

DOCUMENT NO. 40: Working Notes from the CPSU CC Presidium Session,
October 28, 1956

Vladimir Malin's cryptic notes of the CPSU CC Presidium session five days after the first Soviet invasion reflect Moscow's confused and changing state of mind concerning Hungary. At this session, the Soviet leaders reassured themselves about the appropriateness of deploying troops into Budapest but recognized that conditions were continuing to deteriorate. Their frustration not only resulted in a decision to condemn the Hungarian leadership, especially Nagy, for "indecisiveness," but even led Presidium hardliners to criticize Mikoyan's activities. In this atmosphere, Nikita Khrushchev outlined the alternative courses of action open to the Kremlin: either to continue to support Nagy's government in hopes that it would be able to consolidate the situation, or set up a new government capable of restoring order. Khrushchev, who had serious concerns about a military solution, seemed to prefer the first alternative.

At this point, Mikhail Suslov, who had been ordered back to Moscow, joined the meeting. His report on the "complicated" circumstances in Budapest not only reflected the dilemmas the Soviet emissaries had to face in Hungary but also depicted the Hungarian leadership's efforts to gain control over the crisis. Emphasizing how unfavorable the conditions were for a military solution (mass support of the movement, increasing anti-Soviet sentiments, and so on), Suslov clearly endorsed Nagy's policies.

Convinced by Suslov's arguments and realizing that at this point the Hungarian leaders were "evidently ... not able to do more," the Presidium supported the Nagy government's October 28 declaration calling for a cease-fire, the dissolution of the secret police, and negotiations on Soviet troop withdrawals. "We must support this gov[ernmen]t" was the almost universal conclusion, "otherwise we'll have to undertake an occupation."

Participants: Voroshilov, Bulganin, Kaganovich, Malenkov, Molotov, Saburov, Khrushchev, Brezhnev, Zhukov, Shvernik,¹³⁸ Shepilov, Furtseva, Pospelov, Zorin.

On the Situation in Hungary
(Khrushchev)

Cde. Khrushchev—the matter is becoming more complicated.
They're planning a demonstration.
Kádár is leaning toward holding negotiations with the centers of resistance.¹³⁹

We must set Sobolev right at the UN.¹⁴⁰
The workers are supporting the uprising (therefore they want to reclassify it as something other than a "counterrevolutionary uprising").

Cde. Zhukov provides information.
They would refrain from stamping out one of the centers of resistance.¹⁴¹
An order was given not to permit a demonstration.

¹³⁸ Nikolai M. Shvernik was a candidate member of the CPSU CC Presidium from 1953–1957 and chairman of the CC Party Control Committee between 1956–1966.

¹³⁹ This presumably refers to negotiations between Kádár and trade union leaders during the night of October 27–28, but could also relate to Kádár's views, which he expressed at the October 28 session of the HWP PC (see Document No. 39).

¹⁴⁰ On October 28, Foreign Minister Shepilov instructed U.N. Representative Sobolev to represent the Hungarian events as a fascist movement at the upcoming Security Council session. Khrushchev's remark indicates a revision of this instruction corresponding to the imminent change in the official Hungarian evaluation.

¹⁴¹ On October 27, the HWP Emergency Committee (Directory) decided that no military action against the Corvin passage group would be launched unless the insurgents attacked first. The October 28 morning session of the PC confirmed this decision after Nagy criticized Gerő and Hegedűs for insisting on a military solution. See also footnote 127 above.

They're dismantling the railroad tracks in a number of localities.
In Debrecen power has passed to our troops.¹⁴²

Cde. Khrushchev provides information.

The situation is complicated.

Cde. Suslov is to fly back to Moscow.¹⁴³

A Directory has not been declared.

They propose that Hegedüs be removed from the Directory (4 in favor, and 6 against).¹⁴⁴

The plenum is going on now.

Cde. Voroshilov—they are poorly informed.

Cdes. Mikoyan and *Suslov* are behaving calmly, but are poorly informed.

We're in a bad situation. We must devise our own line and get a group of Hungarians to embrace it.

Cde. Mikoyan is not able to carry out this work.

What we intended to do (to send a group of comrades) must now be done.¹⁴⁵

We should not withdraw troops—we must act decisively.¹⁴⁶

Nagy is a liquidator.

Cde. Molotov—things are going badly.

The situation has deteriorated, and it is gradually moving toward capitulation.

Nagy is actually speaking against us.

Our *cdes.* are behaving diffidently.

It is agreed up to what limit we will permit concessions.

This pertains now to the composition of the government¹⁴⁷ and to the Directory.

They are excluding Hegedüs, and this means they're no longer showing regard for us.

The bare minimum is the question of friendship with the USSR and the assistance of our troops.

Cde. Mikoyan is reassuring them.

