

## ANNIVERSARY: THE 100TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE ESTABLISHMENT OF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS BETWEEN THE US AND HUNGARY (1922-2022)

### 1956 and the US Legation in Budapest

#### Devoted, Enthusiastic Professionals Compelled to Act without Clear Instructions from Home and without Functioning Communication Devices in the Most Turbulent Historical Times\*

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#### Abstract

*It is well known that the academic literature on the 1956 Hungarian Revolution is enormous in Hungary and abroad and the analysis of the policy making within the main state-actors (Hungary, Soviet Union, US, Great Britain, Yugoslavia, etc.) and the UN is also abundant, filling long shelves in the libraries specialized in this field of research. Taking into account the Hungarian Yearbook's anniversary theme chosen for 2022, as well as the approximative length of the articles as established by the editorial board, I intend to cover the activity of the American Legation in Budapest during the Revolution. The article focuses on the activity of the American Legation and covers policy-making in Washington or in Budapest only to the extent that is strictly necessary to understand the background of the steps taken or omitted.*

**Keywords:** 1956, revolution, US Embassy, US Legation, Imre Nagy.

#### 1. Introduction and Personal Background

It is well known that the academic literature about the 1956 Hungarian Revolution is enormous in Hungary and abroad and the analysis of the policy-making within the main state-actors (Hungary, Soviet Union, US, Great Britain, Yugoslavia, etc.) and the UN is also abundant, filling long shelves in the libraries specialized in this field of research. Open-access electronic journals have also

\* This contribution was written in my personal capacity, the thoughts expressed herein cannot be attributed to the ICC.

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significantly contributed to a better and historically more and more accurate perception of these heroic and tragic events of the post-World War history.<sup>1</sup>

Taking into account the Hungarian Yearbook's anniversary theme chosen for this year as well as the approximative length of the articles as established by the editorial board, I intend to cover the activity of the American Legation in Budapest during the Revolution. In fact, I return to a topic that I treated in an article<sup>2</sup> commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Revolution. This article was followed by an annotated, footnoted interview<sup>3</sup> with Jordan Thomas Rogers<sup>4</sup> and Ernest Nagy, American diplomats serving in Hungary in 1956 with whom I lead a very intensive electronic correspondence. In these two papers, I used some previous scholarly articles, diplomatic documents published in the US<sup>5</sup> and in

- 1 See e.g. Charles Gáti, *Failed Illusions: Moscow, Washington, Budapest, and the 1956 Hungarian Revolution*, Woodrow Wilson Center Press, Washington DC, 2006. (In Hungarian: *Vesztett illúziók. Moszkva, Washington, Budapest és az 1956-os forradalom*, Osiris, Budapest, 2006.); Chris Tudda, "Reenacting the Story of Tantalus" Eisenhower, Dulles and the Failed Rhetoric of Liberation', *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 7, Issue 4, 2005, pp. 3-35; Csaba Békés, 'The Neutrality of Hungary during the 1956 Revolution', in Mark Kramer et al. (eds.), *The Soviet Union and Cold War Neutrality and Nonalignment in Europe*, Lexington Books, London, 2021, pp. 324-343; Csaba Békés, 'The 1956 Hungarian Revolution and international politics', *Storia e Politica. Annali della Fondazione Ugo La Malfa*, Vol. XXX, 2015, September 2016, pp. 23-41; Csaba Békés et al. (eds.), *The 1956 Hungarian Revolution: A History in Documents (National Security Archive Cold War Readers)*, Central European University Press, Budapest, 2003.
- 2 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, Issue 3, 2006, pp. 14-27, at <http://mjil.hu/MJIL8/20063kovacs1.pdf>.
- 3 Péter Kovács et al., '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)', *Miskolc Journal of International Law*, Vol. 4, Issue 1, 2007, pp. 1-38, at <http://mjil.hu/MJIL9/20071kovacs1.pdf>.
- 4 I was particularly honored when the already 93-year-old Jordan Thomas Rogers came to New York during my campaign for being elected to the ICC. We met in the building of the Hungarian Mission to the UN, where we continued the discussion about his recollections, and I could personally thank him for all that he had done.
- 5 *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957, Eastern Europe. Volume XXV*, Washington DC, 1990 (FRUS or FRUS XXV), at <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v25>.

Hungary<sup>6</sup> and interviews made by others.<sup>7</sup> Since then, plenty of new writings have been published, some of them also reflecting on my considerations or the views expressed by the interviewed veteran diplomats.<sup>8</sup> Later, Jordan Thomas Rogers gave some other interviews, as well.<sup>9</sup> Ernest Nagy earned his scientific degree on the basis of his dissertation written about 1956.<sup>10</sup> As it happens, I have since then discovered other papers<sup>11</sup> which I could have used, had I known about them or had I had access to them. Some other documents which also seem to be very pertinent to the subject were also published in the meantime.<sup>12</sup> However, the 'price' for granting access to some previously confidential documents was that the university database only received a 'heavily redacted' version, *i.e.* smaller or longer parts and personal names are omitted.<sup>13</sup> Naturally, I also relied on the writings of current Hungarian historians, experts of the Cold War and 1956.

With all the above in mind, I return to this topic focusing on the activity of the American Legation and covering the policy-making in Washington or in Budapest only to the extent strictly necessary to understand the background of the steps taken or omitted.

- 6 *Titkos jelentések 1956 okt. 23-nov. 4.*, Hírlapkiadó, Budapest, 1989 (Secret Reports) The documents published in this book are the Hungarian translations of a good number of British and American cables, mentioning generally also their control numbers. Some of them are *verbatim* translations of those to be found in FRUS XXV. Other pieces have no equivalent in FRUS XXV, which is also only a selection. However, the most interesting is that the date of the 'Secret Reports' is prior to FRUS XXV. Moreover, the copyright page does not indicate the origin of the documents. I tried to find an explanation for the obscure origins of the Secret Reports in Kovács *et al.* 2007, pp. 31-32. Since then, the Secret Reports can be found at [www.magtudin.org/Titkos\\_Jelentesek\\_56.pdf](http://www.magtudin.org/Titkos_Jelentesek_56.pdf).
- 7 Martin Ben Swartz, *A new look at the 1956 Hungarian Revolution: Soviet opportunism, American acquiescence*, Ph.D. Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, 1989, at <https://sites.tufts.edu/fletcherussia/files/2018/09/1988-Martin-Ben-Swartz-A-new-look-at-the-1956-Hungarian-Revolution.-Soviet-opportunism-American-acquiescence.pdf>; Géza Katona, Interviewed by Zsolt Csalog, 'A Major Oversight on Our Part', *The Hungarian Quarterly*, Vol. 47, Issue 182, Summer 2006, pp. 109-131, at [www.cceol.com/search/article-detail?id=15919](http://www.cceol.com/search/article-detail?id=15919).
- 8 Ronald D. Landa, *The 1956 Hungarian Revolution: A Fresh Look at the U.S. Response*, Draft, 2012, at [www.esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/FOID/Reading\\_Room/MDR\\_Releases/FY12/12-M-1691.pdf](http://www.esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/FOID/Reading_Room/MDR_Releases/FY12/12-M-1691.pdf).
- 9 Thomas J. Dunnigan, *Interview with Jordan Thomas Rogers. The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project*, 2007, at <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/service/mss/mfdip/2007/2007rog01/2007rog01.pdf>.
- 10 Ernest A Nagy, *Crisis Decision Setting and Response: The Hungarian Revolution*, National Security Affairs Monograph 78-1, National Defense University, Washington DC, 1978.
- 11 *Clandestine Services History. The Hungarian Revolution and planning for the future, 23 October – 4 November 1956*, Volume I of II (1958), approved for release in 2005, the author's name is redacted. Available at [https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB206/CSH\\_Hungarian\\_Revolution\\_Vol1.pdf](https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB206/CSH_Hungarian_Revolution_Vol1.pdf). (In the followings: *The Hungarian Revolution* 1958). See also the interview with John R. Mapother in Swartz 1989, pp. 554-555.
- 12 See especially the extremely valuable collections of the National Security Archive: Malcolm Byrne (ed.), *A National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book*, 2002, at <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB76/>.
- 13 See *e.g.* the unreadable, whitened or blacked parts in Landa 2012, or in *The Hungarian Revolution* 1958.

