Gomulka ended by toeing the line.

If Fry had been prepared to distinguish Nagyists from the other Commies and if the Foreign Office had been prepared--and unobsessed with Suez enough--to instruct us to approach Nagy, György Heltai²⁵, etc., we did in fact have the links, as I am sure you did. It is of course nonsense for Heltai to say that we were not in the picture. We had several leads to the people round Nagy, Commie and non- Commie. We were very discreet about them and they were all funneled incidentally through me. The Russians' White Book giving their version of the Revolution described the only one of our leads which they discovered: to Kardos²⁶, to whom Nagy gave the MS²⁷ his famous book. We also had leads galore to the Petőfi lot and Smallholders; and I met several others of Anna Kéthly's Social Democrat colleagues. I cannot think who Heltai saw. His story²⁸ does

²⁴ For more details, see: Micunovic, Veljko: Moscow Diary, Doubleday 1980 Garden City,

²⁵ György Heltai (1914-1994) participated in the communist side of the Hungarian resistance movement against Germans (1944). He worked for the ministry of foreign affairs (1945-1948), sentenced to imprisonment in the context of Rajk's trial (like Péter Mód, see *infra*) and released also in 1954. Later, he worked for Imre Nagy as foreign policy advisor. When Nagy took charge of the ministry for foreign affairs, Heltai was appointed as deputy minister. After the Soviet intervention, Heltai left the country and first he worked in Brussels then he taught at different American universities.

²⁶ László Kardos (1918-1980): ethnograph and sociologue, member of the Hungarian resistance movement against Germans (1944). He was one of the organizers of the movement of „colleges of the people” during the war and after. (i.e. an institutional network, granting accommodation, grants, special complementary formation for students having come mostly from lower classes. He was secretary general of the movement, then director in the ministry of education, till his disgrace of 1950. He worked then in the Ethnographic Museum. In 1957, he - and Árpád Göncz (lawyer, writer, translator and head of state between 1990-2000) - maintained contact with the British legation in order to smuggle out Imre Nagy's writings in Mr Cope's box of bottles of champagne. For this, Kardos and Göncz, as well as László Regéczy-Nagy, the driver of the legation were condemned to life imprisonment (Regéczy-Nagy for 15 years) but they got back their freedom with the amnesty of the sixties.

²⁷ manuscript

²⁸ This reference concerns an interview made by Martin ben Swartz with György Heltai. Here, Heltai is speaking about a conversation with some British diplomats in September 1956 when he bought the consul's car.

„After our drives the consul would invite me into the embassy for tea, where we would be joined by three or four other embassy officials. This began in September 1956, when it was already well known that I was a close friend of Imre Nagy. But despite that, and despite the fact that I was in the British embassy several times, I was never asked anything about Nagy, about the plans of his followers, or about the strength of our group. Even after the reburial of Rajk, when the power of our movement had to have been obvious, the British still showed no interest in asking my views of what was going on.”

Swartz: *op. cit* p. 521

As far as Heltai's remembrances are concerned, the notes he made just after the collapse of the revolution, already as an asylum-seeker are accessible:

not ring true. Even if it is, would he have revealed his closeness to Nagy?

Fry might have decided on approaches to Nagy, etc., since HE was convinced that the Revolution had won. He wrote a report (telegram), "Whatever else, the future of Hungary is not communism," but he was frightened to do anything at all risky and barely acquiesced in the discreet contacts we had. I was convinced the Russians would never let Hungary go and would invade. Fry and I spent a day (October 29, I think) arguing this, with the result that he amended the telegram just mentioned and became even more cautious about our contacts. Because of this we tried not to let our Nagyists contacts know their information was coming through to the British. So Heltai would not know of our inquiries.

In summary: (1) The British Legation had several leads to supporters of Nagy, and several to the Smallholders, Petőfi group and Social Democrats, especially from February to November 1956- and thereafter. The contacts very rarely knew that the inquiry, etc., came from the British. We were very secretive. (Heltai would not have known). We were VERY well informed. (2) Whom did Heltai contact? The British staff was tiny. The writer heard of all such approaches. Was H also very secretive, about HIS identity and purpose? (3) The British were very concerned about Hungary. But they were divided whether to support Nagy, as the best possible answer, or to work (e.g. diplomatically or *via* the BBC) for "something better." Our levers were very weak!! (4) A view on this, let alone decisions on policy, could not be obtained August-November 1956 given the Government's total absorption with Suez."²⁹

Heltai, György: Hungary 1953-1956 (p. 1-31)

http://files.osa.ceu.hu/holdings/other/blinken/pdf/B_SF_42.pdf

Heltai, György: The Shaping of the Hungarian Foreign Policy after 1945 (p.1-4)

http://files.osa.ceu.hu/holdings/other/blinken/pdf/B_SF_43.pdf

(Both in scanned form, from the typed original in the collection of Mr Blinken, American ambassador to Budapest between 1994-1998: Donald and Vera Blinken Collection – Hungarian Refugee Interviews from 1957-1958) <http://files.osa.ceu.hu/digitalarchive/blinken/related.html>

²⁹ Letter published with Mrs Bettina Cope's kind permission.

Other reasons for lack of contacts with the Nagy Government...

Kovács: How can we explain that- compared to the British Mission- the U. S. Legation did not reach out to the Nagy Government of its own accord?

Rogers: In so far as we are talking about any contacts, taken at our initiative, with the government of Imre Nagy formed during the Revolution, I should point out that I do not recall discussing with Barnes, on either his initiative or mine, the advisability of an approach to the Nagy Government during the uprising. Had we thought of it, and been able to, we probably would have sought Washington's approval, and made suggestions for our objectives. In the absence of a message from Washington, our principal purpose would have been to seek information; in any event, we did not consider making the approach. (There was, of course, the Note of October 28 concerning a cease-fire, which was delivered by phone on October 28, discussed above.)

The better question might be why did the US Legation not have better contacts throughout Hungarian society, with persons or groups who might at some point *become* important, or at least had or might some day have, valuable information? It is a very fair question, and the Legation has been criticized after 1956 on this point.

To begin with, several employees of the Legation had been arrested before I arrived. Ravndal had worked very hard in their behalf after he had obtained the release of the pilots who had strayed over Hungarian territory and forced down. We knew that the AVO³⁰ had placed hearing devices in the Legation building and in our homes. I was not given Hungarian language training before my arrival, though I began to take lessons promptly, and did have a month's training while on home leave in 1955. Furthermore, given the political situation in Hungary, it almost goes without saying that attempts to develop worthwhile contacts would have been risky for all involved, and probably would not have provided a great deal of information that would have made it worthwhile.

It can also be argued, of course, and in fact I would make that argument, that the State Department should have made a much stronger effort, not just in Hungary but in every post, to assign only persons speaking the language of the post to positions where the language was important. Military attaches were all given language training prior to their assignment, though I have the impression it was not always very successful.

This is not to say that I, with no Hungarian language capability at first, and limited throughout my stay, was not able to perceive and interpret developments in Hungary. Some Hungarians spoke English and many spoke German, which at that point I knew pretty well. I knew and had contact with a fair number of Hungarians (as did my wife) and the totality of information and impressions which we and the Legation staff picked up should not be underestimated. We had daily translations of newspapers. Some friendly Legations, and I would mention

³⁰ AVO (Államvédelmi Osztály), later called AVH (Államvédelmi Hatóság, Office for the Defense of the State) was the Hungarian equivalent of the Soviet NKVD, KGB, etc.) It was responsible for investigation in political crimes, for the guard of internment camps, repression of anticommunist behavior, intelligence etc

particularly the Yugoslav and Israeli, were generally better informed than we were, for obvious reasons, and were almost always happy to share their knowledge and opinions.

Two Hungarians, husband and wife³¹, employees of the Associated Press and United Press respectively, also had regular and open contact with the Legation. They in fact were next-door neighbors of mine, so our relationship was a close one. But they were not agents, although they were both arrested and charged as such, and were released from prison only a fairly short time prior to the Revolution.

Ernie Nagy and Géza Katona were both in regular touch with many more Hungarians than I was and were also able to gain more information from people they met casually and passed on their impressions. And it is self-evident that both of them, had they been in my position, would have been hugely benefited by their language knowledge. The type and usefulness of contacts which they may have been able to develop had they made a serious and continuous effort to do so at a significant level in the government can be debated, and clearly that would have been useful in 1956 (and let me repeat, the information and impressions which they passed on was substantial and important).

I also believe it is safe to say that had the US Legation made a serious effort to develop knowledgeable and significant contacts within the Hungarian government during the early 50s, that this almost certainly would not have been successful. That leaves open the question of seeking of useful contacts, particularly with Nagy and his supporters during and after he was Prime Minister, 1953-55. During his premiership, however, any known contacts with the West would almost certainly have been used against him by Mátyás Rákosi, the man whom Nagy had replaced in 1953 as Prime Minister at Soviet insistence. Furthermore, though we were happy with the Nagy "New Course," we still viewed the Hungarian government as a Communist government, with all that that implied.

Also, neither of my predecessors in the Legation, the Economic Officer whom I succeeded in 1953 and the Political Officer whom I succeeded in 1955, had significant contacts who were used as sources of information.

This question of contacts with knowledgeable Hungarians has been raised with me a number of times over the years, including not a few writers on the Revolution, and I have generally been placed on the defensive. But on attempting again to weigh the facts of the Legation's situation in Hungary, I've come to the point of concluding that a serious effort to develop knowledgeable contacts would have been very dangerous for the individuals, and most likely would not have provided the Legation with enough information and opinion to have proven worth the risk.

