

COLD WAR - Soviet control of Eastern Europe - Hungary 1956 and Czechoslovakia

Source 1

Brief for the Secretary of State's Tour Autumn 1955.

THE PRESENT STATE OF THE COLD WAR

The cold war is entering into a new phase. For some months past, the Soviet leaders have been showing marked elasticity and imagination in the conduct of their diplomacy. Even under Malenkov, the Soviet Government settled a number of outstanding questions with the West. These were, for the most part, of a minor nature. The Bulganin-Khrushchev regime has carried the process much further. They have agreed to an Austrian Treaty. They have made a serious effort to re-establish their relations with Tito's Yugoslavia. They have made overtures to the German Federal Republic. The proposals which Mr. Malik presented to the Disarmament Sub-Committee in London on May 10, represented a definite move towards the Western position on disarmament. This trend has been accompanied by a generally more cordial approach to the West. For example, the Soviet press are now reporting on developments in the Western world more objectively than for many years. This changed attitude was very noticeable at Geneva where the Soviet leaders were clearly intent on establishing closer and more friendly relations with their Western colleagues. There seems no doubt that it is their present wish to reduce international tension ^{to ensure} ~~and~~ that Soviet relations with the non-Communist world should have a more normal appearance.

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Source 2

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FROM BUDAPEST TO FOREIGN OFFICE

Cypher/OTP

FOREIGN OFFICE AND

Mr. Fry

WHITEHALL DISTRIBUTION

No. 430

D. 4.04 p.m. October 25, 1956

October 25, 1956

R. 4.08 p.m. October 25, 1956

EMERGENCY

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Addressed to Foreign Office telegram No. 430 of October 25.

Repeated for information to Moscow

Vienna

Belgrade

Warsaw

and Saving to Bucharest

Sofia

Prague

Bonn

My immediately preceding telegram (to the Foreign Office only).

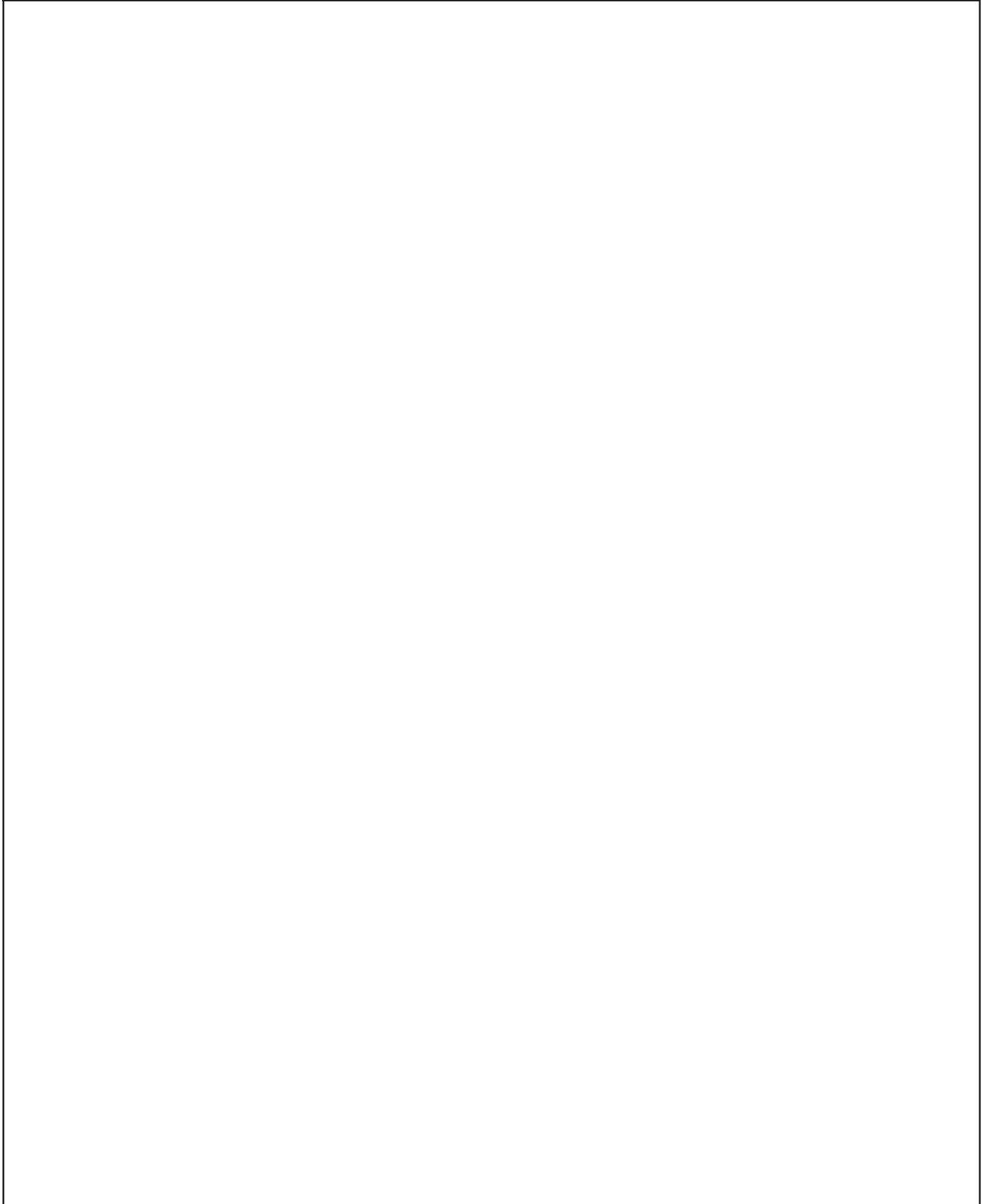
The Hungarian Tricolours without the Communist emblem, now flying on many public and other buildings throughout the city, while orderly crowds carrying their flags and singing patriotic songs are moving about at will. Without controlling their Government they appear to have [? grp. omitted] as close to controlling Budapest as is ever likely.