## 2. The Surprising Uprising

It is a common historical standpoint that the outbreak of the Hungarian Uprising, which soon turned into a Revolution, surprised all the important actors: the Hungarians (communists, whether Stalinist or moderate, non-communists and anti-communists), the Soviet Union, the US, Great Britain, France and Yugoslavia. Taking into account the subject of my article, let's take a look at the reasons why the US and its legation did not expect that the widely known political fermentation, closely followed by diplomats,<sup>14</sup> *i.e.* the debate in the communist party controlled Writers' Federation and the 'Petőfi Circle' as well as at the universities would suddenly turn into a mass demonstration on 23 October, the evening and night of which was already marked by armed fighting in Budapest, around the Radio Building and elsewhere.

Washington's surprise is mentioned *inter alia* by Kissinger,<sup>15</sup> Landau,<sup>16</sup> the 1958 CIA assessment,<sup>17</sup> the diplomats of the legation<sup>18</sup> and of the State Department,<sup>19</sup> *etc.* The unpreparedness was reflected first and foremost in the dilemma of "what to do" in the collision of the "roll back policy"<sup>20</sup> and the "liberation of the captive nations" in a situation where the imperative to avoid a direct military conflict with the Soviet Union prevailed.<sup>21</sup> The unpreparedness was also manifested *e.g.* (i) in the lack of an own radio-transmitting equipment at the legation, (ii) the replacement of the departing minister Ravndal by Wailes, his successor and the latter's belated arrival,<sup>22</sup> even if in the meantime, the Legation working with *cca.* 30 people had a *chargé d'affaires*, counsellor Spencer Barnes,<sup>23</sup> (iii) a long-term foreign mission assigned to Ernest Nagy, one of the three diplomats speaking Hungarian as their mother tongue.<sup>24</sup> On their own, each of

14 Kovács *et al.* 2007, pp. 4, 5, 12, and 13.

15 Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1994, p. 557.

16 Landa 2012, pp. 84, and 85.

17 *The Hungarian Revolution 1958*, pp. 77, 89, 102, and 106.

18 Kovács *et al.* 2007, pp. 30, and 33; *see also* Katona in Swartz 1989, pp. 531-532.

19 Horace G. Torbert, in 1956 Officer-in-Charge in the office of Austrian-Italian Affairs, in the European Bureau of the State Department. *See* Swartz 1989, p. 598.

20 *See* Amory and Mapother in Swartz 1989, pp. 482, and 556; *see also* Rogers in Dunnigan 2007, p. 20.

21 Rogers in Kovács *et al.* 2007, p. 36 and in Swartz 1989, p. 587; *see also* Mapother in Swartz 1989, pp. 556, and 560; Landa 2012, pp. 32, and 49.

22 Christian Ravndal was sent as an Ambassador to Ecuador in August 1956 and Edwin Wailes, ambassador in South Africa succeeded him in Budapest. He arrived in Budapest only on 2 November. On his alleged hesitations, and the reasons of his late arrival due to a boat trip, a holiday and a French language course *see* Landa 2012, pp. 17-18.

23 The Legation was led during these weeks by *chargé d'affaires* Spencer Barnes. He had served formerly at the Moscow, Berlin and Tehran embassies. He was an excellent analyst but not an activist and rather "timorous" as characterized by Rogers and Katona. He was very active in collecting information, but he was not the one to take important, formal steps without instruction. Kovács *et al.* 2007, pp. 9, and 17; Landa 2012, p. 18; Csalog 2006, pp. 112, and 117; *see* Katona in Swartz 1989, p. 532; *see also* Rogers in Dunnigan 2007, p. 14.

24 Géza Katona, Ernest Nagy and Anton Nyerges. Some other diplomats, *e.g.* Jordan Thomas Rogers made efforts to learn Hungarian, but nevertheless, their language of communication was primarily English and eventually German. *See* Kovács *et al.* 2007, pp. 4-5.

these problems could have been managed smoothly in normal times, but between 23 October and 4 November, their cumulative effect hindered the Legation's ability to reach real decision-makers in Washington with their thorough and accurate analysis and to receive appropriate instructions from them.

### 3. Communication, Information and their Limits

The lack of direct radio communication deserves an explanation. It was linked to the fact that some time before and upon the demand of the FBI, the Hungarian Legation in Washington was forbidden to use a radio-transmitting device and as a retaliation, the Hungarian authorities did the same *vis-à-vis* the American Legation. *Lacking a lawfully allowed transmitter, the coded communications went through the Hungarian Post*, but the service was often suspended due to alleged technical reasons.<sup>25</sup> The Legation had on the other hand a telex device but only an open communication version.<sup>26</sup> Since no such conflict emerged between London and Budapest concerning the use of own diplomatic radio devices, US diplomats occasionally asked their British counterparts for a favor to have their messages transmitted. However, due to capacity problems, the British legation sometimes asked Barnes and Rogers to shorten their reports considerably. Apparently, some of the reports that the US diplomats thought to have been sent by the British, never made it to Washington or at least cannot be found in the archives of the State Department or in the FRUS. Finally, Rogers and Gleason, the latter being one of the US military attachés, took all the reports – including the ones transmitted with the help of the British Legation and those which were sent through the occasionally functioning Hungarian Post Office – and drove to Vienna to transmit them from the US Embassy in Austria. They set off on 29 October but arrived in Vienna only on 30 October. They came back with a not too strong, but still functioning device that they used until it got identified by the Kádár puppet government, installed after 4 November by the Soviets.<sup>27</sup>

Under these circumstances, *the State Department and the White House were not informed directly by the Legation in Budapest* but via telegrams received from their embassies accredited in Vienna, Belgrade, Moscow, London, Paris, New York, *i.e.* capitals of neighboring countries or important actors in world policy, traditional stock exchange of diplomatic information, *etc.*

It is worth noting that even the CIA assessment paper was complaining – with a certain degree of self-criticism – about the *lack of adequate information seized directly in Hungary*. The collection of information mostly took place in Vienna or at the Austrian side of the border and in the latter case, essentially through intermediaries.<sup>28</sup> Their sources were generally returning journalists,

25 Kovács *et al.* 2007, p. 7; see Rogers in Dunnigan 2007, p. 26; see also Katona in Swartz 1989, p. 536.

26 Csalog 2006, p. 116; see Katona in Swartz 1989, p. 536.

27 See in detail Kovács *et al.* 2007, pp. 7, and 8; Landa 2012, p. 16; *The Hungarian Revolution 1958*, p. 85.

28 *The Hungarian Revolution 1958*, pp. 80, 81, 83, 84, *etc.*

railroad workers, freedom fighters with the ambition to speak to the world from Vienna, and radio-amateurs able to catch broadcastings of city radios.<sup>29</sup> The report put a bitter emphasis on the fact that *there was only one agent under diplomatic immunity in Budapest* and only a few other staff members were present in Hungary during those days.<sup>30</sup> Some made their ‘coming out’ at an elderly age,<sup>31</sup> while some historians tried to identify others<sup>32</sup> even if according to the well-established custom, this may only be done after the person concerned has passed away.