But all this is not to say that there were not steps which could have been taken, and were not. The French Minister, for example, not long before the Revolution, on the occasion of several French journalists visiting Budapest, invited a substantial number of Hungarian writers and intellectuals for a reception. The universal conclusion, I have heard, was that the present situation could not continue.

³¹ Mr Endre Marton and Mrs Ilona Marton. See *infra*.

We did not do that. No, that's not correct. We did not do that often enough or with sufficiently purposeful objectives.

I am not familiar in detail with the British network of contacts, which clearly was of value in 1956. I have the impression, in fact Kit Cope states as much, that there were generally one or more intermediaries between the contact and the Legation, and the former usually did not know that his information was being passed to the Legation.

Kovács: When we are talking about the necessity or the utility of Hungarian-US contact (during the Revolution), who should have taken the first step? Can you imagine the feasibility of the US Legation reaching out to the Nagy Government in 1956? The people on the streets of Budapest were convinced that American support would help Hungary reach a modus vivendi with the Soviets. The US Legation in Budapest shared this view, did it not? How could this support have been brought to life? What could the Hungarian Government have done? Did it miss an opportunity? What could the US Legation have done? Did it miss an opportunity?

Rogers: I have discussed that general question to some extent in responding to your previous query but let me make an additional point. I have said that the US Government, not too far removed from the McCarthy years, and in spite of its experience with Tito, viewed Nagy with considerable suspicion as an ex-Communist. And Nagy himself contributed to this image, particularly in his address from the Parliament on the evening of October 23.

I am not certain now just when we in the Legation began to see Nagy and his supporters in a different (more anti-Communist) light, and I believe that we did not place enough emphasis on this in our reporting. We perhaps did not fully realize just how suspicious Washington was of Nagy. Had we made a larger effort to "sell Nagy" to Washington and had we been able to transmit these messages promptly, then we *might* have had enough impact on Washington to have made a difference. (Also, *we might not* have!)

It is tempting to accept your unstated conclusion, that had the Hungarian government or the US Legation taken certain action, that history might have been different. Perhaps. But had there been a heavy rainstorm on October 23, history might have been different. And what action on the part of the Nagy government vis-a-vis the US government would have been effective? One can argue that had the Government called in Barnes (or even sent an intermediary to him with a message), *early in the revolution*, to the effect that "We don't know where this is going, but in all likelihood we will need your support against the Soviets and we seek it," that might have jolted the US Government. But I mentioned above that Nagy, with his personal history, and his personality, made the necessary action on part of the Hungarian Government or on his part personally, very unlikely.³² One can also argue that had the US Legation *early in the revolution* reached Nagy with the message, "we support you, but we need a request for support from you to our government" that might have had the same effect. The

³² See Swartz's interview with Miklós Vásárhelyi:

„- Did you, or any others in the Nagy group, have any contacts with Americans or with any other Western representatives, particularly through the summer of 1956, as pressure built up in Hungary for Imre Nagy to return to power?

- I did not have any contact with Western officials, and as far as I knew neither did anyone else. It is perhaps possible that somebody was speaking with the Americans, but I wouldn't know who.”

Swartz: *op. cit* p. 603

US Legation did not make that move. And, in the light of the personnel situation in the Legation (absence of a Minister), the confusion and uncertainty concerning the control over and direction of the insurgents, and the difficulty of communications with Washington, it is not surprising to me that *we* did not.

What I have said above does not take fully into account your discussion later of the situation within the Hungarian Foreign Ministry and the possible consideration there of some sort of initiative, probably with respect to Hungarian neutrality, from the Nagy Government to western legations. As I state later, had such an approach been made to the US Legation, I am confident we would have supported it strongly.

Nagy: I am strongly inclined to reinforce Tom's comments about the unlikelihood of Ravndal or Barnes or anyone else going to see Imre Nagy to persuade him to scale back the aims and aspirations of the Revolution. Nagy was not truly in charge of the Revolution - he was trying to catch up with it. He was a lifelong, dedicated Communist who, perhaps unbeknownst to himself, was being slowly transformed into a Hungarian patriot. Since he had gotten off on the wrong foot with the Freedom Fighters by addressing them as "Comrades," and because Gerő and others had made it seem that Nagy had asked the Soviets to intervene to put down the revolt, he was hardly in a position to sell restraint to the Freedom Fighters and we were not in a position to advocate it. In hindsight, strong efforts by Nagy to advocate an Austrian or Finnish or "Gomulka" outcome *might* have proved to be a meritorious way to reinforce the Soviets in their October 30 decision (i. e., to foreclose the reversal of October 31), but as Tom has pointed out several times, Washington was certainly not in a pro-active mood at the time. I am convinced that Imre Nagy was not really in control of events at any point in the Revolution. On the contrary, he was constantly catching up with the expanding aspirations of the street. It would therefore follow that attempting to persuade Nagy to curb the aspirations of the revolution would have been a complicated futile exercise. I have nothing of value to add, Tom, to your very interesting testimony. Spencer Barnes is, indeed, best described as rather timid, urbane, intelligent but basically timorous at a time when the situation called for boldness and vision. Having said that, the *really* timorous people were all in Washington and it is they, and not in any sense the Legation, who must bear the responsibility for failing in any way to assist or exploit the situation in Hungary.

Kovács: *But in fact, only the official contacts were missing on behalf of the Hungarian diplomacy?*

Rogers: You wonder why Nagy did not approach directly or indirectly the embassy and you do not understand the lack of earlier exploratory talks? I am trying to recall whether during Nagy's earlier period as Prime Minister, our Minister, Christian Ravndal, had any significant contacts with him. Of course, he was then seen as a more moderate Communist, not as anti-communist. And I believe that throughout, Washington and specifically Dulles, was more suspicious of Nagy as an ex-Communist than they should have been. I do not recall any contacts, but it would have been unlike Ravndal not to have had any. But looking through the Swartz's paper it quotes Heltai as saying Nagy had no western contacts. (It does say that Péter Mód³³ was the person who delivered the statement of November 1, although it states that he

³³ Illegal communist in the 30's, Péter Mód (1911-1996) left Hungary and he was living in France where he was a member of the Résistance in WW 2. Diplomat after 1947, he was serving in 1949 at the Hungarian legation in Paris where he had also the mission to report about his boss, envoy Mihály Károlyi. Called back, he was arrested in the context of the so called Rajk-trial and he was sentenced to imprisonment. Rehabilitated in 1954, he turned back to the Ministry of Foreign affairs in July 1956 and in October 1956, he was the president of the

brought it to the Legation, which is not correct.) And I am even more confident, that had Ravndal been in Budapest during the revolution, that he would have made an effort to see Nagy once he became Prime Minister. It would be interesting to know what foreign Ambassadors or Ministers Nagy did see while he was in office, other than Andropov. (Actually according to Heltai³⁴ or Vásárhelyi, he saw several³⁵ but no Westerners. But I believe at one point during the latter days, he did see Peinsipp³⁶, the Austrian Minister, but about armed persons crossing the border into Hungary). This is a major point made by Swartz, that before and during the Revolution, the Legation had no contact with Nagy and those around him, and made no effort to see him. The criticism is justified, I believe. Excuses can be made (we had nothing to tell him about US advice or instructions to see him; contact would have been incriminating; etc., etc.) I have said that Barnes was not an "activist," which is to say that he was not likely to have taken the initiative himself.³⁷

revolutionary committee of the Ministry. In the Kádár-regime, he was sent as ambassador to the United Nations, December 1956–December 1961. Later, he was deputy minister of foreign affairs (1961–1968), ambassador to Paris (1968–1974), ambassador to the Unesco in Paris (1975-1988). According to György Heltai, Mód was charged on his own request with the transmittance of diplomatic notes about the neutrality on November 1st. Heltai, György: A Varsói Szerződés felmondása (Egy tanú vallomása), Az igazság a Nagy Imre ügyben, [The denunciation of the Warsaw Treaty. A Witness's Testimony. The Truth in the Imre Nagy Affair] Bruxelles 1959 Európai Petőfi Kör p.86-88

³⁴ Heltai: „The Czech ambassador came in at least three times, and the Romanian ambassador once; they were both pretty upset. They each told us that what we were doing was causing them serious problems at home, particularly with their Hungarian minorities.”

Swartz: *op. cit.* p.516

³⁵ The Polish and the Yugoslav ambassador as well as a delegation of the Romanian Communist Party.

³⁶ At the meeting of November 3, envoy Peinsipp assured Imre Nagy that Austria would scrupulously observe all the commitments which derive from Austria neutrality and refused the allegations that Austria would furnish a basis for irregular units of Hungarian emigration. He emphasized that Austria had closed her borders and put them under quadripartite military checking. Ex prime minister Ferenc Nagy, demissioned in 1947, was also asked to leave Austria.