If they don't agree, we must consider what will happen with the troops.

Cde. Kaganovich—a counterrevolution is under way.

Indecisiveness of the Hungarian Communists.

Kádár should make certain concessions to the workers and peasants and thereby neutralize the movement.

Decisive action is needed against the centers of resistance; we cannot retreat.

¹⁴² This statement was far from accurate; it more correctly refers to the fact that the county's party and state leaders took refuge with nearby Soviet forces from the city of Debrecen, which was already under the control of the local revolutionary committee.

¹⁴³ *Suslov* actually arrived in Moscow while the meeting was underway and reported on the Hungarian situation at this meeting. Until then, the discussions had been based on reports received over the past few days.

¹⁴⁴ See Document No. 39.

¹⁴⁵ This presumably refers to a decision made during the October 26 meeting of the CPSU Presidium, which concerned Hungarian party officials studying in Moscow. The idea, first proposed by Hungarian Ambassador *János Boldoczki*, was to send these officials back to Hungary, with proper instructions, in order to strengthen the HWP. For the minutes of the meeting see *Kramer*, "The 'Malin Notes'," 389.

¹⁴⁶ *Voroshilov's* remark again refers to the October 28 session of the HWP PC (See Document No. 39) where the Hungarians requested the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Budapest without launching a military action against the *Corvin* passage.

¹⁴⁷ Although the new government formally came into being on October 28, the decision concerning its composition had already been made at the HWP PC session the day before. *Mikoyan* and *Suslov* immediately informed the Soviet leadership. See Document No. 38.

Cde. Bulganin—the HWP is acting ambivalently.
Kádár kept lurching. The main thing is to demand greater decisiveness from Kádár.

We must act as follows—summon Mikoyan to the phone and say: The HWP Politburo must act decisively; otherwise, we will take action without you. Perhaps will have to appoint the gov't directly.

Cde. Malenkov—we shouldn't lay blame for the situation on our comrades. They're firmly carrying out a line aimed at suppressing the uprising. Nagy from the government so he can put forth a program [sic].

Cde. Zhukov—regarding Cde. Mikoyan's role, it's unfair to condemn him right now. The situation has unfolded quite differently compared to when we decided to send in troops.

We must display political flexibility.

We must organize the CC for more flexible actions.

We must organize armed workers' brigades.

Our troops must be kept in full readiness.

The main center of resistance must be suppressed.

Cde. Saburov—agrees with Cde. Zhukov. They must take up their positions at large enterprises. A program is needed.

Cde. Khrushchev—we will have a lot to answer for.

We must reckon with the facts.

Will we have a gov't that is with us, or will there be a gov't that is not with us and will request the withdrawal of troops?

What then?

Nagy said that if you act he will relinquish his powers.¹⁴⁸

Then the coalition will collapse.¹⁴⁹

There is no firm leadership there, neither in the party nor in the government.

The uprising has spread into the provinces.

The [Hungarian] troops might go over to the side of the insurgents.

We can't persist on account of Hegedüs.

Two options.

The gov't takes action, and we help.

This might soon be completed, or Nagy will turn against us.

He will demand a cease-fire and the withdrawal of troops, followed by capitulation.

What might the alternatives be?

1) The formation of a Committee, which takes power into its hands¹⁵⁰ (this is the worst alternative), when we . . .

¹⁴⁸ Nagy threatened to resign over the planned attack against the Corvin passage group; see footnote 127.

¹⁴⁹ "Coalition" here merely means the presence of non-communist politicians in the government, not a coalition of different parties.

¹⁵⁰ The first reference to a "Military-Revolutionary Committee," the formation of a counter-government, was made at the October 26 CPSU CC session. The word "committee" originates from the vocabulary of the 1917 Bolshevik revolution when such "revolutionary military committees" were formed. For the minutes of the October 26 session, see Kramer, "The 'Malin Notes'," 389.

2) This gov't is retained, and officials from the gov't are sent into the provinces.

A platform is needed.

Perhaps our Appeal to the population and to workers, peasants, and the intelligentsia should be prepared, or else we're just shooting.

3) Would it not be appropriate if the Chinese, Bulgarians, Poles, Czechs, and Yugoslavs appealed to the Hungarians?

4) Decisively suppress the armed forces of the insurgents.

Cdes. Brezhnev, Pospelov, Shepilov, and Furtseva are to prepare documents.¹⁵¹

It is agreed: the fraternal parties should appeal to the Hungarians.

*On the Situation in Hungary*¹⁵²
(Cde. Suslov)

Cde. Suslov: The situation is complicated.

On 23 Oct. our troops entered.

On 25 Oct. only one pocket of resistance was left; we found out about it on 26 Oct. It was at the "Corvin" cinema, a group headed by a colonel from the Horthyite army.¹⁵³

Single gunshots are heard (often).