The conditions were of course far from being optimal, even in an average, normal situation, but the members of the US Legation in Budapest felt themselves truly abandoned, when due to the lack of an own, direct and secure communication system, and to the repeated problems of the Hungarian Post Office (which surprisingly disappeared when the Revolution seemed to win at the end of October<sup>33</sup>) concerning not only telegrams but also open phone calls, the only source they could rely upon was public media broadcastings, newspaper coverage about Eisenhower’s, John Foster Dulles’s or, the ambassador to the UN, Henry Cabot Lodge’s statements.

The talks with the staff of the US Embassy in Vienna on 30 October were certainly important for Rogers and Gleason. We also know that Minister Edwin Wailes was informed in detail by Ambassador Llewellyn Thompson. The briefing lasted a whole day and also contributed to his late arrival in Budapest, only on 2 November.

Between 23-29 October, conversations with British and other diplomats also working in Budapest could help somewhat, at least when the Foreign Office and the Quai d’Orsay could deal with other issues besides Suez. In the interviews with Rogers, apart from the British diplomats, Israeli and Yugoslav colleagues were mentioned as people helping or acting together with the American diplomats.<sup>34</sup> In this context, Géza Katona referred to contacts with the British, French, Italian, Egyptian, Turkish and Indian legations and, to a much lesser extent, with the Yugoslav legation.<sup>35</sup>

29 Id. pp. 96, 97, and 98.

30 Id. pp. 78, and 85; Mapother in Swartz 1989, p. 558.

31 “[...] Seymour Freidin, Vienna correspondent of the New York Post, confessed to being a CIA agent in 1973, and would presumably have been working for US intelligence in 1956 as well. There is no trace of such a suspicion in any Hungarian document [...]” János Molnár, *Foreign Correspondents in the 1956 Hungarian Revolution*, at [http://server2001.rev.hu/msite/display\\_item.asp?id=2&act=tu&lang=e](http://server2001.rev.hu/msite/display_item.asp?id=2&act=tu&lang=e). See also Vienna based John R. Mapother in Swartz 1989, p. 555. On English side, see Anthony Cavendish, *Inside intelligence*, Granta, Cambridge, 1989. See also at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anthony\\_Cavendish](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anthony_Cavendish).

32 CIA had a single officer in Hungary 1956, see at <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB206/index.htm>.

33 Kovács *et al.* 2007, pp. 7-8.

34 Id. pp. 10, 15, and 16.

35 Csalog 2006, p. 127; The Yugoslav contact (by the way a next-door neighbor) is mentioned however also by Rogers in Swartz 1989, p. 586.

#### 4. Main Lines of the Few Instructions that the Legation Got and Had to Live with...

The US governmental (and of course the international) unpreparedness to a surprising Uprising and the already mentioned telecommunication problems explain that the staff of the Legation was suffering from the lack of reliable information from Washington<sup>36</sup> and had no other guideline than the traditional *'Wait and see! And please report!'*<sup>37</sup>

On 24 October, Imre Nagy was appointed as Prime Minister, and sometime later, the above-mentioned guideline was completed with the alleged instruction to keep a distance from him.<sup>38</sup> It is true that "Washington's instructions were not entirely explicit, not exactly precise."<sup>39</sup> (However, Géza Katona resolutely denied<sup>40</sup> having spoken about any instructions and having mentioned that at all to Csalog in his interview in 1984.)

What I could read as an instruction or at least as an official message having reached the Legation, is the following: (i) an empty expression of thanks and appreciation sent by J.F. Dulles to the Legation;<sup>41</sup> (ii) the advice that the only message that they can address to the crowds is the expression of sympathy and the promise to inform the US government in as much detail as possible;<sup>42</sup> (iii) a circular sent from Washington to all the US embassies and legations about the

36 Rogers: "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 *et al.* 2007, p. 8; *see also* Rogers in Swartz 1989, pp. 584, 585, 588-589, and 590.

37 *See* Jacob D. Beam, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Soviet and East European Affairs in 1956: "[...] Except for the Mindszenty problem, I do not recall sending special instructions to any of the missions in Eastern Europe, beyond keeping them informed of current developments and general policies. Our missions in the area were competently led and performed well, although in Budapest we didn't even have a Minister until well into the Revolution, and he was never able to present his credentials." Beam in Swartz 1989, p. 491; *see also* Katona in Swartz 1989, pp. 533, and 537.

38 *See* Katona in Csalog 2006, p. 126.

39 *Id.* *See also* the former consul Ernest Nagy's remarks: "The State Department was unhelpful and provided only minimal guidance to the Legation for the focus of its efforts." Kovács *et al.* 2007, p. 33; *see* Katona in Swartz 1989, p. 531.

40 Kovács *et al.* 2007, pp. 27-28. I have to add that Géza Katona gave his interview of 1984 to Zsolt Csalog apparently in Hungarian and it was translated into English by Tim Wilkinson and published in 2006. *See* Csalog 2006, pp. 109, and 131.

41 108. *Transcript of a Teletype Conversation Between the Legation in Hungary and the Department of State, October 25, 1956*, at <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v25/d108>. *See also* in Hungarian: 'Telegram of 25 October, Without numbering but with control number: 14835', in *Secret Reports* 1989, p. 49.

42 *Id.* *See also* in Hungarian: 'Telegram of 25 October, without numbering but with control number: 14853', in *Secret Reports* 1989, p. 51.

Hungarian situation informing them that the US's standpoint is to encourage the Soviets to put an end to the use of their military troops in Hungary and to prepare to call back their troops. This is also the policy followed by the US in the UN. The promise of the Nagy-government to get rid of the Soviet troops is precarious, and it is too early to assess Imre Nagy's personality. The regime may cheat in order to break down the resistance. The US government is ready to send humanitarian aid, and the shipment of other items is still under consideration.<sup>43</sup>

As mentioned, Eisenhower's and J.F. Dulles's main concern was how to let things go, while avoiding a direct armed confrontation with Soviet Union.<sup>44</sup> Plenty of historical works have studied the brainstorming in the White House and the State Department. I do not want to enter into their presentation and analysis. However, one may assume that *the diplomats in Washington did not want to send any clear instructions* or answer the questions of their fellow diplomats working at the Legation concerning the proper course to be followed in the UN<sup>45</sup> *until a decision was taken at higher level*. Similarly, the question asked by military attaché Todd concerning the content of a reply if demand for assistance in weaponry were formulated by the Hungarian counterpart, was left deliberately without an answer.<sup>46</sup>

Although the intelligence branch kept complaining of the lack of reliable news on what was happening in Budapest,<sup>47</sup> the formal instruction or minimum guideline was the following: "we must restrict ourselves to information collection only, that agents sent to the border must not get involved in anything that would reveal US interest or give cause to claim intervention [...]"<sup>48</sup> and it was not permitted to send US weapons in.<sup>49</sup> The mistrust in Imre Nagy was also underlined, even though he seemed to be "daily gaining in stature and was acceding in giant steps to the increasingly radical demands [...]"<sup>50</sup>

The question whether the mistrust in prime minister Imre Nagy was well founded, was thoroughly examined by the diplomats of the Legation during our interview. They recognized their own responsibility in as much as *they realized too late that Nagy – even if a communist – was ready to go in another direction than the Moscovite dicta*.<sup>51</sup> They also emphasized that Nagy did not seem to be a strong

43 143. *Circular Telegram From the Department of State to All Diplomatic Missions*, at <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v25/d143>; See also in Hungarian: 'Telegram of 30 October, control number: 779/546', in *Secret Reports* 1989, pp. 82-83.

44 See also Katona in Swartz 1989, p. 535.

45 See Rogers in Kovács *et al.* 2007, p. 20. See also the cable 168, control number 17573, 27 October in *Secret reports* 1989, pp. 60-61.

46 Landa 2012, p. 41. Todd's telegram was written on 31 October but arrived in the Pentagon on 2 November.

47 *The Hungarian Revolution* 1958, p. 83.