See the story in the November 3, 1956 dispatch of the Hungarian News Agency (MTI):
<http://1956.mti.hu/Pages/NewsArchive.aspx?id=c045613f-69be-4e88-95e9-292673adfb20>

³⁷ Géza Katona has more or less the same impression: „As it happens, the legation in Budapest itself was not ready for anything of a more serious nature. We were in the strange position that, strictly speaking, we did not even have a minister! Unfortunately, even these quite discernible portents had sounded no alarm bells in America. Nothing was stirring in Washington. Prior to this, the minister to Budapest had been Chris Ravndal. He was very fond of the Hungarians and took a strong line with the Communist government, being well-informed and having the necessary knowledge of the country; but then, his tour of duty ended in August '56. Ravndal had been a decisive, vigorous, gutsy fellow, and his word was listened to in Washington. If he had still been minister to Budapest in October '56, I'm sure the American government would have reacted quite differently to the Hungarian Revolution. Ravndal left in August, and a new minister had not come to replace him, only a chargé d'affaires, Barnes, who did not have any appreciable rank, weight or actual powers, and for that reason, he was exceedingly cautious, weak and soft. He did not take any action when the situation would have demanded it, or when we would have regarded it as proper; Barnes held back and waited. Another person who went at the same time as Ravndal was Ernő Nagy, who had also been important in view of his knowledge of the Hungarian language.” (Géza Katona, Interviewed by Zsolt Csalog A Major Oversight on Our Part VOLUME XLVII * No. 182 * Summer 2006) <http://www.hungarianquarterly.com/no182/4.html>

Kovács: In the interview that you gave to Swartz, you mentioned however a contact with Miklós Gimes³⁸, one of Nagy's closest collaborators:

„We had some contact with Miklós Gimes, whom we actually had recommended to visit the States as an observer of the US election (but a visa was denied him on the grounds that he was a communist. Still, we were very cautious: even in Gimes' case we did not seek to establish continuing contacts.”³⁹

One the one hand, this – among others - also proves me the fact that before the revolution, you measured pretty well the decision-makers of a potential alternative. On the other hand, one can highly understand why Nagy's people did not rewarm the contacts – but of course in these busy days, everybody was overburdened. Or Gimes could feel all this story that because of their communist colour, Americans did not and will not trust in them – at least till the proof of a real change? (May be this is not too far from what you are writing about McCarthy's impact on the way of thinking of the State Department and JF Dulles.)

Rogers: Well, I don't remember the exact date of the proposal that Gimes go to the US to observe the election, which I believe came from Ernie Nagy before he left on reassignment in September. I don't believe I met him. I was quite startled when it was turned down, but it does show the climate in Washington.

Nagy: No, it must have been Anton Nyerges who proposed Gimes for the trip. It must have happened around the time I left Budapest.

Rogers: Anyway, his visa was refused on orders from Washington, I would guess early October, I seem to associate it, timewise, with the Rajk reburial, but not sure. This story and the above deal with contacts between the Legation and the Nagy Government, and why they were not more extensive; we dealt only minimally with what such contacts might have attempted and what they might have achieved.

In 1987, I wrote the following, and I find the argument still a very strong one: „In hindsight, and I'm not certain that we ever stated this from the Legation in so many words, my view of the basic underlying reason for the Soviet intervention on November 4 was that the Revolution "had gone too far." Even before the Nagy appeal of Nov. 1, it was clear that the Communist Party had lost control totally, and that therefore the "new Hungary," under Nagy or whomever, would be strongly anti-Soviet. It might be socialist, it might be pluralistic, but it would be anti-Soviet...If, however, Nagy had been able to hold Hungary within the Bloc, even if he had insisted on considerable changes in relations with the USSR, I think the intervention on Nov. 4 *might* not have occurred.' Given the minimal control that Nagy had over the uprising, it is difficult to see what impact the Legation, even with extensive contacts, could have had."

³⁸ Miklós Gimes (1917-1958), journalist at the Szabad Nép (Free People, the official daily of the communist party till November 1, 1956). Correspondent in Zürich, Paris and Berlin in 1954. After his return to Hungary, he became the most intransigent policy-shaper around Imre Nagy. During the Revolution, he was much more radical than Nagy and very early supported the legitimacy of the uprising, the introduction of a multi party system, etc. Being Nagy's close collaborator, he was condemned to death in the Imre Nagy trial.

³⁹ Swartz: *op. cit* p. 585

Possible UN action?

*Kovács: In your reports, I could read quite a lot about the involvement of the United Nations in the Hungarian cause. It was not however always clear enough that you were thinking in terms of an extraordinary session of the General Assembly when the G.A. can act autonomously because of the paralysis of the Security Council (i. e. in terms of the resolution 377(V) called *Uniting for Peace*) or whether the continuation of the procedure tried after the *Mindszenty-case* (i. e. the way described by the resolution 385(V) of the General Assembly which is the follow up of the so-called *peace-treaty advisory opinion issue*) was given a preference. Can you clarify the plans that your legation was envisaging at that time?*

Rogers: Yes, there is also the question of UN action. During that period, I (and I believe Barnes) became convinced that the further the Revolt moved to the right politically, the less the likelihood of Soviet acceptance. This was the thinking behind some of our cables. And at least implicitly, I believe we gave greater weight, in terms of its effect on the Soviets, to this factor than to the factor of US action alone (outside the UN). Further, we were of course urging US (US/UN) action, not only for any possible impact it might have on the Soviets, but also 1. for the possible impact locally (restoration of law and order), and 2. to at least establish as supportable US position in response to a national uprising against the Soviets, come what may. In the early days of the insurgency, the Legation was confident the matter would be brought to the UN, and in fact urged that the US take the initiative. At that point, I believe, we were thinking altogether of action in New York, but did not feel competent nor called upon to discuss action in the Security Council vs the General Assembly. We were however confident that any discussion in New York would be comprehensive. I believe that we did not give much thought during the initial period October 23-30 to the advisability of a visit by the UN Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld. In fact, the Legation's telegram of October 31 (which I believe I wrote) did not refer to such a visit, and evidently we did not then see a visit as critical as later became clear. And a personal recollection: on the evening of October 31, Ilona and Endre Marton, the UP and AP correspondents, were at our home and we heard on the radio the Chinese positive reaction to the Soviet October 30 declaration. That probably was the high point of our feelings about the success of the Revolution, and that point a visit by Hammarskjöld did not appear critical to us.

In looking over the telegrams and other reports in FRUS, it is interesting (and disappointing) to note the total absence of a suggestion for a high-level UN delegation visiting Hungary. In fact, the only reference I saw was a negative recommendation from Ambassador Thompson in Vienna⁴⁰ to a suggestion from the British Ambassador in Vienna. And the British Legation suggestions quoted in your earlier article refer only to discussions at the UN, not to a delegation coming to Budapest.

Later, probably about November 2, there were reports in Budapest that Hammarskjöld was enroute to Hungary, and in fact that he had gotten as far as Prague. I do not know where this report originated. That may well have been a factor in the Legation's failure to recommend such a visit.

⁴⁰ FRUS,XXV, p. 353.

Nagy: I have always felt very strongly that the appearance in Budapest of the UN Secretary General, or a delegation under his instructions, during those critical days between the Soviet decision and its implementation, might have been sufficient response to the posited question period. If Suez tipped the balance in the Soviet decision-making process, what step could conceivably have redressed the balance and salvaged the Hungarian situation?

Rogers: I agree with that, but without reviewing the discussions in Washington-New York or more important, in Moscow, feel from review of the above, that events were moving so rapidly and matters at the UN so complex because of Suez, that it would have taken an early personal decision from Hammarskjöld himself, probably to send a deputy to Budapest, to have had someone arrive in Budapest early enough to have had any impact. In other words, through October 31, the need was not so apparent. A decision by Hammarskjöld to take action could not really be expected before November 2, and an arrival of a deputy before November 3 at the earliest, and that would have been too late.

Kovács: *It is very difficult to understand – especially with sixty (and not only ten) year experience behind us – why and how Imre Nagy could think that everything could be arranged in New York? Or was the UN appeal only a desperate cry for help without expecting too much? On November 2, the government called back the previously appointed delegation sent to the UN General Assembly and appointed Imre Nagy, Zoltán Tildy, Anna Kéthly and Béla Kovács into the delegation⁴¹. But this could mean really that Imre Nagy wanted to get support only in a few days in New York?*

Rogers: Why did the Nagy government put a big trust in the UN and not in permanent members of the Security Council, represented also in the legations in Budapest? Well, why didn't Nagy call in all the Western representatives at the same time and appeal to them personally as a group, and also send a cable, as he did, to the UN? He simply left it to the Foreign Office. Of course, that was on the evening of November 1, but there were already clear signs of Soviet forces re-entering Hungary. If we in the Legation were confused, harried and exhausted, think about Nagy! But from his point-of-view, he did both: he sent a cable to the UN (which did not get the treatment it deserved) and he gave notes to several legations. In our case, we assumed that the message would be received with great excitement by Washington (wrong!) and that we did not need to make a great deal of comment (wrong again!!).

Nagy: The treatment of Anna Kéthly (and, by extension, Imre Nagy) is, I think, particularly reprehensible.⁴² I want to introduce into our conversation an article written by Arnold Beichman⁴³ from the Hoover Institute at Stanford":

„We all know what was happening in that embattled land, victimized first by Adolf Hitler and then after Hitler's defeat by Josef Stalin and his successors. The democratic forces had been led by Imre Nagy, a communist who had broken with the communists. He sent a spokesman to America to speak for the Hungarian people, Anna

⁴¹ The composition of the new delegation represented also the mult partite transformation in Hungary while Nagy represented the renewed communist party, Tildy and Kovács the smallholder peasant party, Kéthly to social-democrats.

⁴² As it was mentioned *supra*, when she arrived to New York, the American ambassador to the United Nations did not receive her.

⁴³ Beichman, Arnold: No Backbone in Rollback, The Washington Times, October 28, 2006

Kéthly. A Social Democrat who had served jail time during the Nazi occupation and more jail time under the communist regime, she came to the United Nations as a member of Nagy's Cabinet. By the time she came to the United Nations, the Nagy regime had been overthrown by Soviet bayonets and a Soviet stooge, Janos Kádár, had been installed in his place.

As a leading Social Democrat, Mrs. Kéthly was well known in Europe and was welcomed by her contemporaries at the U.N. like Paul-Henri Spaak, the Belgian statesman who had been elected first president of the United Nations General Assembly in 1946. The United States representative, Henry Cabot Lodge, refused to meet her. His deputy, James Wadsworth, stood no more than a dozen feet from where she sat in the U.N. chamber, and he refused to see her.

