

CONFIDENTIAL

CHAPTER IV

SOVIET MILITARY INTERVENTION  
(23 October - 3 November 1956)

Sections

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Section 1 - Movements of Soviet forces and areas of fighting

1. On account of the developments in Hungary, the USSR authorities took certain military precautions and measures which, on the basis of available evidence, may be listed as follows:

- (i) certain units were mobilized at the beginning of October after unrest had materialized in Hungary;
- (ii) certain Commanding Officers were alerted on 21 October;
- (iii) floating bridges were assembled at Zahony on the USSR-Hungarian border on 20-21 October.

2. On the other hand, actual movements of Soviet tanks on the Debrecen-Budapest highway did not start, an eye-witness said, until the morning of the 24th.\* The political police, at Nyirbator, reported at 1 a.m. that Soviet troops from Rumania had entered Hungary. The same morning other Soviet units crossed the border about 74 kilometres from Beregsurany and still further North over the above-mentioned pontoon bridges at Zahony. From the vicinity of Beregsurany the Soviet troops proceeded to Niyregyhaza and Debrecen, and from Zahony they went towards Miskolc.

3. In all, the following units were either involved in the fighting on 24-30 October or, at any rate, present in Hungary by 3 November:

- (i) two divisions which had been stationed in Hungary before the insurrection, namely the 2nd Mechanized Division, which intervened in Budapest, and the 17th Mechanized Division which was moved to West Hungary;
- (ii) two Divisions from Rumania which participated in the fighting as early as 24 October, namely the 32nd and 34th Mechanized Divisions;



- (iii) two or three Divisions which had been stationed in neighbouring parts of the Soviet Union and had arrived in Hungary by 3 November.

The above-mentioned Divisions were equipped with an estimated 2,500 tanks.

5. The main areas of fighting during the period 23-30 October were as follows: the area of Pecs, in Southern Hungary; certain mining districts on the Czechoslovak frontier; Csepel Island, south-west of Budapest; various centres around Kecskemet in the Central Hungarian plain.



Section 2 - Resistance of Population to Soviet Troops

1. Broad indications as to the part played by the various population groups in the fighting may be derived from the above geographical data. Both the Pecs and the Czechoslovak border areas are mining districts in which the workers sought to free or protect Hungarian resources - such as uranium - from Soviet control or intervention. In addition Pecs is a university town and there, as in Budapest, the students were prominent in the fighting. The fact of active participation by the youth in the insurrection is also confirmed by the large proportion of young people who later emigrated.
2. The insurgents obtained conventional weapons in the manner indicated below.\* But little or no Soviet infantry was available or, at any rate, used in fighting the insurrection, and rifles or pistols were not adequate to fight Soviet armour. Crowbars were used to paralyze the tanks and the so-called Molotov cocktail proved to be a most effective weapon. Three important features of this weapon was that it could be made by the insurgents themselves; that its component parts were either available at home or easy to secure - gasoline and a bottle - and, thirdly, that its use required no qualifications other than gallantry amounting, in many cases, to virtual self-destruction. A former member of a group of insurgents in Budapest, recalling that they had ample supplies of gasoline in the Corvin block said this meant "unlimited" possibilities for the making of such anti-tank weapons.

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\* See Chapter X.



3. In addition to proving technically resourceful, the Hungarians were prompt in waging psychological warfare. Part of the Soviet forces, as noted, had remained in Hungary for several months. Other units had been stationed in Rumania for a year and a half and they had also become familiar with Central European ways. The Hungarians on their part had learnt some Russian at school where it was compulsory or in prisoner-of-war/<sup>camps.</sup> Whenever they had a chance, they started to talk with Soviet Army personnel and plead with them not to interfere in Hungarian affairs or, at any rate, not to harm the population. Soviet troops, on their part, found themselves in an embarrassing situation. Not only did they have to fight civilians but, in many cases, women, children, elderly people. The fact that the insurgents, in trying to <sup>over</sup> win Soviet Army men/to their side, met with some success is established by various instances of open rebellion.\* It is, moreover, confirmed by the circumstance that an effort was made by the Soviet authorities, in preparing a second round of fighting, to bring in units not previously stationed in Central Europe and, to a large extent, originating from the Asiatic regions of the Soviet Union.

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\* See Chapter X.