48 Sent on 28 October. *The Hungarian Revolution* 1958, p. 91. See also instruction sent on 1 November. *The Hungarian Revolution* 1958, p. 95: "[...] Nothing must happen which would justify charge of intervention [...]."

49 Sent on 29 October. *The Hungarian Revolution* 1958, p. 92.

50 Sent on 31 October. *Id.* p. 93.

51 See Katona in Csalog 2006, pp. 125-126; and in Swartz 1989, pp. 532-533; see Rogers in Kovács *et al.* 2007, pp. 16, 18, 35, and 37.

leader and it was always with hesitations that he went ahead alongside with the continuously radicalizing Revolution.<sup>52</sup> They confirmed that even now, looking back from the 21st century, this remains their professional conviction.<sup>53</sup> They pointed out, however, that the mistrust *vis-à-vis* the national communists was closely linked to the McCarthy legacy in the State Department,<sup>54</sup> led by John Foster Dulles, as well as in the intelligence, led by his brother, Allan Dulles. For J.F. Dulles, Cardinal Mindszenty was the potential focal point and not Imre Nagy, whom he felt weak.<sup>55</sup>

## 5. The Reporting Activity of the Legation

The following cables sent by the Legation became selected into the FRUS XXV: (i) a telegram about the demonstrations on 23 October;<sup>56</sup> (ii) a 23 October telegram about the continuation of the demonstration, the destruction of Stalin's statue, fights around the Radio;<sup>57</sup> (iii) a 24 October telegram suggesting the issuing of a solemn declaration in favor of the Hungarians and a strong protestation against Soviet military intervention;<sup>58</sup> (iv) telex-exchange of 25 October about shootings in Budapest, Imre Nagy's views and situation of Americans living or staying there;<sup>59</sup> (v) a 27 October telegram about the extension of the uprising to other cities; dilemma of insurgents whether to trust Imre Nagy; several suggestions *e.g.* issuing a presidential declaration in favor of the Hungarians, actions to be taken at the UN, *etc.*;<sup>60</sup> (vi) a 28 October telegram about the continuation of shootings; difficulties in communicating with Washington; query about eventual decision on previous suggestions; urging for

52 See Rogers and Nagy in Kovács *et al.* 2007, pp. 9-10, 17, 19, and 33.

53 *Id.*

54 See Rogers in Kovács *et al.* 2007, pp. 9, 17, and 37; and in Swartz 1989, p. 583; see Katona in Csalog 2006, p. 125; see also Torbert, speaking about the impact of ideology on contacts with communists at that time, in Swartz 1989, p. 600.

55 “[...] Mr. Dulles declared that the main problem facing us today in Hungary was the lack of a strong guiding authority to bring the rebels together. Nagy was failing to unite the rebels, and they were demanding that he quit. Somehow a rallying point must be found in order to prevent chaos inside of Hungary even if the Soviets took their leave. In such a heavily Catholic nation as Hungary, Cardinal Mindszenty might prove to be such a leader and unifying force. [...]” 152. *Memorandum of Discussion at the 302nd Meeting of the National Security Council*, Washington DC, 1 November 1956, 9-10:55 am, FRUS XXV, at <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v25/d152>. See on that Rogers in Kovács *et al.* 2007, p. 9 and in Dunnigan 2007, p. 28.

56 97. *Telegram From the Legation in Hungary to the Department of State, Budapest, October 23, 1956, 2 pm*, at <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v25/d97>.

57 98. *Telegram From the Legation in Hungary to the Department of State, Budapest, October 23, 1956, midnight*, at <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v25/d98>.

58 103. *Telegram From the Legation in Hungary to the Department of State, Budapest, October 24, 1956, 3 pm*, at <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v25/d103>.

59 108. *Transcript of a Teletype Conversation Between the Legation in Hungary and the Department of State, October 25, 1956*, at <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v25/d108>.

60 125. *Telegram From the Legation in Hungary to the Department of State, Budapest, October 27, 1956, 11 am*, at <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v25/d125>.

clear instructions;<sup>61</sup> (vii) a 29 October telegram about chaos in Budapest and suggestion that Washington should exercise real pressure on the Soviet Union in order to stop the military intervention;<sup>62</sup> (viii) a 30 October telegram about the situation in Budapest where insurgents demand free elections in return for stopping fighting. Imre Nagy's position is weakening but an agreement resulting in the withdrawal of Soviet troops can stabilize him. Beside him, two former peasant and small holder party politicians seem to emerge as a focal point. The Legation feels that the achievement of a status similar to Finland's could be a good solution.<sup>63</sup> (ix) A 31 October telegram about the Soviets' withdrawal from Budapest, even though there are some sporadic shootings. No sign of any antisemitic outbursts. Social-democrats reconstitute and can eventually enter Nagy's government. Prospects of good American-Hungarian relations. It would be useful to issue a presidential statement, a draft is attached.<sup>64</sup> (x) A 1 November telegram about Soviet critics on radicalization and about Nagy's strengthening Hungarian support. The Legation feels that Soviets and Nagy may be collaborating in order to stop the radical demands and suggests that the US should welcome the proclamation of Hungary's neutrality.<sup>65</sup>

As already mentioned, it is unclear (and the internet version of the FRUS XXV definitely doesn't contain any such indication) when the cables were received by Washington. The booklet entitled 'Secret Reports'<sup>66</sup> contains their Hungarian translation,<sup>67</sup> with two exceptions.<sup>68</sup> Moreover, it contains other telegrams as well, stating that they were sent from the Legation.

The cables that I sought to summarize from the 'Secret Reports' were as follows: (i) a telegram sent on 23 October about the continuing demonstrations;<sup>69</sup> (ii) a telegram of 24/25 October on the outbreak of armed clashes around the Radio Building. Participants of demonstrations were seen fraternizing with Hungarian soldiers coming with tanks. Arrival and intervention of Soviet tanks at different points of Budapest. Martial law is declared by the government.<sup>70</sup> (iii) A

61 130. *Telegram From the Legation in Hungary to the Department of State, Budapest, October 28, 1956, 2 pm*, at <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v25/d130>.

62 135. *Telegram From the Legation in Hungary to the Department of State, Budapest, October 29, 1956, 8 pm*, at <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v25/d135>.

63 140. *Telegram From the Legation in Hungary to the Department of State, Budapest, October 30, 1956, 2 pm*, at <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v25/d140>. The two people are Béla Kovács, having returned recently, former MP and charismatic general secretary and of the Smallholders Party who was kidnapped by Soviets in 1947 and sentenced to Gulag; and Zoltán Tildy, MP of the same party and former head of State between 1946-1948.

64 148. *Telegram from the Legation in Hungary to the Department of State, Budapest, October 31, 1956, 1 pm*, at <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v25/d148>.

65 154. *Telegram from the Legation in Hungary to the Department of State, Budapest, November 1, 1956, 9 pm*, at <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v25/d154>.

66 See the full reference of this booklet in the introductory footnotes of the article.

67 See according to the Roman numeration in the main text: the *i.* on pp. 26-28, the *ii.* on pp. 35-36, the *iv.* on pp. 43-51, the *v.* on pp. 60-61, the *vi.* on pp. 61-62, the *vii.* on pp. 70-71, the *viii.* on pp. 80-81, the *ix.* on pp. 98-99.

68 These are the *iii.* and the *x.*

69 'N°153, control n°13527', in *Secret Reports 1989*, p. 31.