When she came to Washington to meet with Meany and told how she had been snubbed by Lodge and Wadsworth, Meany phoned Undersecretary of State Robert D. Murphy and insisted she be received at the department or he would go public in his condemnation.

Keep in mind as you read this, that this was an administration that demanded: Rollback Not Containment. Here was a leader of armed resistance against Soviet occupation, being treated like Typhoid Mary. She was finally received by Murphy but with no public announcement before or after the meeting.”

Kovács: Was the Legation informed by the new Nagy Government of Anna Kéthly's mission? If no information was transmitted on behalf of the Hungarian ministry for foreign affairs, can we assume that the Hungarian mission to the UN (eventually through the Hungarian Legation in Washington) had to warn the State Department about the arrival of a competent and legitimate emissary? Why was the Legation not informed about this crucial diplomatic action?

Rogers: Although I was not in Budapest from the morning of November 3 on, I do not believe the Legation received any information about the new makeup of its new UN delegation from the Nagy Government. If this is the case, then the Legation either received this information from the Department of State, and I believe this is unlikely, or from news broadcasts from New York or elsewhere. In effect, I believe that probably the Legation was not aware of the new makeup until it heard of it from news broadcasts, or possibly from Budapest newspapers. As far as the UN and Department of State are concerned, could either or both have been informed by cable from the Nagy Government? Had we known that she was in New York, we would never have dreamed that Lodge would not have received her!

Kovács: Reading the articles, we can get a certain answer to the lack of establishing contacts from behalf of Imre Nagy. But this answer is once again much more a feeling than a duly proved fact. At that time, the quasi totality of the staff of the Hungarian Foreign Ministry was composed of people from whom the communist party expected not only loyalty but strict adherence. Even if they were also informed about current problems (especially those who originated from the peasantry) they were considered as people mostly belonging to the Rákosi-

establishment, i.e. the hardliners. Géza Katona had the same impressions⁴⁴. The slow emancipation of Nagy in the post October 23 government explains also that it could take a time till he was able to deal with foreign policy. Nagy took this portfolio only on November 1⁴⁵, up to that time, it was directed by minister Imre Horváth⁴⁶, and his deputies, Endre Sík⁴⁷ and Károly Szarka⁴⁸. Imre Nagy did not trust in them and the lack of confidence is explained also indirectly by the fact all three persons were reappointed in their functions by the Kádár-regime. As I made allusion to it in my article, Andropov also reported about distances⁴⁹ taken by high ranking diplomats vis-a-vis Nagy's foreign political steps. Some Hungarian Ministers or Ambassadors were revoked, others resigned and sought for political asylum in Czechoslovakia⁵⁰ or in the Soviet Union. The fact that on November 2, the building of the ministry of foreign affairs was occupied for some hours by insurgents⁵¹ and the army had to restore the order on Nagy's request, did not contribute either to the elaboration of a coherent foreign policy. It could not be easy to find a competent person – under these slightly chaotic conditions.

Miklós Vásárhelyi refers by the way also that Nagy was very alone and he left the daily business to two close collaborators, namely György Heltai and Pál Félix. He added that „the staff of the ministry for foreign affairs was practically excluded from everything.”⁵²

⁴⁴ Swartz's interview with Géza Katona:

„- Did the Nagy Imre regime ever get in contact with the Legation regarding American diplomatic support?
- I don't recall any such contacts, at least not between October 23 and November 3. Nagy's government had problems getting organized and deciding what they wanted to do they may never have been in a position to ask anything of us. We knew exactly which people in the Foreign Office dealt with the United States, and there was no attempt on their part to set up a meeting or to discuss the situation with anyone from the Legation.”

Swartz: *op. cit* p. 537

⁴⁵ There is a certain confusion whether November 1 or November 2 is the proper date. It is a fact that Nagy was acting also as foreign minister on the 1st of November, inter alia at the meetings with Andropov, but minister Horváth (see below) was discharged only on November 2.

⁴⁶ Imre Horváth (1901-1958): member of the communist emigration in the Soviet Union (1922-1933), arrested and imprisoned in Hungary (1933-1944). Entered into diplomatic service in 1945, he was serving at different legations (Moscow, Berlin, Washington, London, Prague. Minister of foreign affairs in 1956 between July 30-November 1. The Kádár-regime reconducted him in this function on November 12, 1956 that he performed till his death.

⁴⁷ Endre Sík (1891-1978) was a member of the Hungarian communist emigration in the Soviet Union. Returned to Hungary in 1945, he has been working in the ministry of foreign affairs since 1947. Envoy in Washington (1948-1949), director of political affairs (1949-1954), deputy minister (1954-1955), first deputy minister (1955-1958), minister (1958-1961)

⁴⁸ Károly Szarka (1923) entered into diplomatic service in 1948 and served at different legations (London, Delhi), envoy to Washington (1953-1956). Deputy minister (1956-1968), ambassador in Kairo (1968-1970), ambassador to the UN (1970)

⁴⁹ Andropov's report of October 30 (Yeltsin-dossier p. 67-68) with a reference concerning minister Horváth and Szarka.

⁵⁰ e.g. Frigyes Puja (1921), ambassador in Vienna (1955-1959) who became later deputy minister for foreign affairs (1959-1963 and 1968-1973) and finally minister (1973-1983).

⁵¹ According to the common opinion, these people were belonging to the so-called Dudás-group. Some newest researches show that this is an erroneous assumption and the insurgents belonged in reality to the Seifert-unity of the Széna-square group. (Kenedi János: Hézagos kataszter [A Register with Lacunas] Élet és Irodalom n° 50, December 15, 2006)

<http://www.es.hu/pd/display.asp?channel=PUBLICISZTIKA0650&article=2006-1218-0924-22YAGW>

⁵² Vásárhelyi Miklós: Teljes összevisszaság volt a nemzetközi sajtótájékoztatón. [A Complete Chaos at the International Press Conference] Interview on the home page of the 1956 Institute
http://server2001.rev.hu/msite/msite_document.asp?id=431&parent=2&order=3

When we read the interviews⁵³ made with György Heltai's we have the impression that he did not feel either the necessity of establishing an informal contact prior to the declaration of neutrality.⁵⁴ Why? Because of naivety – as Swartz puts it?⁵⁵ Newly appointed deputy minister for foreign affairs, Heltai had precise knowledge about the fact that in one of his papers submitted to the Russian and Hungarian politburos where he devoted cca five lines to the importance of the Hungarian neutrality:

„I remember discussing a chapter, or rather, several lines, on foreign policy that he included in this work in 1955. It was then that we first talked about the neutrality of Hungary, and then only in tentative terms. But he felt that this was the only way to work out a *modus vivendi* with the Soviets, and the only way to get them out of the country. This was a long document. Some hundred pages in Hungarian. I'm sure the Russians never read it. He could never have been returned to power if Russians had even read the five or so lines about Hungarian neutrality.”⁵⁶

According to a Hungarian biographer of Nagy, these thoughts could be linked to the 1955 meeting of non-aligned countries and the proclamation of the five Bandung principles.⁵⁷ When Heltai was asked to represent Nagy in the ministry, he remembered soon the neutrality issue.

„On Monday the 29th, Nagy called me and said he was going to take over the responsibility for foreign affairs, and urgently needed me to assist him. I felt obligatory to respond to this appeal and decided to enter the Civil Service as Deputy Foreign Minister. Our first discussion again turned to the theme of Hungary's neutrality, which we had discussed the previous summer in theory, but now had to face as an actual fact. I felt that it was now the only „way out” for the Russians, and in face of a declaration of neutrality, they could withdraw their forces without seeming to have suffered a military defeat. I drafted the declaration on a piece of note paper in my own hand. I remember taking it home to my wife to keep as a souvenir, but when the Russians arrested Nagy later, we decided to burn it.”⁵⁸

⁵³ Reform to Revolution. Detailed Interview Given by György Heltai to an American Journalist, dated 12th December 1956 and Submitted to the UN Special Committee on the Question of Hungary

<http://www.hungarianquarterly.com/no142/p42.html>

See also Swartz's interview with Heltai, referred *supra*.

⁵⁴ „- Did you meet with any American diplomats yourself?

- No, the only contact I had with Americans was with a few journalists.”

Swartz: *op. cit* p. 519

⁵⁵ „Still in the final analysis it was naive and unrealistic for Imre Nagy and the other Hungarian leaders to have believed that any foreign state would act on their behalf if they did not first ask for that help.”

Swartz: *op. cit* p. 334

⁵⁶ Reform to Revolution. Detailed Interview Given by György Heltai to an American Journalist....p.4-5

⁵⁷ Rainer M. János: Nemzeti függetlenség, semlegesség és dunavölgyi együttműködés. Nagy Imre külpolitikai nézetei. (National independence, neutrality and Danube-basin cooperation. Imre Nagy's views about foreign policy.) p.5-6

<http://www.rev.hu/portal/page/portal/rev/tanulmanyok/1956/nagyimre>

⁵⁸ Reform to Revolution. Detailed Interview Given by György Heltai to an American Journalist, p.6

Kovács: Apparently, for Heltai, the situation was clear and he was given a mandate for the execution of an already taken decision. Nevertheless, in another paper, Heltai refers to the feeling of the general expectation of the whole nation and the initiative of the „revolutionary committee” of the ministry for foreign affairs.⁵⁹ According to historian János Rainer M., it is a fact that Nagy did not look for contact with western ambassadors with exception of the Austrian, as already mentioned and that for what was apparently only a very limited discussion. He adds that because of the manifest lack of confidence vis-a-vis Nagy on behalf of western legations, the receiving of such an initiative is rather doubtful.⁶⁰

Nagy: To a certain extent, it could have depended on personalities at the posts. Anyway I am not aware of any formal contacts between Ravndal and Imre Nagy, which is not the same as saying that there were no such contacts. Ravndal, had he still been in Budapest during the Revolution, would surely have made strong recommendations to Washington along the lines of a Hammarskjöld visit or the advocacy of an Austrian or Finnish-type accommodation.⁶¹

Rogers: What you have said or quoted above about the Hungarian Foreign Ministry during those days is very interesting, but I cannot add anything to it. But contrary to the statement by János Rainer M. that the reception by Western legations of some initiative from the Nagy Government is "rather doubtful," I believe the US Legation would have received such an approach warmly and would have supported it strongly to Washington. I do not know the dates on which he was thinking that such an initiative might have come, but certainly at any time after the first day of so of the uprising, I believe this to be the case.

