

October 24, 1956

Mikoyan-Suslov Report

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Summary:

Mikoyan-Suslov Report on the situation in Budapest in October 1956 and talks with Nagy and Gero about the Hungarian party leadership

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CIPHERED TELEGRAM
FROM BUDAPEST

OUT OF SEQUENCE

We arrived at the scene after some delay; due to weather conditions, we were unable to land at the airport near Budapest. We landed 90 kilometers to the north. We stopped by the corps headquarters for orientation, and from there, in an armored personnel carrier with comrades [KGB chief Ivan] Serov and [Gen. Mikhail S.] Malinin, we set off for the city. We were accompanied by tanks, because there was shooting in Budapest at this time and casualties on both sides, including Soviet soldiers and officers.

In Buda small groups of people watched the movement of our column calmly; some looked anxious, others greeted it with a smile. The roads approaching the city and in the city were full of Soviet tanks and other materiel.

On the streets together with the Soviet troops were Hungarian patrols. In contrast to Buda, where it was calm, there was continuous shooting in Pest between isolated groups of provocateurs and individuals and our machine-gunners, beginning at the bridge and extending to the ministry of Defense building, as well as toward the Central Committee building. Our men did more of the shooting; to solitary shots we replied with salvos.

In the Ministry of Defense we met the ministers of defense and state security, as well as a group of Central Committee members-[Istvan] Kovacs, Zoltan Vas, and others, who were authorized to lead the operation for liquidating the riots in the city. There is a field headquarters there, which works in contact with the Hungarians. It should be noted that during a telephone conversation with Gero from the corps headquarters, in reply to our question about the situation, he answered that there is both an improvement and deterioration in the situation, and that the arrival of Soviet troops in the city has a negative effect on the disposition of the inhabitants, including the workers.

After a conversation with military personnel, during which we heard the preliminary re-ports of the Soviet military command and the command of the Hungarian armed forces, which—after closer familiarization—turned out to be rather exaggerated in a pessimistic way, we stopped by the Central Committee of the Hungarian Workers' Party, where we conversed with [Emo] Gero, Imre Nagy, Zoltan Santo, and [Andras] Hegedus, who informed us about the situation in the city and the measures they had taken to liquidate the riots.

We had the impression that Gero especially, but the other comrades as well, are exaggerating the strength of the opponent and underestimating their own strength. At five o'clock Moscow time the situation in the city was as follows:

All the hotbeds of the insurgents have been crushed; liquidation of the main hotbed, at the radio station, where about 4,000 people are concentrated, is still going on. They raised a white flag, but when the representatives of the Hungarian authorities appeared, they presented as a condition of surrender the removal of Gero from his

post, which of course was rejected. Our command is setting for itself the task of liquidating this hotbed tonight. It is significant that the Hungarian workers here, above all the state security personnel, put up a violent resistance to the insurgents and tolerated defeat here only due to the exhaustion of ammunition and the attack on them by a fresh battalion of Hungarian troops who mutinied.

The comrades express the opinion that the Hungarian army conducted itself poorly, although the Debrecen division performed well. The Hungarian sailors, who patrolled the banks of the Dun [Danube] River, also performed well, especially, as already noted, state security troops and employees.

Arrests of the instigators and organizers of the disturbances, more than 450 people, are being carried out. The exposure and arrest of the instigators continues.

The task has been set to complete the liquidation of the remaining individual groups hiding in buildings. Due to the fact that a turning point in the events has occurred, it has been decided to use more boldly the Hungarian units for patrolling, for detaining suspicious elements and people violating the introduction of a state of emergency, and for guarding important installations (railroad stations, roads, etc).

The Hungarian comrades, especially Imre Nagy, approved of the use of more Hungarian military units, militia, and state security units for the purpose of lightening the burden of the Soviet troops and to emphasize the role of the Hungarians themselves in the liquidation of the riots. The majority of the workers did not participate in the riots, and it is even said that the workers in Chepel, who had no weapons, drove off the provocateurs, who wanted to incite them to riot. However, some of the workers, especially young ones, did take part in the disturbances.

One of the most serious mistakes of the Hungarian comrades was the fact that that, before 12 midnight last night, they did not permit anyone to shoot at the participants in the riots.

The Hungarians themselves are taking measures, and we gave them additional advice with respect to the organization of workers' fighting squads at the factories and in the regional committees of the party and about the arming of such squads.

They had already made such a decision, but they didn't carry it out, because they couldn't deliver weapons at the factories, fearing that the opponent would intercept them. Measures were taken to provide for the delivery of weapons today with the help of our armored personnel carriers. Radio addresses by prominent party and government leaders, as well as other public leaders, were organized. Gero, Imre Nagy, and Zoltan Tildy have already spoken. Istvan Dobi, Hegedus, Sakasics, Kadar, Zoltan Santo, Marosan, and Ronai will be speaking. Appeals by the Womens', Youth, and Trades Unions will be published.

Today not a single newspaper was published, only a bulletin. It has been arranged to have at least one newspaper published tomorrow. It has also been arranged to announce to the public that all citizens who fail to surrender weapons within the next 24 hours will be accused of a criminal offense.

We are not broadcasting the information about the changes in the leadership of the party and government, since the embassy has already reported it. While conversing with the Hungarian comrades, we did not touch on that issue. One gets the feeling that these events are facilitating the unity of the Central Committee and Politburo. When we asked Imre Nagy when and how he joined in the struggle with the opponents of the party, he replied that he started to take action in the struggle yesterday at six o'clock in the evening, not by the summons of the Central

Committee, but because the youth in the meeting demanded that he go there and speak to them, which he did.

He thinks the majority of the crowd of almost a hundred thousand people approved of his appeals, but many groups of fascist elements hollered, whistled, and screamed, when he said that it was necessary to work together with the party. Fights took place in the square between the fascist and democratic elements. The whole crowd dispersed peaceably, but then began to regroup in various places in the city and the events well-known to you began.

During Imre Nagy's reply, Gero retorted that they were looking for Imre Nagy before the meeting and couldn't find him. Nagy said that if they had appeared before the crowd earlier and announced the changes in the leadership before or during the meeting, then the events would not have grown complicated. The other comrades met this assertion of Imre Nagy's with silence.

To our question: is there unity in the Central Committee and Politburo in the face of the events that have taken place? Everyone answered in the affirmative, however Gero made a remark that more voices are being heard against his election as first secretary of the Central Committee, thinking that he is responsible for this whole thing. To this remark, Imre Nagy said that it is necessary to make a correction; this concerns neither the Politburo, neither the Central Committee members. Such voices, rather, are being heard from below. He cited the letter received from the secretary of one of the factory party committees, protesting the choice of Gero as first secretary. To our question, may we report to our Central Committee that the Hungarian comrades are mastering the situation and are confident that they will deal with it, they answered in the affirmative.

Gero announced that he hadn't slept for two nights; the other comrades: one night. We prearranged to meet with these same comrades at eight o'clock in the evening. We have the impression that all the Central Committee members with whom we met related well, in a friendly manner, to our appearance at such a time. We said the purpose of our arrival was to lend assistance to the Hungarian leadership in such a way as to be without friction and for the public benefit, referring especially to the participation of Soviet troops in liquidating the riots. The Hungarian citizens, especially Imre Nagy, related to this with approval.

A.MIKOYAN

M.SUSLOV