70 'N°156, control n°14654', in *Secret Reports 1989*, pp. 36-37.

telegram of 26 October about the situation and the fights during the previous night around the buildings where a number of US diplomats were living. Readiness of the Legation to arrange the evacuation of some US citizens. Heavy fights on the Buda side of the capital but also elsewhere.<sup>71</sup> (iv) Continuation of the telex-exchange of 25 October about shootings. Appreciation of Imre Nagy's and János Kádár's chances in the coming weeks. The State Department is ready to issue entry visa to the Hungarian delegation arriving soon at the General Assembly of the UN, no objection on behalf of the Legation.<sup>72</sup> (v) 26 October: Signs that some Hungarian army units are working together with, or in favor of the insurgents. Other units of the Hungarian army and of the security service and the Ministry of Defence are on the side of the Soviet army. Demand to receive urgently reliable information about the US position in the matter and the suggestion that the case should be brought before the UN and the insurgents' government should be recognized.<sup>73</sup> (vi) 26 October: a short report on a talk with an insurgent leader, informing them about their meeting with Imre Nagy, who asked for their support. It seems that this person would be ready to enter Nagy's government. The Legation is ready to maintain this contact without giving the impression of accepting the gentleman as its negotiating partner.<sup>74</sup> (vii) A 26 October telegram about another meeting with the same person, informing the Legation about Imre Nagy's views and relatively unsure position and Nagy's aspiration to arrange the withdrawal of the Soviet army if the insurgents surrender to his government.<sup>75</sup> (viii) A 27 October telegram about the nationwide repercussions of the fight for freedom and actions in different towns of the country. A larger overview of the considerations transmitted by an insurgent leader about Nagy.<sup>76</sup> The Legation urgently requests official information about the US standpoint when discussing the Hungarian situation in the UN.<sup>77</sup> (ix) A 27 October telegram about a visit two Hungarian ladies paid to a US diplomat's wife. (They are spouses of important Hungarian writers.<sup>78</sup>) The talk is about a cease-fire that the US Legation could propose and arrange between the insurgents and the government. The Legation asks for official position before giving an answer.<sup>79</sup> (x) A 29 October telegram about the continuous presence of Soviet troops in Budapest despite the official declaration that they would leave. The Legation is not convinced that the population has trust in Nagy's promises.<sup>80</sup> (xi) A 29 October telegram transmitting suspicions about the official news of the evacuation of Soviet troops. Different groups of the nationalist insurgents are not

71 'N°165, control n°17446', in *Secret Reports* 1989, p. 47.

72 'N°165, control n°14805', in *Secret Reports* 1989, p. 48.

73 'N°162, control n°17452', in *Secret Reports* 1989, pp. 57-59.

74 'N°163, control n°17435', in *Secret Reports* 1989, p. 59.

75 'N°166, control n°17548', in *Secret Reports* 1989, pp. 59-60.

76 Without giving the name, it seems that it is the same person as reported the day before.

77 'N°168, control n°17573', in *Secret Reports* 1989, pp. 60-61.

78 It is to be reminded that the debates organized by the Hungarian Writers' Federation played a very important role in the fermentation of the political climate turning into the Uprising and the Revolution.

79 'N°169, control n°17465', in *Secret Reports* 1989, p. 61.

80 'N°182, control n°17359', in *Secret Reports* 1989, pp. 71-72.

cooperating with each other. The insurgents desperately need foreign assistance like (a) the setting up of an international commission representing their case in talks with the Hungarian communist government and the Soviets, (b) sending of military equipment.<sup>81</sup> (xii) A 30 October telegram about a new manifestation with the following claims: Cardinal Mindszenty for prime minister. Colonel Pál Maléter for minister of defense. Ceasefire and evacuation of Soviet troops. They ask for Western intervention in case of these demands are refused.<sup>82</sup> (xiii) A 30 October telegram about heavy fights at different points of Budapest after a relatively calm period. A demonstration arrived in front of the US Legation and asked for the US' intervention and assistance. Soviet troops are rather in the countryside, or in their barracks but not in the cities.<sup>83</sup> (xiv) A 31 October telegram suggesting the issuing of a presidential statement (draft attached), expressing joy over the independence and willingness to give economic assistance completing the already decided humanitarian assistance.<sup>84</sup> (xv) A 31 October telegram on calm conditions. Insurgents are controlling the surroundings of their positions and they arrange services. There is a cooperation between insurgents and the Hungarian army, namely, the insurgents do not oppose to the army entering former Soviet positions. According to the Radio, Soviets are leaving, but there are rumors about Soviets in Hungarian uniform.<sup>85</sup> (xvi) A 31 October telegram advising the State Department to use its press contacts to keep silent about the few atrocities and lynchings, and to emphasize instead the need to return to the rule of law and to show news on return to democracy, the new parties, etc.<sup>86</sup> (xvii) A 1 November telegram about the evacuation of Soviet troops from Budapest and also about news that they stopped in the countryside not too far from the capital. Insecurity in the streets especially at night. Evacuation of American families. Some exactions occurred against people who were presumed to be members of the former security services and there were also lynchings.<sup>87</sup> (xviii) A telegram of 1 November about the roots and perspectives of the uprising, dilemmas surrounding communist Imre Nagy's tactics, possible entry of former small holders' party leaders<sup>88</sup> in a diluted communist government. Complete return to private economy system is hardly possible.<sup>89</sup> (xix) A 1 November telegram about the proclamation of neutrality. The *chargé d'affaires* was invited to the Ministry for foreign affairs and the text was transmitted to him in the form of a *note verbale*.<sup>90</sup> (xx) A 1 November telegram about the necessity to restore law and order fully, in order to avoid whatever pretext for Soviets to come back. Imre Nagy's government seems to be accepted by the people and is ready to organize

81 'N°180, control n°17322', in *Secret Reports* 1989, pp. 72-73.

82 'Without N°, control n°18132', in *Secret Reports* 1989, p. 79.

83 'N° 197, control n°18530', in *Secret Reports* 1989, pp. 79-80.

84 'N° 201, control n°18984', in *Secret Reports* 1989, p. 99.

85 'N° 198, control n°19083', in *Secret Reports* 1989, p. 100.

86 'N° 203, control n°19176', in *Secret Reports* 1989, p. 100.

87 'N° 204, control n°422', in *Secret Reports* 1989, p. 103.

88 Béla Kovács and Zoltán Tildy, already mentioned in a previous telegram, see footnotes *supra*.

89 'N° 206, control n°1278', in *Secret Reports* 1989, pp. 104-105.

90 'N° 204, control n°208', in *Secret Reports* 1989, p. 106.

free elections. The evacuated Soviet troops are still all around Budapest. Joy and pro-American feeling all over Budapest. A presidential statement or at least that of the Secretary of State is strongly advised by the legation, a draft is attached.<sup>91</sup> (xxi) A 1 November telegram about an alleged meeting between three members<sup>92</sup> of the government and cardinal Mindszenty, where the cardinal was asked to support Imre Nagy's government, but he seems to be reluctant and has conditions. The Legation feels that Mindszenty's standpoint is going against Hungary's prompt interests *i.e.* the re-establishment of law and order, the relaunching of the economy and the avoidance of anything that could be used by Russians as a pretext to return.<sup>93</sup> (xxii) A 2 November telegram about the relative calm in the capital, only some shootings at night. According to not fully confirmed information and rumors, Budapest is nearly encircled by Soviets and new motorized units are coming as well. The deputy minister for foreign affairs says that the Soviet ambassador<sup>94</sup> has not yet responded to the government's inquiry. Changes in government can be expected.<sup>95</sup> (xxiii) A 3 November telegram contains information about the military strength of the Soviet units surrounding Budapest. A Soviet ultimatum about the Warsaw Pact and recent changes in government can be expected, maybe the government will accept it, but the population will resist, and all this will turn into carnage. What about the UN? Rumors that a 16 member UN mission is allegedly on its way.<sup>96</sup> (xxiv) A 3 November telegram clarifies that the recent military information came from a very reliable Hungarian officer, high in the hierarchy. On the other hand, there are allegedly some talks about the complete withdrawal of Soviet troops. The Legation is in difficulty when evaluating the reliability of the different sources as the content of their information was rather contrary.<sup>97</sup> (xxv) A 4 November telex exchange between the Legation and the State Department about the outbreak of a massive Soviet attack. Tildy's secretary<sup>98</sup> called the Legation informing them about a general Russian attack all over the country and asked for help in the name of the government. The Legation begins to destroy all reports. Preparations for the evacuation of the families of US diplomatic staff. Cardinal Mindszenty arrived and asked for asylum and for American help and protection for Hungary, victim of the Soviet aggression. Exchange of impressions with the UK Legation about the Soviet military attack. Béla Kovács<sup>99</sup> was also present and asked for admission but finally left. The Hungarian delegation sent to negotiate with the Soviets about

91 'N° 210, control n°745', in *Secret Reports* 1989, pp. 111-112.