Kovács: I have found only one allusion on an eventual meeting between chargé d'affaires Barnes and Imre Nagy, by the way on an alleged American initiative. The source is a certain journalist Edmund Taylor but I cannot consider the reference as a credible one, as far as the citation was published in a hardliner communist publication⁶² of 1981.

Rogers: I am really quite positive in stating that Barnes and Nagy did not meet.⁶³

⁵⁹ As Kovács quotes in his article, the decision of the Nagy's Government about neutrality was linked in the oral and written arguments to the inexplicable and progressive rearrival of Soviet troops: formally is was taken about at midday of November 1, after the previous approval of the Politbureau. According to the testimony of the deputy-minister of foreign affairs of the government, in the morning, several „delegations” proposed to the government to take this step and the ministry of foreign affairs supported it unanimously without any hesitation. Heltai, György: A Varsói Szerződés felmondása (Egy tanú vallomása), Az igazság a Nagy Imre ügyben, [The denunciation of the Warsaw Treaty. A Witness's Testimony. The Truth in the Imre Nagy Affair] Bruxelles 1959 Európai Petőfi Kör p.86-88

However, according to the dispatch of November 1, 1956 of the Hungarian News Agency, the „revolutionary committee” of the ministry for foreign affairs took this decision already on October 30 and drafts were prepared about the steps to be taken.

⁶⁰ Rainer M. János: Nemzeti függetlenség, semlegesség és dunavölgyi együttműködés. Nagy Imre külpolitikai nézetei. (National independence, neutrality and Danube-basin cooperation. Imre Nagy's views about foreign policy.) p. 8

⁶¹ The same can be read in Géza Katona's interview, see footnote n° 32

⁶² The translation of the relevant part is as follows: „As Edmund Taylor wrote it in the 1956 December issue of the American review Reporter (...): «The Budapest based American chargé d'affaires received an instruction to meet Imre Nagy and to counsel him to witness at least a certain lack of confidence vis-a-vis the West. It should be so at least till the Soviet troops do not leave the country.»”

Ez történt. A Népszabadság cikksorozata 1956-ról. [All this has happened so. Collected articles of the Népszabadság (= the official daily paper of the Communist party between 1956 and 1990)], 1981 Budapest p. 48

⁶³ See Swartz's question and Heltai's answer:

„- Did Nagy meet at all with any Western representatives?

Kovács: I have found an interesting information to explain a deliberate distance on behalf of Imre Nagy vis-à-vis the American legation. In his talks and letters written during his internment of Snagov, Imre Nagy referred several times to the story of a meeting between envoy Ravndal and Mátyás Rákosi. After Stalin's death, at the meeting of March 1953, the delegations of the two politburos met in Moscow, and Molotov criticized very sharply Rákosi for having tried to establish a contact to Eisenhower through Ravndal. Even if in Snagov, Imre Nagy was in such a situation that he knew that everything what he was saying or writing can be used against him – or can contribute to his defence – in his intercourses with high ranking Romanian communist dignitaries, Nagy condemned⁶⁴ very sharply the receiving of Ravndal by Rákosi and considered this act as treasonous.⁶⁵ (Ravndal met however several times Rákosi also later⁶⁶ and the returning subject of the talks was inter alia the intervention for the release of some arrested employees of the American legation.) The humiliation of Rákosi in Moscow in 1953 happened however just in Nagy's presence, preceding shortly his nomination for prime minister. Thinking in the truthfulness or not, Nagy maybe wanted to avoid the repetition of a dangerous precedent in a much more important case?

Rogers: Yes, that is very interesting. But I would have thought that the most likely time that Nagy would have wished to approach the Legation would have been after he knew or strongly suspected that the Soviets might reverse or withdraw their October 30 statement. In such a case, Nagy would already have gone so far that his concern over repeating Rákosi's errors would not have stopped him from what he might have considered an act of desperation, that is, at the last minute calling on the US for assistance. But why with this history behind him he would have described Rákosi's approach to Ravndal as treasonous is beyond my comprehension. By the way Rákosi, I seem to recall, did attend at least one July 4 reception at Ravndal's residence, it could have been when Hungary was playing in the world soccer playoffs.

Kovács: Your colleague, Mr Géza Katona does not remember either any contact with Imre Nagy, neither personally, nor in telephone form⁶⁷, he does not exclude however that the initiative was blocked somewhere in the

- I don't think so. I am certain that he never met with the Americans, but the French ambassador may have come in."

Swartz: *op. cit* p.519

⁶⁴ Meeting between Imre Nagy and Emil Bodnaras and Walter Roman, on December 2, 1956

in: Baráth, Magdolna and Sipos Levente (eds): A snagovi foglyok. Nagy Imre és társai Romániában. Iratok. [The Snagov-prisoners. Imre Nagy and his consorts in Romania. Documents] Napvilág Publisher and Országos Levéltár [National Archive] 2007 Budapest, p.96

⁶⁵ Imre Nagy's letter of April 6, 1957 to Walter Roman

in: Baráth, Magdolna and Sipos Levente (eds): *op. cit* p.296

⁶⁶ One year later on March 9, 1954

See the note prepared by the Hungarian side:

<http://www.archivnet.hu/rovat/nyomtat.phtml?forraskod=386>

⁶⁷ „I have to say that Washington's instructions were not entirely explicit, not exactly precise. The usual response that was given to any question we raised was "What do you think?" We would then attempt to steer by this and kept on writing our reports, which wouldn't always reach Washington on time... One thing is for sure: no direct contact was made between the Legation and the Nagy government. I can state that with complete certainty, because if such a contact had been made, then either Nyerges would have interpreted, or more likely me, because there was no one else in the mission who spoke Hungarian. There was not so much as a telephone conversation between the Minister and Imre Nagy. I know that quite definitely, and I also know nothing about any serious request that might have been addressed to us from Nagy by letter. What little contact there was went via the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. There were a few exchanges of insignificant notes with the Ministry, but these were only on routine topics and did not amount to anything on which more substantial relations could have been based. The passivity was on both sides: just as we didn't seek to make contact with the Imre Nagy government, neither did they approach us.” (Géza Katona, Interviewed by Zsolt Csalog, *op. cit*)

ministry of foreign affairs.⁶⁸ The highest interpersonal contact was established by minister István Bibó⁶⁹ when he visited the legation⁷⁰ – but only on November 4. On the other hand, Katona makes reference however to visits paid by the Marine guards of the legation to insurgents based in Kilián-barracks.⁷¹

Rogers: That statement concerning instructions from Washington we were asked by Géza Katona to tell you the following: "With respect to the statement allegedly made by him referring to instructions from Washington, Mr. Katona has stated that he did not receive any instructions from any source in Washington relative to responding to the Hungarian Revolution, and that he did not make that statement to Mr. Csalog." Mr. Katona I believe kept a detailed diary of his activities during the Revolution and he gave a number of interviews to writers on the subject, providing them with very interesting and informative details. Some of these interviews were by telephone, and so I must assume that Mr. Csalog misunderstood or misinterpreted something that Mr. Katona said.

Kovács: In this case, I am a bit in perplexity to cite another parts from Katona's interview.

„The instructions we had from Washington were to maintain a distance from the Nagy government and wait - wait to see what course things took. Most definitely, Washington was not advising us, for the time being, to make any gesture that would have amounted to, or signaled, recognition of the Nagy government; but we should be open and, if the occasion arose, friendly, so as not to close the door too firmly. (...) For Washington, it appeared uncertain how long Nagy would manage

⁶⁸ „It is conceivable that attempts to do this were made on their part, but if that was the case, then the initiative could only have come laboriously and tentatively through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs - and got blocked there. It stands to reason that an act of rapprochement like that would have had to pass through several pairs of hands within the Foreign Ministry, and I suspect that even in late October there would have been a number of covert old-style Communists who had the opportunity to purloin a letter of that nature, to throw a wrench in the works. It's not that I know anything definite. There were more than a few Hungarians who dropped in on us, not just with information, but with the aim of giving us advice of a political nature, pleading for us to take action, to intervene somehow; however, these were all private individuals and not one of them represented the Nagy government in any official capacity. István Bibó, then a secretary of state, visited on one occasion, but that too was only on November 4th, when in reality he alone represented the Hungarian government, all the others being at the Yugoslav Embassy, incapable of action - in other words, when for all practical purposes the Nagy government no longer existed. I suspect that there was at least as much confusion and muddle in Parliament during those days as there was at the Legation. During the first few days of November we actually did not even know where Imre Nagy was - or at least, we didn't know officially. He was in the Parliament building, of course, but even that could only be picked up by word of mouth. We could have found him if we had wished, but we didn't want to. Washington did not want that.” Géza Katona, Interviewed by Zsolt Csalog, *op. cit*

⁶⁹ István Bibó (1911-1979) law professor, famous legal philosopher and politologue, was appointed as minister of state on November 2 in the last government of Imre Nagy. He did not follow his PM to the yougoslav embassy but remained in the building of the parliament till November 6. He was released from his function on November 12 an later, he was in contact with Indian ambassador Menon whom he asked to trasmit his proposal about principles of the way out of the crisis. (Árpád Göncz – see *supra* – was involved in the contacts between Bibó and Indian diplomats Rahman and Menon as well as Christopher Cope.)