They're beating officers.

3,000 wounded, 350 dead (Hungarians).

Our losses are 600 dead.

The popular view of our troops now is bad (and has gotten worse). The reason is the dispersal of the demonstration on 24 Oct. 56.¹⁵⁴ Shooting began. 70 ordinary citizens were killed. Many flags were hung up on the sidewalk.

Workers are leaving their enterprises.

Councils are being formed (spontaneously) at enterprises (around various cities).

There is an anti-Soviet trend to the demonstrations.

How can we regain control of the situation?

The establishment of a relatively strong gov't.

¹⁵¹ This refers to the appeals, referred to above, that were to be issued. For the actual list of these documents, see Document No. 53.

¹⁵² There is some disagreement among scholars about the proper placement of the following section of Malin's notes, which covers Suslov's report to the Presidium. According to Mark Kramer, who published extensive translations of Malin's notes (including this one) relating to Hungary in the *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, Suslov's comments must have come late on October 28 or early the following morning (see Kramer, "The 'Malin Notes'," 391-392 and 403, fn 68). The editors of a more recently published compilation of Russian documents on the revolution placed the section as it appears in this volume, which also has the effect of attributing to Suslov (instead of to Khrushchev) the last two lines before Bulganin's next statement, below. (See *Sovietskii Soyuz i vengerskii krizis*, 435-436 for the location of this segment of Suslov's remarks.)

¹⁵³ This alleged Horthyite colonel first appears in the October 27 report by Serov with the name "Berlaki." However, since no such person is known to have been at the Corvin passage, it is possible that the report refers to Pál Maléter who was in the neighboring Kilián barracks. For Serov's report (forwarded by Suslov and Mikoyan), see *Sovietskii Soyuz i vengerskii krizis*, 414-415.

¹⁵⁴ This should be October 25. Suslov is referring to the bloodshed at Kossuth Square.

Our line is not to protest the inclusion of several democrats in the gov't.
Yesterday a government was formed.¹⁵⁵

On the morning of 28 Oct., at 5:00, Kádár arrived and pointed out that the trade unions had demanded a reassessment of the insurgents, reclassifying the events as a national-democratic uprising.¹⁵⁶

They want to classify it according to the example of the Poznań events.¹⁵⁷

Kádár reported that he had succeeded in agreeing with the trade unions to eliminate the formula of a national democratic movement and about the organs of state security.

In his address, Nagy inserted a point about the withdrawal of Soviet troops.
They're also insisting on a cease-fire.

Our line now: this time the gov't is recommending a cease-fire, and the military command is devising an order for the withdrawal of troops from Budapest.

Nagy and Szántó raised the question of removing Hegedüs from the Directory.

There's no need to hold elections.¹⁵⁸

Do we support the present government once the declaration is issued?¹⁵⁹

Yes, support it. There is no alternative.

Cde. Bulganin: . . .

Cde. Voroshilov: We acted correctly when we sent in troops. We should be in no hurry to pull them out.

American secret services are more active there than Cdes. Suslov and Mikoyan are.¹⁶⁰ A group of comrades should go there. Arrange to form a gov't and then withdraw the troops. We sent you there for nothing.¹⁶¹

(Cdes. Khrushchev and Kaganovich object.)

Cde. Bulganin: We acted properly when we sent in troops, but I can't agree with the assessment offered by Cde. Voroshilov. We should endorse the actions taken by Cdes. Mikoyan and Suslov. We must draw the right conclusion: In Budapest there are forces that want to get rid of

¹⁵⁵ See footnote 147, above.

¹⁵⁶ Concerning Kádár's meeting with the leaders of the SZOT, see footnote 139, above.

¹⁵⁷ This refers to Gomulka's famous speech on October 20, 1956, at the Eighth Plenum of the PZPR CC, in which he denied that the Poznań uprising was counterrevolutionary in character, and explained it as the result of despair on the part of the workers caused by the grave mistakes committed while building socialism.

¹⁵⁸ Presumably, this refers to the resolution of the October 28 HWP CC session, according to which the Fourth Party Congress was to be convened within the shortest possible time. The word "elections" refers to the election of congress delegates by the party organizations.

¹⁵⁹ For the declaration, see Document No. 44.

¹⁶⁰ Voroshilov may be referring to the report sent by Serov on October 28, according to which U.S. diplomats said during a private conversation that "if the uprising is not liquidated in the shortest possible time, U.N. troops will move in at the proposal of the USA and a second Korea will take place." In fact, this information lacked any foundation. For the report, see *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, no. 5 (Spring 1995): 30-31.

¹⁶¹ "You" means Suslov and Mikoyan.

Nagy's and Kádár's government. We should adopt a position of support for the current government.

Otherwise we'll have to undertake an occupation.