92 Béla Kovács and Zoltán Tildy and the newly appointed minister for defence, Pál Maléter.

93 'N° 212, control n°1123', in *Secret Reports* 1989, p. 115.

94 Youri Andropov.

95 'N° 217, control n°1670', in *Secret Reports* 1989, p. 119.

96 'N° 219, control n°2099', in *Secret Reports* 1989, p. 123. As an answer, the State Department informed the Legation about the content of not yet voted draft resolution submitted by the US in the UN and remarked that the arrival of whatever UN mission is a pure baseless gossip. Precisions are expected about evaluation of Soviets' troops. LEG-TEL 219, 3 November, in *Secret Report* 1989, p. 123.

97 'N° 224, control n°2258', in *Secret Reports* 1989, p. 123.

98 Zoltán Tildy was – at this time – State Minister *i.e.* deputy PM.

99 Béla Kovács, mentioned in the previous footnotes. See Katona in Swartz 1989, pp. 537-538.

their withdrawal was most probably arrested. The State Department imparts some information about the current state of discussions in the UN on Hungary.<sup>100</sup> (xxvi) A 4 November telegram transmitting State Minister István Bibó's call upon the President to provide urgent help and to stop the Soviet aggression.<sup>101</sup> (xxvii) A 4 November telegram about the alleged establishment of a new government by the Soviets in Szolnok, led by János Kádár, qualifying Imre Nagy a counter revolutionary. Soviet ultimatum to Imre Nagy. Béla Kovács leaves and understands the consequences of refusing asylum. The Legation gives a presentation on the geographic location of Soviet attacks and popular resistance. Precise information on the number of Soviet tanks, soldiers, divisions already in Hungary and in some points in the neighboring countries. Estimation of Hungarian armed forces, freedom fighters, tanks, artillery. István Bibó's call to the peoples of the world to support Hungary and about the world-threatening danger of leaving Hungary to fend for itself.<sup>102</sup>

## 6. Secretary of State J.F. Dulles's Instruction to the Legation in Budapest on 3 November

Minister Edwin Wailes arrived in Budapest on 2 November but with the instruction to refrain from transmitting his credentials.<sup>103</sup> Suddenly, a telegram arrived from State Secretary Dulles which instructed the Minister to

“act at once present credentials [...] and seek establish official contact highest levels Hungarian Government on urgent, close and continuing basis. [...] Factors dictating this action include: (1) Implications current Soviet military movements; (2) Hungarian Government's apparent acceptance 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.”<sup>104</sup>

The telegram contained also the text of the speech to be delivered before the Head of State with very warm words about heroism, friendship and the possibility

100 'Without number. Control n° 25.36', in *Secret Reports* 1989, pp. 135-141.

101 'Without number, "Document in the Eisenhower Library"', in *Secret Reports* 1989, p. 142.

102 'N° 231, control n°22881', in *Secret Reports* 1989, p. 143.

103 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 precious time when being late in recognizing the nature of the events. Swartz 1989, pp. 355-358. Similarly, in Landa 2012, p. 66. See also Rogers in Kovács et al. 2007, p. 29.

104 161. *Telegram From the Department of State to the Legation in Hungary, Washington, November 3, 1956, 6:50 pm*, at <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v25/d161>.

of cooperation and the promise to defend Hungary's independence at the UN.<sup>105</sup> The telegram added that upon transmittal of credentials, a press release should be published containing the text of the speech.

This was more or less close to the repeated suggestions made by the Legation about a solemn declaration recognizing the achievement of the government and expressing sympathy and willingness to provide assistance in economy and global politics. However, *the date and time of issuance (i.e. 3 November, 6:30 pm Washington D.C. time) meant 4 November, 12:30 am according to the Central-European time zone* applicable also in Budapest, and presumably the decrypting at the Legation also required a certain amount of time. In the meantime, *the Soviet offensive was launched at 04:15 am on 4 November* with the well-known tragic consequences and destruction all over Budapest. Under these circumstances, the credentials were not transmitted. After having sent a radio message to the Hungarian people and to the nations of the world,<sup>106</sup> Imre Nagy and some members of his government left the building of the Parliament and sought temporary refuge at the Yugoslav embassy of Budapest.

Finally, Wailes never transmitted his credentials when János Kádár and his government were installed by the Soviets in Budapest, the minister was once again instructed not to proceed with the transmittal, because it could be felt as a sign of recognition. As retaliation for withholding the transmittal of the credentials, Edwin Wailes was declared *persona non grata* and had to leave Hungary on 22 February 1957.

105 "Mr. President: In presenting the Letter accrediting me as Minister of the United States of America to the Government of Hungary, and the Letter recalling my predecessor, I express to Your Excellency, on behalf of the Government and people of the United States, warmest greetings to the people of Hungary. In this momentous hour of their national life, the Hungarian people have shown highest courage, integrity of purpose, and unflinching spirit. Their just struggle for freedom and independence commands the sympathy and the admiration of the entire world. 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 Hungarian freedom and independence before the United Nations and to contribute all possible assistance for the alleviation of human suffering in Hungary. In accordance with the clear purposes of my Government, I assure Your Excellency that I shall devote myself earnestly and unceasingly to the promotion of good will and friendly understanding between Hungary and the United States and to the advancement of those ideals and principles which inspire our two peoples, give rise to mutual interests, and ensure the welfare of both countries. It is my sincere hope that my efforts in this regard will engage the full cooperation of the Hungarian Government. I now present to Your Excellency my Letter of Credence as Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary of the United States of America to the Government of Hungary and the Letter of Recall of my predecessor, Mr. Christian M. Ravndal." See at <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v25/d161>.

106 See the text here: *Hungarian Radio Broadcasts Speech Nagy Made in 1956*, at <https://apnews.com/article/632e89b3416d1ac82bd9183a331b5a0e>.

## 7. The Contacts of the Legation with Hungarians

Former diplomats of the Legation were often asked about the quality and the depth of their relations with Hungary and the Hungarians whether representing the officialdom of Hungary, the politicians of the Revolution, the insurgents or civil society.

The diplomats admitted – not without a considerable amount of self-criticism – that *they did not have truly deep relations with the Hungarians*. As far as the underlying reasons were concerned, the following were said with special regard to the difference of approach in time *i.e.* before and during the uprising and the revolution.