⁷⁰ Géza Katona, Interviewed by Zsolt Csalog, *op. cit*

⁷¹ „The eight marines who did duty in the Legation couldn't wear their uniform, but that didn't stop them from going out into town in their civvies. There was no holding them back! They went off to the Kilián Barracks, even had themselves photographed with the freedom fighters, and they practically begged to be allowed to go off in uniform to help the Hungarians. "The Russians only need to give us Marines one look, and they'll be taking to their heels!" This spontaneous fervour obviously did not have much grounding in reality, but it was characteristic of the spirit of our military personnel. „Géza Katona, Interviewed by Zsolt Csalog, *op. cit*

to stay in power in the wake of the Revolution, and even if on the surface he did stay, the direction in which he would take the new Hungary appeared unclear. It appeared questionable to what degree the revolutionary government enjoyed the population's trust and to what extent the Hungarian people approved of and wanted this political line - in other words, to what extent the uprising could be a basis for a stable future. (...) So when, at the end of November, the Russians succeeded in tricking Nagy and his group out of the Yugoslav Embassy and spiriting them away, again no genuine action was taken on the part of America. But then, what could have been done, when they abducted a government that we didn't even recognize?"⁷²

Rogers: I have to repeat: "With respect to the statement allegedly made by him referring to instructions from Washington, Mr. Katona has stated that he did not receive any instructions from any source in Washington relative to responding to the Hungarian Revolution, and that he did not make that statement to Mr. Csalog."

Kovács: OK. I had only the impression that the whole context of establishing or not establishing⁷³ contacts reflects the famous Tobar-doctrine about recognition of insurgent governments what every law student learns when studying international law. The fact that stability and popular support – if possible proved by democratic elections⁷⁴ – are required for recognition, can explain why Minister Wailes was not allowed⁷⁵ to hand over his credentials till the arrival of explicit instruction what he got only on the very late of November 3. The text of the speech was redrafted in a hurry and the credentials which he would have presented to Nagy had he been able to contained the following language:

„My Government understands and supports these aspirations of the people of Hungary. Deeply moved by the anguish and the heroic sacrifices which the Hungarian people have endured and honoring the traditional friendship which exists between the Hungarian and the American peoples, my Government is acting urgently at this time to espouse the cause of the Hungarian freedom and independence before the United Nations and to contribute all possible assistance for the alleviation of human suffering in Hungary.”⁷⁶

We can discover the logic of the Tobar-doctrine in the reasoning of instruction sent to Minister Wailes” to act at once present the credentials”⁷⁷:

„Factors dictating this action include: (1) Implications current Soviet military movements; (2) Hungarian Government’s apparent acceptance

⁷² Géza Katona, Interviewed by Zsolt Csalog, *op. cit*

⁷³ „to a great extent, Imre Nagy’s regime was seen in Washington, as illegitimate.” Swartz: *op. cit* p. 327

⁷⁴ This is the Wilson-doctrine i. e. the elastic interpretation of the Tobar-doctrine, originally refusing the recognition of government arrived to power with unconstitutional means.

⁷⁵ According to Swartz, the State Department followed here a proposal, submitted by the influential Ambassador Thompson leading the US Embassy in Vienna. Here, the American diplomacy lost a precious time when not recognizing at once the nature of the events.

Swartz: *op. cit* p. 355-358

⁷⁶ FRUS XXV p. 374

⁷⁷ FRUS XXV p. 373

and identification itself with popular demands and people's struggle freedom and independence; (3) Hungarian Government's forthright appeal US and UN for assistance in critical situation attended by its forceful protest against entrance new Soviet troops, its repudiation Warsaw Pact, its demand withdrawal all Soviet forces, and its proclamation neutrality. (4) Desirability that you enjoy proper formal access Hungarian authorities for prompt interchanges between Governments."⁷⁸

Above, the n°2 of the instruction fits properly in the logic of the rules concerning recognition of revolutionary governments, according the Tobar-doctrine.

All this can mean that the very formalistic approach to international law – as taught in textbooks – prevented also you from being more active? So the scrupulous observation of international legal teachings and doctrines could overcome the historical necessity – or the historical chance. But of course, everybody was exhausted and very hard-pressed for time: Hungarian, Americans – and Soviets. And the final decision was taken too late – and it arrived too late.

Rogers: I believe it is safe to say that the Tobar-doctrine did not play an important role in US foreign policy in general or in the factors under consideration relative to the US government's attitude toward the Nagy government at that time and Wailes' presentation of credentials. After all, the US had ignored that doctrine altogether in establishing and maintaining diplomatic relations with Hungary under Soviet domination after World War II. And of course with many other countries as well. I would argue that much more paramount in the thinking of the drafters of Wailes' credential statement was the repudiation of the Warsaw Pact and the clear - by then - anti-Soviet nature of the new government. This makes the contrast between the instructions to Wailes, which must have been drafted on November 2, and the refusal of UN Ambassador Lodge to receive Nagy's emissary Anna Kethly (which took place around November 6) altogether incomprehensible and if nothing else demonstrates the confusion in Washington.

Kovács: *Events happened so quickly, that Wailes could not execute the instruction to hand the credentials.*

Rogers: Yes, and after the fall of the Nagy government and installation of Kádár, Wailes' instructions to present his credentials to Nagy were cancelled and he was instructed to await developments. In February 1957, the Kádár government requested that he either present his credentials or leave, and in order not to recognize the Kádár government, Wailes was instructed to leave.

Kovács: *International law is never the number one concern of decision-makers...*

Nagy: Then there was Suez - do not forget that... Perhaps I stand alone in this, but I feel certain that the Suez adventure played a major role in Soviet decision-making. By standing *with the United States* in opposing the Franco/British/Israeli invasion, the Soviets

⁷⁸ FRUS XXV p. 373

suddenly seemed to be occupying the moral high ground (!) and felt free to smash the Hungarian Revolution with impunity.

Rogers: During the Revolution itself, I believed (to the extent that I thought about it) that in Budapest we US official personnel were operating in too much ignorance of thinking in both Washington and Moscow to be able to weigh such a question. We made an effort to state the issues as we saw them, and to recommend courses of action on the part of the US which we believed would have a beneficial effect, but we did not have time (or energy) to think much further about the ultimate impact of these and other possible measures on the Soviets. In the same fashion, we were aware of and dismayed by the Suez imbroglio, but we did not attempt to judge between Suez and Hungary as to their relative significance on US national interests. In other words, we did not see ourselves as attempting to set forth total US policy. Throughout, we presumed that all sorts of discussions were under way in Washington, to which we hoped to contribute.

Intelligence issues...

Kovács: The US Legation was checked as far as it was possible in the fifties with all lawful means and I assume, with intelligence devices, as well. How did you feel its impact in the turbulent October-November days? Or the split in the Hungarian forces could be felt here also?

Rogers: We of course were very aware of the various ways that the AVO was checking on US personnel, as well as on the Legation's Hungarian employees and on personal servants. We assumed - no, I guess we knew -, that all employees and servants were subject to questioning and that listening devices were installed in the Legation, as well as in some if not all homes and apartments. At times we were followed. There had been cases of US employees having been tricked into embarrassing behavior and put under pressure by the AVO. We must assume that there were also cases of this nature of which the Legation was not aware. All these were ever-present facts which existed and to some extent became taken for granted. I believe in my time there the arrest of employees had ceased, or almost so.

I don't remember thinking much about this during the Revolution. I assume now that the AVO was so busy taking care of itself in October - November 1956 that its activities vis-a-vis the Legation virtually ceased. Of course, it did not take the Kádár Government very long to discover that we were using radio facilities in November and to request us to desist, so that signals that the situation was getting back to "normal," or "status quo ante," which was certainly the case.

Your article contained any allusion to a telegram⁷⁹ from the Budapest KGB station to Mikoyan

⁷⁹ „To Comrade Mikoyan, A.I.

I am reporting about the situation on 28 October 1956.

1. From the network of agents, which has contact with the insurgents, doubt is arising about whether to continue the struggle. The more active part of the opposition wants to continue fighting, but says, however: if we do stop

dated 10/28. One of its points concerns "an organized observation" at the American Embassy. Nothing in it is correct or logical, to me. It states that employees are leaving the Embassy with their things. It is true that families of Legation personnel moved into the Legation around the 28th for probably two nights and then went back home. But no organized convoy to Vienna occurred until November 1 or 2. The message also states that two US agents stated that UN troops "on the proposal of the US, UN troops would move in if the uprising were not quickly liquidated". The Soviets could very quickly notice if US troops from anywhere in Europe, principally Germany, were preparing to move. I don't know if any Soviet agents, either US or Hungarian, in the Legation were active at that time. It would not be impossible. Legation Hungarian employees were questioned, and some had been arrested earlier. Further, a number of listening devices were discovered in the Legation building and in homes (one, over the couple's bed!). But if the message quoted is accurate, I fear the Soviets were wasting some money.

Rogers: Do you have by the way an idea by about the real origin of our *pro domo* reports in Hungarian publications?

Kovács: Some years ago, a Hungarian researcher could check the official documents linked to the help that David Irving got from the officials of the Kádár-regime to collect documents for the „Uprising”. There are explicit references⁸⁰ to interesting documents furnished as a counterpart of the Hungarian official facilities. As I

for a while, we must still keep our weapons in order to attack again at an auspicious moment. 2. On 27 October, an agent of friends of the writer [Ivan] Boldizsar met with the leaders of the opposition group. The agent sounded the alarm about the meeting that was going on in connection with the street fighting. The other participants at the meeting decided to support the new government and expressed their intention of calling the insurgents and persuading them to stop the fighting.