2. But casualties have been very severe, even amongst the women and children, and the populace are terrified of massive reprisals. The success of this revolt against Communism is clearly in the balance and, as I see it, we have a magnificent opportunity to tip the scales. Is there not justification for placing the situation at once before the United Nations, giving the widest possible publicity to our action? The mere fact of our application would be beneficial.

Extracts from a Foreign Office telegram reporting back to London on the situation in Hungary in October 1956.

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Source 3



A British news film showing the situation in Hungary in 1956.

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Source 4

B. 573(R).
December, 1959.

NO HOPE FOR THE HUNGARIANS

Few political conferences can ever have held out less hope for the future than the Hungarian Party Congress, held in Budapest from November 30 to December 4. Three years after the revolt, the Kadar régime has given notice that, despite the complete disenchantment and apathy of the people, the Communisation of the country is to proceed without any relaxation of police State methods.

Soviet troops are to remain in the country and with this promise of continued backing from Moscow the harsh measures to suppress dissidence and enforce conformity are to continue - particularly amongst the young and the intelligentsia where unorthodoxy is most prevalent - and the protests of the free world will be defied as before.

Further improvements in the country's economic situation and the people's standard of living may be expected - but always in conformity with, and subordinate to, the requirements of Soviet bloc plans, which may not always coincide with the welfare of the Hungarian people. In particular, the resumption of the collectivisation drive will cause hardship.

The Congress has probably confirmed most Hungarians in their feeling that the endurance contest which they are waging against the reimposition of Soviet Communism will be very long and very hard.

Extracts from a Foreign Office report on the state of Hungary 1959.

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Source 5

COMMUNIST INTEGRATION AND PENETRATION

The question of the co-ordination of economic planning has lately become more important, namely between the USSR and the People's Democracies of Europe. Already in the past good trade relations with countries of the Socialist bloc have been established, and an effective exchange of scientific and technological experience has been attained. The economic co-operation of the past, however, failed to get beyond individual questions. Being an industrially developed country with a high standard of living, Czechoslovakia must serve as an example for the benefit of the working people in the West. Through co-ordination of plans among countries of the Socialist bloc and agreement on the division of tasks in industry and agriculture, as well as in the field of science and technology, these particular countries and the entire Socialist bloc will be strengthened.

We, i.e. the Czechoslovak Republic, have to add our contribution towards the stabilisation of the Socialist camp, first of all by a further development of political and economic ties with the Soviet Union and with the Peoples' Democracies. One of our most important tasks will be to improve relations with our brothers in China and Yugoslavia.

Our foreign policy must become more active, and we must carry out these tasks with more stubbornness and determination. Apart from developing our foreign contacts along the official line, it is also up to our Party to promote the development of international contacts along all other lines and to see to it that our social and cultural organisations develop contacts with all foreign countries. One of the new tasks we are facing is to try to establish contacts and to promote friendly relations with all progressive organisations and individuals in capitalist countries.

A Foreign Office report on the origins of Czech discontent with Soviet control, 1956.

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Source 7

Overseas Affairs Czechoslovakia

(Previous Reference: CC (68) 37th Conclusions, Minute 2)

1. The Foreign Secretary said that we did not know the strength of the Warsaw Pact forces that had invaded Czechoslovakia on the night of the 20th-21st August, but it was clear that their grip on the country was complete although some free radio stations were still operating. Ground forces of the Soviet Union, East Germany, Poland and Bulgaria were involved together with Soviet air forces. There were also indications of an increased level of activity in the Soviet long-range air and rocket forces but these did not appear to be in a high state of alert. A remarkable feature of the political situation was that no Czech leader had so far shown himself willing to act as a Soviet puppet. Mr Dubcek, the Secretary of the Czech Communist Party, and others were in detention, but president Svoboda had issued a statement on the previous evening calling for the withdrawal of the invading troops and for the liberalisation programme in Czechoslovakia to continue; it might be, however, that the Soviet authorities hoped that he would be prepared to co-operate with them. The Czech people were behaving with very great restraint and, although there had been some deaths, widespread bloodshed did not seem likely. It was not clear why the Soviet Union had resorted to military action, despite the agreement reached at Bratislava, it might be that they did not consider that censorship was being sufficiently rigidly imposed by the Czech Government as a result of the agreement or that they feared the outcome of the elections for the Presidium of the Czech Communist Party which were due to take place on 9th September.

Report to the British Cabinet summing up the situation in Czechoslovakia in August 1968.