(i) As to the official Hungary, the hostile attitude of the Hungarian ministry for foreign affairs made it *quasi* impossible to have whatever deep contact. During the events, the ministry stayed in the hands of hardliner communists until the end of October, and they refused to accept the good offices offered by the Legation concerning a cease-fire, suggested after the meeting with the already mentioned great writers' spouses. By the end of October, the foreign ministry was seized by a group of insurgents, which resulted in *cca.* two days of troubles in the connections. Finally, when Imre Nagy took over the ministership and conferred the bulk of the work on György Heltai, Pál Félix, *etc.* there were only a few days left until the uprising was quashed. The first real contact took place when Pál Félix called and received Spencer Barnes and transmitted the *note verbale* informing the US Legation on the proclamation of neutrality. As there was no indication before that from Nagy's team for a desire to establish contacts,<sup>107</sup> no other professional relations had been initiated prior to the transmission of the *note verbale* according to former US diplomats. They emphasized that without a fully empowered minister, when only a – rather timorous – *chargé d'affaires* led the Legation, taking action without instruction from Washington was out of question, contrary to Minister Ravndal's rather activist approach. In any case, they did not notice any steps taken in their direction from the side of the Hungarians.<sup>108</sup>

Current Hungarian historiography also takes it for granted that *Imre Nagy did not have and even did not want to have any serious contact with Western legations*,<sup>109</sup> except for a meeting with the Austrian ambassador. The only ministerial 'meeting' that occurred with the US Legation was the one with State Minister István Bibó, who went there in order to transmit his call for help: at the dawn of November 4, when the offensive had already started.

(ii) During the events, as mentioned in the diplomatic cables, the diplomats of the Legation made contact with the insurgents several times. The latter

107 See also Miklós Vásárhelyi in Swartz 1989, p. 603.

108 See Rogers in Kovács *et al.* 2007, pp. 8, 9, 14, 15, *etc.* See also Katona in Swartz 1989, pp. 532-533, and 537.

109 János Rainer M., 'The Development of Imre Nagy as a Politician and a Thinker', *Contemporary European History*, Vol. 6, Issue 3, 1997, pp. 263-277; János Rainer M., *Nemzeti függetlenség, semlegesség és dunavölgyi együttműködés, Nagy Imre külpolitikai nézetei*, at [www.rev.hu/ords/f?p=600:2:::P2\\_PAGE\\_URI:tanulmanyok/1956/nagyimre; Békés 2021](http://www.rev.hu/ords/f?p=600:2:::P2_PAGE_URI:tanulmanyok/1956/nagyimre; Békés 2021).

generally gathered in front of the building of the Legation or the condominium close to the Parliament accommodating most of the US diplomats and transmitted or left proclamations, demands for help, *etc.* As *per* usual, the US personnel tried to verify who was acting seriously, who acted *bona fide* but without any mandate or background and who was acting as an *agent provocateur*.

(iii) As to civil society, the Legation had some contacts in the fifties, but the diplomats apparently wanted to avoid creating situations which could serve as a pretext to initiate penal proceedings against these Hungarians, for this is what unfortunately happened with some of the Hungarian contracted employees of the Legation.<sup>110</sup> Sometimes, intelligence infiltration was also detected,<sup>111</sup> and some of the local employees informed the Hungarian secret services.<sup>112</sup> The negative consequences of McCarty's legacy<sup>113</sup> were also felt by diplomats who established – apparently *proprio motu* – contact with Miklós Gimes,<sup>114</sup> a close collaborator of Imre Nagy and they subsequently suggested to the State Department that he should be invited to the US together with other foreigners. However, he did not get the US visa because of his communist party membership.<sup>115</sup> It is true that there is no sign that Gimes wanted to revitalize this contact during the Revolution.

110 See Rogers in Kovács *et al.* 2007, pp. 14, 15, 30, and 31; Nagy p. 5.

111 See Rogers in Kovács *et al.* 2007, p. 30; see also Katona in Swartz 1989, p. 531.

112 As KGB general Serov reported on October 28, “from the observation of the American Legation, let us point out that some people are leaving the capital with parcels. Two Americans, Olivert and West told the secret informer of our friends that if the uprising is not crushed soon, UN troops will intervene, according to the proposal of the US, thus creating a second Korea.” Serov's Report of October 28 to Mikoyan (Yeltsin-dossier, p. 55) cited in Kovács 2006, pp. 23-24. The so called ‘Yeltsin-dossier’ (*i.e.* a couple of Soviet documents transmitted to the new Hungary by Russian president Boris Yeltsin, were published in Hungarian as A “*Jelcin-dosszié*” *Szovjet dokumentumok 1956-ról, Századvég*, 1956-os Intézet, Budapest, 1993. About the story and the basic content of the Yeltsin-dossier, see [www.rev.hu/ords/f?p=600:2:::::P2\\_PAGE\\_URI:tanulmanyok/1956/rmj2](http://www.rev.hu/ords/f?p=600:2:::::P2_PAGE_URI:tanulmanyok/1956/rmj2). It is to be noted that Landa could identify the real American persons concerned by this story: “The men, whose names were Oliveiras and Vest were not Legation employees but couriers responsible for carrying the diplomatic pouch between State and overseas posts. They could hardly be expected to reflect the Legation's views. Indeed, no mention has been found that it advocated or even discussed a possible armed UN intervention.” Landa 2012, p. 53, and also endnote no. 107, at p. 102.

113 See Rogers in Kovács *et al.* 2007, pp. 9, and 6.

114 Miklós Gimes was condemned and executed together with Imre Nagy and Pál Maléter, on 16 June 1958.

115 “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.” Rogers in Swartz 1989, p. 585.

However, according to Géza Katona the military branch of the Legation had allegedly some contacts with insurgents<sup>116</sup> (but as previously mentioned, he strongly denied<sup>117</sup> the accuracy of the words attributed to him in the Csalog-interview) as well as with high-ranking persons around the Hungarian government and in the Hungarian army when the Revolution seemed to be winning. (Nevertheless, a photo of this meeting has already been published<sup>118</sup> showing also the marines' names.<sup>119</sup>)

Moreover, as Landa – recognizing the high value of the diplomats' reporting activity,<sup>120</sup> and finding unfounded the 1958 CIA's criticism as well as that of journalists<sup>121</sup> – puts it

“the military attachés were active. On 30 October, Air Attaché Colonel Welwyn Dallam talked with the government's chief of military protocol, who said the government's aim was to establish an independent, socialist state similar to Yugoslavia. Dallam, pessimistic, felt that the Soviet Union would “settle for nothing less” than the complete crushing of the revolution, continued Communist political control of the government, and continued Soviet military occupation. He said that the Hungarian people “of both sides”, apparently referring to government supporters and rebels, were “looking to UN for action”.”<sup>122</sup>

It is worth recalling one of the cables already mentioned among those which are not on the Internet version of the FRUS XXV, but only in the ‘Secret Reports’: “(xxiv) A November 3 telegram clarifies that the recent military information came from a very reliable Hungarian officer, high in the hierarchy. [...]”

It is difficult to assess today the depth of information exchanges between diplomats and attachés but as Jordan Thomas Rogers noted:

“In addition, there were the military attachés who sent their messages separately. However, during the period of the revolution, normal activities

116 “[...] 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 Kilian 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 fervor obviously did not have much grounding in reality, but it was characteristic of the spirit of our military personnel. [...]” Katona in Csalog 2006, p. 124.

117 See Rogers, citing Katona's message in Kovács *et al.* 2007, p. 27. It is to be added that in the interview that Katona gave to Swartz, more or less at the same time when the Csalog-interview was made, the marines' visit is not mentioned.

118 Leo J. Daugherty III, *The Marine Corps and the State Department: Enduring Partners in United States Foreign Policy, 1798-2007*, McFarland, Jefferson, London, 2009, p. 118.

119 G. J. Bolick, Gene Comer and Edward Parauke. (Pages 114-120 show the 1956 Budapest events from their perspective and they contain also citations from their recollections.)

120 Landa 2012, pp. 19, and 22.

121 *Id.* pp. 15-16, 19, and 22.

122 *Id.* p. 21. Landa in his footnote no. 40 gives as source the Air Attaché's report (with precise numbering) and preserved on microfilm. See Landa 2012, p. 94.