(...)

5. An organized observation of the American embassy confirms that the employees of the embassy are leaving the city with their things. The Americans Olivart and West in a conversation with one of the agents of our friends said if the uprising is not liquidated in the shortest possible time, the UN troops will move in at the proposal of the USA and a second Korea will take place.

(...)

SEROV Transmitted by special line - 28.X.56”

http://www.wilsoncenter.org/index.cfm?topic_id=1409&fuseaction=va2.document&identifier=5034E9C2-96B6-175C-902D349297EE6957&sort=Collection&item=1956%20Hungarian%20Revolution

⁸⁰ „The London Embassy's report to the Foreign Ministry noted that "the collection of material for his book on 1956 progresses nicely. He received new material from the USA, including the complete CIA file on Comrade János Kádár, which is approximately 5 centimeters thick and contains everything that the CIA had ever compiled on Comrade János Kádár. The Hungarian authorities will probably be satisfied with the book's tone, because he had obtained the telegraphic correspondence between Radio Free Europe and New York in the said period, which clearly outline Radio Free Europe's role in the events of 1956."(...)

„In September 1979 Irving returned to Hungary once again. Although he did not get to see Kádár, he did meet Ervin Hollós, and he handed him copies of the telegrams that the Budapest Legation of the United States had sent between October 23 and November 4, 1956. In connection with the documents, Rezső Bányász, the head of the Foreign Ministry's Press Department, quarreled with Ervin Hollós. Bányász was resentful that Hollós had failed to hand over the documents to the Foreign Ministry. Hollós retorted that he naturally handed in the documents, but he did so to the appropriate Hungarian official body. Without a shadow of a doubt he was alluding to the Ministry of Interior.”

Mink, András: David Irving and the 1956 Revolution

The Hungarian Quarterly, Volume XLI n° 160, Winter 2000

http://hungarianquarterly.com/no160/#_aut

NB: As the whole article shows, still as ambassador in London, Mr Bányász was very reluctant and suspicious vis-a-vis David Irving and he proposed several times the suspension of the cooperation with him. Mr Hollós was a

have indicated in my first article (and in the introduction of the present one), the „Secret Reports” published in 1989 does not have a reference to the origin of the translated telegrams the text of which are coinciding with those of the FRUS XXV. The XXVth volume of the Foreign Relations of the United States 1955-1957 was published in 1990 in Washington DC by Government Printing Office. This does not exclude that someone could have access before this date to the documents⁸¹. In Irving’s book there are sometimes verbatim citations from the telegrams sometimes we read only recapitulations. I have found however two books⁸² published in Hungarian respectively in 1981 and 1987 containing citations from the reports of the American Legations. Some of them are the same citations which are published also by Irving⁸³ in 1981, some are verbatim there too where Irving has only a recapitulation. All the reports cited by one of the authors⁸⁴ have their equivalent in „Secret Reports” and the Hungarian text is practically the same at both times. So one cannot exclude that documents transmitted by Irving should be more or less the same which were published under „Secret Reports” in 1989. The documentation was hidden however as „Sleeping Beauty”: apparently several items of them were used however in the meantime: authors of the regime were assisted by archivists working in the right moment at the right places...

Rogers: I cannot add very much to that, except to say that the documents in question were certainly available prior to their publication in FRUS. As one⁸⁵ your footnotes indicates, it is not clear how soon certain documents can be obtained from the Department of State or other sources under our Freedom of Information Act, but absent information to the contrary, I believe we should assume that documents quoted or used by Irving and others were obtained legally.

Kovács: It is however strange that Martin ben Swartz - whom we have cited several times in the footnotes - wrote that between one half and one third of the official US documents were declassified at his request between 1985 and 1988 while many others were declassified within five years prior to 1989, as part of the Document Mandatory Review process which the US Government routinely conducts.⁸⁶

lieutenant-colonel of the police in 1956 and directed the division of interrogation of the arrested freedom-fighters. Later, he wrote several books about 1956 treated it always as a real hardliner, ultra-communist author. He was associated with David Irving as his „scientific advisor”. Mink’s article shows also that Hollós was from time to time also rather reluctant to cooperate with Irving. Nevertheless, some stories are the same in Irving’s Uprising, and in Hollós’s books.”

⁸¹ As we were was informed by a specialist of Office of the Historian in the US State Department: „As a general rule, the US government declassifies its documents after 30 years have passed. However, members of the public can submit Freedom of Information request (FOIA request) asking that they be permitted access to documents before th documents have been declassified and retired to the National Archives and Records Administration. I cannot give you a specific answer as to when the documents from the American legation of Budapest were declassified. You might be able to get a more definitive answer on this question from an archivist at the National Archives. (<http://...>, tel.... fax.... etc,)”

⁸² (A) Ez történt. A Népszabadság cikksorozata 1956-ról. [All this has happened so. Collected articles of the Népszabadság (= the official daily paper of the Communist party between 1956 and 1990)] 1981 Budapest
(B) Gyurkó László: 1956 (Magvető Publisher 1987)

⁸³ David Irving: Uprising! One Nation’s Nightmare: Hungary 1956. London, Sydney, Auckland, Toronto: Hodder and Stoughton, 1981.

⁸⁴ Gyurkó: *op. cit* p. 344-346. Here, no footnote is devoted to the origin of these documents. Recently, Gyurkó has published a third – an deeply reelaborated - edition of his book in 2006. (Gyurkó László: A bakancsos forradalom [The Booted Revolution]. Kossuth Publishers 2006 Budapest). Here, he turns back to the birth of the first edition and he apologizes for some of its sentences. He precises that the works on the first edition were completed in 1985. In the third – and much longer – edition, the *verbatim* citations from American diplomatic reports are much less – and there, the references are always pointing to the relevant pages of the „Secret Reports”.

⁸⁵ footnote n° 81 *supra*

⁸⁶ Swartz: *op. cit*, preface, p. 1-2

Rogers: I am not able to explain that.

Conclusions

Nagy: As far as I am concerned, I would like to summarize my conclusions, as follows:

Imre Nagy was never in control of the Revolution. The events began spontaneously, as the result of brutally stupid decisions made by those in charge before Nagy was installed. Belatedly made Prime Minister, Nagy alienated the masses at first by addressing them as "Comrades" and seeming to treat the events as riots which had to be suppressed. He evolved quite rapidly in becoming increasingly sympathetic to the aspirations of the Freedom Fighters but never quite succeeded in overtaking the Revolution. Nagy emerged as a Hero and Symbol of the Revolution but never quite managed to be its Leader.

The American Legation and its staff performed valiantly. Despite less than stalwart leadership, and with minimal guidance from Washington, the officers of the Legation pitched in tirelessly in gathering information on the developments, and conveyed that information as best they could. Once the normal communications channels had been blocked, they enlisted the capabilities of the British Legation or took messages overland to Vienna for despatch to Washington and the other relevant addressees.

The State Department was unhelpful and provided only minimal guidance to the Legation for the focus of its efforts. Like virtually everyone, Washington was caught by surprise by the dramatic events unfolding in Budapest. The former charismatic leader of the Legation was not replaced for several months and there were only two Hungarian speakers on the Legation staff. Despite general encouragement of resistance to Communist oppression, through earlier speeches by the Secretary of State and broadcasts over Radio Free Europe, Washington seemed unprepared to capitalize on the opportunities provided by the spontaneous bravery of the Freedom Fighters.

The United States government turned away from the Hungarian Revolution with unseemly haste. The US at the United Nations exerted little pressure on behalf of the raging revolution in Hungary. For example, no initiatives were urged for the despatch of the UN Secretary General to Budapest, as urged by the Nagy Government. Indeed, the American UN Ambassador refused to see the emissary of the Nagy Government, Anna Kethly, and the American Government busily turned its concentration on the invasion of Egypt and the Suez Canal by Israel, the United Kingdom and France.

The appearance in Budapest of UN Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld at any time between October 23 and, say, November 3, could have had a powerful effect on the outcome of the Revolution. This assertion is, to be sure, highly speculative. We will simply never know the truth of it. Suffice it to say, such an appearance was keenly sought by both the Nagy Government and the masses fighting in the streets, and rumors were rife that Hammarskjöld

was on his way. Furthermore, the Soviets on the following day had suddenly reversed their decision of October 30 against intervention. In short, they were capable of sudden alterations in policy. Is it not plausible to suppose that Hammarskjöld's appearance in Budapest, and the massive reception he was bound to receive, might have caused the Soviets to forebear in implementing their decision to crush the Revolution forcibly?

The coincidence of the Suez invasion was seized upon by a) the USSR to change its decision against intervention in Hungary, and b) by the American Government to turn its attention from the Hungarian Revolution and actually join hands with the USSR in condemning the UK, Israel and France. Evidence for this conclusion is strictly circumstantial, but the coincidence of these events and policy shifts are striking and, for me, thoroughly persuasive. The Freedom Fighters were basically left to their own devices and were allowed to be crushed by the Soviets with impunity.

The fate of the Czechs in 1968 was sealed by the obvious inaction of the US Government in 1956. First of all, the Czechs sought to effect a bloodless revolution and thus to avoid whatever pretexts the Soviets might have seized upon for their bloody acts of suppression in Hungary. Based on the Hungarian precedent, however, the Soviets were confident they could deal unopposed with the Czechs in any manner they chose. The manner they chose was quite reminiscent of Hungary 1956.