Section 3 - Endeavours of Government to end the fighting  
(24 - 28 October)

1. The Nagy Government spared no efforts trying to put an end to the fighting which, except for skirmishes with the AVH, mostly involved Soviet forces, on the one side, and Hungarian insurgents on the other.

2. A first approach may be broadly described as information or propaganda, calculated to calm the feelings of resentment and indignation, which made the populace literally hurl themselves against Soviet tanks, by seeking to explain the presence of Soviet troops and to justify the part which such foreign forces were playing in Hungarian affairs. In a broadcast on 24 October shortly after noon\*, it was indicated that "several of our listeners have asked us to explain under what circumstances and with what tasks units of the Soviet army have come". In answering this question the following points were made:

- (i) the Soviet troops were in Hungary under the Warsaw Agreement;
- (ii) armed attacks by enemies of the people had threatened the country's order and the life of the population;
- (iii) the Government had requested that Soviet troops should help to defeat the counter-revolutionary gang;
- (iv) the Soviet soldiers were "risking their lives to protect the life of the peaceful citizens of Budapest and the tranquility of the nation";
- (v) "after restoring order, the Soviet troops will return to their barracks."



3. In this task of "persuasion and enlightenment" which, it was pointed out, was of extreme importance, the Government-sponsored radio indicated, a few minutes after the above broadcast, that more and more Communists and people outside the Party were helping.
4. Part of the propaganda effort also consisted in repeated announcements that "more surrenders" were taking place all the time. On 24 October for instance, it was announced that "the armed counter-revolutionaries who had penetrated into the radio building" were among the groups which had surrendered. Another series of announcements listed groups which had remained loyal and, in some cases, had rejected the appeal of the "emissaries of the enemies of the people" and handed them over to the authorities.
5. Another approach, combining persuasion and more or less thinly veiled threats, consisted in declaring amnesties, with certain time-limits. It had been ordered on the 24th at 8 a.m. that summary jurisdiction should be applied throughout the country to acts calculated to overthrow the People's Republic and to acts of violence and the illegal possession of arms. Repeated orders were given over the radio to Government forces to eliminate the resisters. As, however, there were little or no such forces - apart from Soviet troops and the AVH - ready to fight the insurgents, the Government, beginning on 24 October in the morning, offered amnesties, by which those who stopped fighting and laid down their arms were to be exempted from summary jurisdiction. This first amnesty had a time-limit which was extended from 1 to 5 p.m. on the same day. Subsequently, however, other offers were made including the decree - law No.30 of 1956 whereby, on 26 October, at 4.30 p.m. amnesty was



granted to "all those taking part in the armed fight ... provided they lay down their arms not later than 21.00".

6. Government appeals for the cessation of fighting were backed, on 24 - 25 October, by statements originating from groups or individuals, ranging from the Communist Party to the leader of a group closely associated with the original demonstrations, Gabor Tanczos, the Secretary of the Petoeffi Circle. Among the organizations which recommended calm and order, the People's Patriotic Front intervened as well as its affiliates of the National Peace Council and the Democratic Association of Hungarian Women. The National Trade Union Council and the Peace Council of Catholic Priests also pleaded with the insurgents, as well as University Students and Journalists Associations and Professors Tibor Erdei-Gruz and Istvan Ruzsnyak. Possibly more authoritative, in view of comparative aloofness from the system, at least in the past few years, were the statements of two former Chairmen of the Presidential Council of the People's Republic, Zoltan Tildy (1946-1948) and Arpad Szakasits (1948-1950). Lastly Jozsef Groesz, the President of the Bishops' Bench raised his voice, condemning violence, on the basis of the principles of the Roman Catholic Church.

7. On 28 October a new development took place. The Government ordered and the Ministries of Defence and Home Affairs undertook to implement "an immediate cease-fire" applying "to the entire country and to all groups which are in our country".