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.”<sup>123</sup>

The name of the “government’s chief of military protocol” is not given by Landa and it is not clear whether he is the same person as the “very reliable Hungarian officer, high in the hierarchy” mentioned in one of the telegrams of 3 November.

On the other hand, there is a person who was not related to the military protocol but whose name appeared in a number of rumors and gossips<sup>124</sup> concerning his activity in 1956 and even before. He is colonel Ferenc Nádor, commandant of the Hungarian air force at the time. At the beginning of the Soviet invasion, he also took refuge at the Yugoslav Embassy and got accommodated in the flat of Vukmirovic, the Yugoslav deputy military attaché. Similarly to the other members of Imre Nagy’s group, he also had to leave his refuge after a while and he was arrested and interrogated by KGB general Serov, the mastermind of the operations in Hungary. An already accessible report prepared by Serov to Nikita Khrushchev on 19 November 1956 about the results of some of the interrogations refers to previous meetings between Nádor and Dallam, namely on 2 November, when the American attaché allegedly asked for information *inter alia* about Soviet airplanes.<sup>125</sup> (Some contemporary Hungarian historians also confirm the relations between Dallam and Nádor while placing the date and place of the meetings differently, agreeing in substance, while differing in the perception of the outcome.<sup>126</sup>) Shortly afterwards, the new regime accused Welwyn Dallam of spying<sup>127</sup> and expelled him from Hungary in 1957.<sup>128</sup> As to colonel Ferenc Nádor, he was not allowed to return to the Army but surprisingly, he completely avoided penal prosecution. He entered the Hungarian civil aviation

123 See Rogers in Kovács *et al.* 2007, p. 7.

124 Iván Dezső, ‘A Magyar Néphadsereg légierije 1956 októberében – novemberében’, *Hadtörténelmi Közlemények*, Vol. 102, Issue 2, 1989, p. 215.

125 *Hiányzó lapok 1956 történetéből. Dokumentumok a volt SZKP KB levéltárából*, Móra Ferenc Könyvkiadó, Budapest, 1993, pp. 161-164. See the text in Hungarian also at [www.rev.hu/sulinet56/online/szerviz/dokument/serov19s.htm](http://www.rev.hu/sulinet56/online/szerviz/dokument/serov19s.htm).

126 See Krisztián Ungváry, ‘A Kádár-rendszer kémelhárítása’, in János Tischler (ed.), *Kádárizmus: mélyfúrások, Évkönyv XVI.*, 2009, p. 359. Ungváry accepts 2 November as the date and mentions the Air Force headquarters as the place where the meeting took place. Miklós Kun, the best Hungarian historian of Soviet and Eastern European secret services refers to a meeting which occurred on the premises of the Yugoslav embassy, already during the temporary asylum but with more or less the same content. Miklós Kun, *Rejtélyes XX. század/Nádor Ferenc ezredes és társai megpróbálnak elbujdosni*, at <https://nava.hu/id/3118392/#>. See in the film especially the sequences between 18:00-21:00 minutes. According to Professor Kun, who personally met Nádor, the colonel refused to transmit the information requested by attaché Dallam.

127 Released documents relating to Welwyn Dallam can be consulted in the Historical Archives of Former Hungarian Secret Services, see at [www.abtl.hu/sites/default/files/raktari\\_jegyzetek/4\\_1.pdf](http://www.abtl.hu/sites/default/files/raktari_jegyzetek/4_1.pdf), pp. 85 and 186, folders A-2126/138 and A-3209. It seems that a pedagogical ‘case study’ was also prepared by the Hungarian Secret Services of the time.

128 After Dallam’s expulsion, Gábor Illési a food conservation technician, allegedly belonging to the attaché’s network in 1955-1957, was arrested, condemned to death and executed. See Ungváry 2009, p. 360.

where he got important positions and also served abroad as the representative of the MALÉV air company.

## 8. Conclusions

FRUS XXV and historiographic coverage makes give us insight into how the different options were elaborated, discussed, approved of or often postponed and even abandoned in the State Department, the National Security Council and the White House.<sup>129</sup>

These options concerned the policy in the UN (to seize the Security Council and the General Assembly and to proceed according to Resolution 377(V) “Uniting for peace”), the suggestion of military assistance (which was soon abandoned!) or the proposal to offer military concessions to the Soviet Union (e.g. reduction of US military presence in Italy), or to take demonstrative steps (e.g. highest alert of US troops in West Germany), ending in the repeated transmission of a speech President Eisenhower gave in Dallas to the Soviet leadership. This was intended as a message to calm hardliners in Moscow. Acknowledging at first sight the right of Hungary to freedom, it can also be interpreted as a tacit recognition of the fact that the Soviets have free hand in the matter, and they need not be afraid of a military or other, tougher type of retaliation.

“The US has no ulterior purpose in desiring the independence of the satellite countries. Our unadulterated wish is that these peoples, from whom so much of our own national life derives, should have sovereignty restored to them, and that they should have governments of their own free choosing. We do not look upon these nations as potential military allies. We see them as friends and as part of a new and friendly and no longer divided Europe. We are confident that their independence, if promptly accorded, will contribute immensely to stabilize peace throughout all of Europe, West and East.”<sup>130</sup>

Henry Kissinger writes in his *Diplomacy*:

“A firmer, clearer American stance would have been essential to render the Soviet decision to intervene less calculable, or at least not quite so seemingly devoid of consequence. The Kremlin could have been warned that repression

129 See detailfully in Landa 2012, pp. 22-47; Békés 2016, pp. 31-34 and 34-37.

130 134. *Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in the Soviet Union, Washington, October 29, 1956*, at <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v25/d134>. See also these sentences before and after the Dallas speech excerpts in the instruction “Personal for Ambassador from Secretary. I call your attention to following language from my Saturday night speech at Dallas: [...] This paragraph resulted from intensive consideration here at highest level. We would like this to come to attention of highest Soviet authorities, including Zhukov, and to know that they appreciate it is a high level policy statement. Please use your discretion as to when and how to bring this about.”

in Hungary would involve major political and economic costs and put a freeze on East-West relations for the foreseeable future. [...]”<sup>131</sup>

Compared with the US standpoint in the Suez crisis,

“Hungary was a more complex case, for it would have required the application of power in some form. Yest, America’s leaders were not willing to risk American lives for a cause which, however offensive to their consciences, involved no direct American security interest. [...] In Hungary, it acquiesced to *Realpolitik*, just as other nations do, because insistence on principle would have carried with the unavoidable risk of war, perhaps even nuclear war. The Soviet Union was clearly prepared to run bigger risks to preserve its position in Eastern Europe than the United States was willing to brave in order to liberate Hungary. Nothing could get around this equation. In terms of its rhetoric prior to the uprising, America’s policy on Hungary was weak indeed; in terms of its interests, the refusal to run the risk of war was both inevitable and fitting – though it does not explain the reluctance to raise the cost of Soviet intervention by nonmilitary means. [...] The United States had left Hungary adrift in the sea of historical evolution, and American allies with a sense of their impotence.”<sup>132</sup>

Kissinger continues as follows

“A generation later, latent Soviet weakness would cast the Hungarian uprising as a harbinger of the ultimate bankruptcy of the communist system. Despite all that had happened, with ten years Hungary was to be internally freer than Poland and its foreign policy more independent of the Soviet Union. And thirty-five years later, in the next phase of Moscow’s attempt at liberalization, the Soviets would entirely lose control over events.”<sup>133</sup>

All this is true. In conclusion, the author would like to emphasize yet again that the aim of this short article was not to analyze the American policy, but to show how the people at the US Legation were working during those days and how they came to understand what was happening in Hungary. These devoted and enthusiastic professionals, compelled to act without clear instructions and without a functioning communication system deserve recognition for their efforts.

131 Kissinger 1994, p. 563.

132 Id. p. 566.

133 Id. p. 567.