The seeds of the downfall of the Soviet system were planted in 1956. Though the Revolution was crushed and was seemingly a failure, it had a powerful effect on world opinion and the standing of Communism in neutral countries and among large numbers of Western intellectuals. Along with earlier events in East Berlin and in Poland, the brutality of the Soviet system was exposed. While the emergence of Gorbachev was vital to the collapse of the Soviet Empire, the valor and determination of the Hungarian people, who had no coherent leadership or any meaningful outside assistance, made the emergence of Gorbachev possible.

Kovács: Your comments and conclusions, Mr Rogers?

Rogers: Well, the Hungarian Uprising of 1956 played an important role in my life, then and since. I have met regularly for over fifty years with colleagues, both US and British, and with Hungarian friends, from those days. After the death of my first wife, I married the widow of an officer at the British Legation in Budapest whom I had known there. I have participated in panels on anniversaries of the Revolution. I have read many books and articles on those events, including the official record of the exchanges between the Legation and the State Department in Washington. Last year, at the invitation of the U. S. Embassy in Budapest, I returned to Budapest to participate in the celebration of the Uprising's 50th Anniversary.

But none of the discussions resulting from the above activities brought about as serious an effort at reconstruction of the details, the specifics, and particularly the reasoning and thinking which resulted in the activities of the Legation and of myself during the dramatic days of 1956 as did the email exchanges with Dr. Kovács of the University of Miskolc concerning those events and the facts and the thinking which lay behind them.

This intense experience, extending over several months, has caused me to attempt to recollect, in as much detail as possible, what was done or not done at the Legation during those days, and why. After fifty years, it is of course not possible to reconstruct one's actions with total accuracy, much less one's thinking. And there is always the danger of recollecting what one wishes to recall rather than what actually took place. And as I said earlier, the danger of enlarging one's own role and minimizing the contributions of others is a real and ever-present one.

Nevertheless, this period of intense thought has brought me to certain thinking, which follow. Not the US Government, not the US Legation in Budapest, and not I, forecast the Revolution. The closest forecast of which I am aware is the statement made by the Yugoslav Minister to Hungary at the time, Dalibor Soldatic, who in an interview with the Zagreb daily *Vjesnik* in November 1977 stated "The situation began to develop with such vehemence that we notified to Belgrade something would happen. I remember just what we told Belgrade: if the situation were not somehow stabilized, if Rákosi and after him Gerő, were not removed, if the party and the government were not taken over by Kádár and Nagy, a revolt might take place, the consequences of which we were not able to predict."

Let me take up what the US Legation could, in hindsight, have done or done differently. And obviously I must associate myself with the actions as well as inactions of the group.

To begin with, I believe that probably we did not emphasize early enough and strongly enough the anti-Communist and anti-Soviet attitudes of the new Nagy government. I believe that these characteristics were very clear as far as the insurgents themselves were concerned, and I believe our reports conveyed that. But I am not certain that we gave enough attention to the Nagy government formed and announced on October 27, nor argued strongly enough that it should be viewed and treated with approval by Washington. Our cable No. 168 of October 27 does urge UN consideration and the examination of a variety of options by the US government, but it apparently said little about the new Nagy government. In any event, we know that as late as November 6, the US government refused to deal with Nagy's representatives sent to New York.

Secondly, the Legation was not sufficiently specific in recommending that the UN Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld come personally to Budapest or send a high-level deputy. We did not, it is my recollection, because we assumed, at least until the outbreak of the Suez crisis, that such a move would have been under consideration in any event. One can debate, of course, the most propitious time for such a visit, that is, during the first week when fighting was at its peak, or prior to the Soviet decision to reinvade (October 31), or after that date but prior to November 4. I have argued that after the reentry of Soviet troops into Hungary became clear, that is, on November 1, that a UN presence could hardly have been accomplished until November 3, when probably it may have been too late to have had any positive results. (At minimum, such a presence would have increased the Soviets' level of embarrassment, whatever that might have meant.)

Third, in view of the communications problems caused by the refusal of the Hungarian post office to transmit coded cables, I am surprised now that we waited almost a week before taking messages by car to the Embassy in Vienna for transmission, and that we did not institute almost a daily run to Vienna for that purpose. I believe the road to Vienna was open until the

Legation convoy was turned back on November 2. I do not remember any discussion of this possibility. To have done that would have been a strain on personnel resources, but it seems to me now that at least we should have considered it. I do not recall that we did.

Dr. Kovács has raised questions about the absence of an effort on the part of the Legation to communicate with the newly-formed Nagy government. While in theory such a contact could have been very fruitful, after reviewing the question earlier in this article, I do not see it as at all surprising that it did not occur. In reading that conclusion, I do so without finding fault with the Legation for its failure to take such initiative.

But Dr. Kovács is also surprised that the new Imre Nagy Government did not on its part take the initiative and make contact with the US Legation in some fashion to explore the possibilities and the intricacies of Hungarian neutrality. He points out an earlier interest in that subject by György Heltai, who had just been appointed Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs. On the other hand, as my co-contributor to this article Ernest Nagy has described (accurately, I believe), Imre Nagy was not in control of the Revolution, "he was hardly in a position to sell restraint to the Freedom Fighters and we were not in a position to advocate it." It may be more accurate to describe Nagy's withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact and his appeal to the UN and western powers as a desperate and perhaps knowingly hopeless last-minute effort to avert disaster.

As far as action or inaction on the part of the US in relation to the Hungarian Revolution are concerned, one must recognize that the US Government and the Department of State were under considerable stress at the time of the uprising. A national election (always an event tending to overshadow anything else!), the sudden illness and hospitalization of Secretary Dulles, and the unexpected outbreak of the Suez crisis, all diverted attention and placed additional pressure on top officials. The Suez crisis, furthermore, hindered or possibly prevented normal cooperation with our European allies, particularly the United Kingdom.

What, ideally, might the US Government have done to have better supported the Revolution and the new Nagy Government and to have minimized the chances that the Soviets would reverse their decision of October 30. Did a real chance exist that some type of neutral, "Austrian" or other solution could have been worked out? That question goes beyond the scope of this inquiry and in any event depends much more on activities and attitudes in Washington and Moscow than in the US Legation in Budapest. I pass it over to Dr. Kovacs as a topic for his next article!

Nevertheless, certain facts stand out and cannot be avoided.

In my view, since World War II, domestic politics have almost always trumped foreign policy. Domestic politics were certainly the underlying objective of the "rollback" policy of Secretary Dulles, which was shown in 1956 to be totally without means of being carried out. Happily so, in my view, because the most obvious means by which it could have been implemented would have been through force, which might well have led directly to war with the USSR.

So the rollback policy was in fact a farce. But it was not viewed as a farce by thousands of

Hungarians who were further encouraged by Radio Free Europe to believe that some type of concrete assistance would follow their courageous assault on Soviet tanks in Budapest. The US Government certainly did not intend to imply through its support of RFE that concrete support would be available, but a large percentage of Hungarians without doubt inferred from these broadcasts that such would be the case.

So these actions, in my view, contributed to the likelihood of the uprising which occurred. But, would the Revolution have taken place in the absence of these US policies? Who can say? Clearly, the US and its European allies, also contributed to events in Hungary through their mere existence, to the existence of systems of law, order, justice and democracy which did not exist in Hungary, but which Hungarians were well aware of.

The US, through its Department of State, was also derelict, without much doubt, in its tardiness in appointing a new Minister to replace Christian Ravndal when he left in the summer of 1956. Perhaps the Legation contributed to this by not complaining loudly. (However, it is asking a bit much of any Charge to emphasize his inadequacies in seeking an early arrival of a new Chief of Mission!)

The Department of State was also derelict in its continuing suspicion of the Nagy Government. The Legation, as indicated above, perhaps could have done more to support that government and to show that it had repudiated its Communist past, but even considering the paucity of information, the available facts should have persuaded the Department to extend more credibility than it did. Its treatment of Anna Kéthly was particularly unworthy.

Henry Kissinger, in "Diplomacy," expresses his surprise that Secretary Dulles did not take advantage of a number of knowledgeable Kremlinologists, beginning with George Kennan, who were available and whose advice could easily have been sought⁸⁷. I find this a fascinating observation; it is hard to believe that to have utilized their experience would not have proven very profitable, and may well have resulted in substantially different US actions during the uprising.

So, finally:

The Hungarian Revolution of 1956 occurred. It probably presented the Hungarian people in their most united, most unified, moment in their history. It certainly showed the willingness of thousands to die for their freedom, and caused hundreds of thousands to flee their homeland. It contributed, perhaps as much as any other single event outside the USSR, to the downfall of the USSR.

October-November 1956 are not months of which the United States can be proud. Its government, even if unintentionally, had misled Hungarians and then was unwilling to shoulder its responsibilities and to make a serious enough effort to find a solution. Unfortunately this is not the only occasion when such a charge can be directed against the United States.

Many factors, potentially or in fact, played a role in the Hungarian Revolution: action by the

⁸⁷ Kissinger, Henry: *Diplomacy* (Simon & Schuster 1994 New York) p.562

UN; action by the US and other western Governments; the Suez crisis; the Nagy Government and its capabilities; the political movement to the right by the insurgents to a strongly anti-Soviet position; tensions and disagreements within the Kremlin; and others. It was our task in the Legation to weigh only some of these. To meld them all and to find the definitive answer to the question, whether the Soviet attack of November 4 could have been avoided, remains beyond my capability.

The U. S. Legation in Budapest did what it could. In hindsight, as with almost any human endeavor, its actions could have been improved. Yet, on the whole, it carried out its responsibilities. I am proud to have played a small role in that.

As for the writer, I continue to feel privileged to have witnessed the events of October-November 1956 in Hungary. The result: „*Szívemben félig magyar vagyok.*” – In my heart, I am half a Hungarian...

Kovács: Dear friends! The picture has become much clearer. Thank you both very much!