Section 4 - Agreement on conditional evacuation of Budapest by Soviet forces: the question of the setting up of the new security forces (28 October - 1 November)

1. The Hungarian Government, on the same day it issued a cease-fire, made an announcement designed to help the resisters decide in favour of its acceptance. The agreement with the USSR Government which Mr. Nagy made public on 28 October had two main aspects -- Soviet withdrawal from Budapest and negotiations on the question of Soviet withdrawal from Hungary\*.
2. A beginning to Soviet withdrawal from Budapest had apparently been agreed unconditionally, since the Soviet troops would "immediately begin their withdrawal from Budapest". On the other hand, the completion of the withdrawal movement from the capital city was subject to the following condition. "... the Soviet troops ... simultaneously with the establishment of the new security forces, will leave the city's territory".
3. The desirability of coming to an understanding with the insurgents had never been doubted by Mr. Nagy whose efforts to placate and satisfy them have been recorded in the previous section. Even the cease-fire agreement did not relieve the Government of the necessity to persuade the insurgents that they should co-operate finally in/re-establishing law and order, as hostilities were, at best, merely suspended. Considering, moreover, the condition now placed by Soviet authorities for completing their withdrawal from Budapest, the Government became ever more anxious to reach agreement with the

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\* The latter point will be dealt with in Chapter VIII.



resisters. For, on the basis of the announcement of 28 October, the establishment of new security forces, that is, the re-establishment by the Government of its internal authority, was also a pre-requisite to the removal of external pressure in the form of the presence of foreign troops in the capital city. On the other hand, in insurgents quarters, suspicion prevailed, not unnaturally in view of Mr. Nagy's apparent role in the developments on 23 - 27 October. They were reluctant to giving up their arms, or even their existence as separate armed units, as long as Soviet forces were in Hungary, or, in any case, in Budapest, with the result that the negotiations went round in circles and suspicions were not cleared until the Government had given firm indications of changes both in personnel and policies.

4. On 29 October, the Ministries of National Defence and Home Affairs announced that they had issued an order reorganizing the Army and the police. Both Ministries were at the time headed by Communists, General Karoly Janza and Ferenc Munnich. Although abolition of the AVH was announced on the same day, the insurgents were not impressed. Yet the Army kept sending emissaries to their strongholds. Vivid accounts of such contacts with senior Army officers were given by a number of witnesses. The insurgents felt the authorities were only interested in disarming them. Certain Army officers, on their part, particularly at the top - where more care had been taken to place dependable Communists - did not sympathize, and had no real desire to combine their units, with insurgents forces, all the more as they feared competition for senior posts henceforth reserved to Party nominees.



5. It was, however, announced on Radio Budapest, also on 29 October, that certain resisters had begun handing over their arms to Hungarian troops.

6. On the following day, the Army leadership, realizing how hopelessly unpopular they were made a new move to placate the insurgents. The Army Command announced on 30 October that they had set up a "Revolutionary Military Council of the Army Command", dismissing "the sectarian forces which were retarding the march of events." By that time, weariness was such on both sides participating in Budapest street fighting that the cease-fire became more effective as between Soviet forces and the insurgents - a circumstance which also facilitated contacts between the latter and the armed forces. Regular negotiations took place notably at the Headquarters of the insurrectionary Korvin group. But even then the resisters were still suspicious that the War Ministry representatives pretended they had cleaned house so as to save their lives and, if possible, their posts.

7. On 31 October, however, the Government gave a serious indication of its eagerness to have new security forces organized - and Budapest finally evacuated by Soviet troops. It recognized the decisions taken by the Army Command, replacing Lajos Toth, as Chief of the Army General Staff by Istvan Kovacs. The Government further appointed Major-General Bela Kiraly as Military Commander of Budapest. But the most significant appointment of all was that of the leader of the insurgents' resistance in the Kilian barracks, Colonel Pal Maleter, to the post of First Deputy Defence Minister - previously held by the Chief of the Army General Staff, Lajos Toth.



8. This last move by the Government apparently broke the deadlock in negotiations between the insurgents and the leaders of the armed forces of the Government mostly generals without troops. The efforts initiated on 30 October with the setting up of a so-called Revolutionary Council of the Army and followed up on the following day with actual negotiations with the insurgents side were finally successful on 1 November. A "Revolutionary Committee of the Public Security Forces" was set up by representatives of the "armed formations taking part in the national democratic revolution, the factory guards, the Honved Army and Police, with a view to coordinating the activity of the Public Security Forces in the interest of safeguarding the achievements of our victorious democratic revolution. The Committee will function until the new Government, based on a general and secret election takes up office...." The same statement, which was signed by Major-General Bela Kiraly, also announced that "the representatives of the armed formations, other than Army and Police, yesterday decided to amalgamate into a new National Guard, which enjoys equal status with the Honved Army and Police. Besides the Honved Army and Police, only members of the National Guard are entitled to carry arms".