This will drag us into a dubious venture.

Cde. Kaganovich: Regarding the sending of troops, we acted properly in sending them.

There is no reason to attack Mikoyan and Suslov.

They acted properly. It's unfair to lay the blame on them.

If we don't offer support, there'll be an occupation of the country.

That will take us far afield.

We should do what is needed to support the gov't.

Changes shouldn't be made in the declaration regarding the withdrawal of troops.

So that they speak about friendship.

The question is how to strengthen the party.

We don't need to send additional people there.

Malenkov: The actions that were taken were correct.

There is no point at all in condemning Cdes. Mikoyan and Suslov.

We should support the new gov't.

We should keep troops there with the approval of the gov't.

Cde. Malenkov: So many people were involved there that there'll have to be a guarantee of an amnesty.

Cde. Molotov: We acted properly when we sent in troops. The initial messages from Cdes. Mikoyan and Suslov were reassuring about their view of the government.

The influence of the party on the masses is weak.

With regard to the new government, we should support it.

But regarding friendship with the USSR, they're talking about the withdrawal of troops. We must act cautiously.

Cde. Zhukov: We must support the new gov't.

The question of a troop withdrawal from Hungary—this question must be considered by the entire socialist camp.¹⁶²

The authority of the HWP CC must be raised.

We should appeal to the fraternal parties so that they, in turn, will issue appeals to the Hungarians.

In Budapest, we should pull troops off the streets in certain regions.

Perhaps we should release a statement from the military command.

With regard to the assessment of Cdes. Mikoyan and Suslov, it's inappropriate to say the things that Cde. Voroshilov did.

Cde. Saburov: We must support this gov't.

The authority of the gov't must be increased in the eyes of the people.

We shouldn't protest their assessments of events, and we shouldn't protest about the withdrawal of troops, albeit not an immediate withdrawal.

Cde. Khrushchev: Agrees with the cdes.

We must support this gov't.

¹⁶² This is the first reference to withdrawing Soviet forces from the entire country, not just Budapest. The term "withdrawal" may have been used in this sense during the entire meeting but this cannot be ascertained from the notes.

We must devise our tactics.

We must speak with Kádár and Nagy: We support you; the declaration—you evidently are not able to do more.

We will declare a cease-fire.

We are ready to withdraw troops from Budapest.

We must make this conditional on a cease-fire by the centers of resistance.

Cde. Molotov: Second, we must look after the Hungarian Communists.¹⁶³

Cde. Bulganin—the regime of people's democracy in the country has collapsed.

The HWP leadership no longer exists.

Power has been gained by . . .

Cde. Kaganovich—we're not talking here about concessions, but about a war for the people.

The declaration must be adopted.

A troop withdrawal from Budapest.

Cde. Voroshilov: If only a group could be formed there, we could leave our troops in place.

There's no one to rely on.

Otherwise there's war.

Cde. Khrushchev—I support the declaration.

Politically this is beneficial for us.

The English and French are in a real mess in Egypt.¹⁶⁴ We shouldn't get caught in the same company.

But we must not foster illusions.

We are saving face.

Fundamentally, the declaration must be adopted.¹⁶⁵

But adopt it with corrections.

Life in the city must be put right.

An appeal from the fraternal parties.

A ciphered cable to Yugoslavia.¹⁶⁶

Cde. Pospelov is to be included in preparations of the report for 6. XI. 56¹⁶⁷

If there is to be a leaflet from the military command, let . . .

Hegedüs

Gerő

Piros

them to Bulgaria.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶³ This presumably refers to the Soviet aim to evacuate certain Hungarian leaders from the country. See footnote 168 below.

¹⁶⁴ This remark indicates that on October 28 Khrushchev already knew about the imminent attack against Egypt.

¹⁶⁵ Again, this refers to the Nagy government's October 28 declaration, see Document No. 44.

¹⁶⁶ The purpose of this telegram was presumably to arrange for a consultation with Tito, or propose a personal meeting. Nevertheless, the telegram was not sent on the 28th, but on the 31st, see Document 53.

¹⁶⁷ This refers to the speech that Suslov was to deliver on the occasion of the 38th anniversary of the Bolshevik revolution on November 6, 1956.

¹⁶⁸ This is what appears in the original. Eventually, the three officials, together with their families, were flown to Moscow not Bulgaria during the night of October 28. According to Hegedüs' recollection, former Defense Minister István Bata was also evacuated with the group. Piros and Hegedüs remained in the Soviet Union until 1958, while Gerő could only return on 1960.

[Source: TsKhSD, F. 3, Op. 12, D. 1005, Ll. 54–63, compiled by V. N. Malin. Originally published in English in the Cold War International History Project Bulletin no. 8/9 (Winter 1996/1997): 389–92. Translated by Mark Kramer.]