RESEARCH NOTE: DOCUMENTING THE EARLY SOVIET NUCLEAR WEAPONS PROGRAM

by Mark Kramer

Two recent developments pertaining to the early Soviet nuclear weapons program—the declassification of an edict promulgated by Josif Stalin in August 1945, and the issuance of a directive by the Russian government in mid-1995—are worth noting. Each development is covered here briefly, and the relevant documentation is provided at the end.

The Establishment of Beria's Special Committee

Exploration of the basic processes involved in nuclear fission began in the Soviet Union well before World War II, and serious work aimed at building nuclear weapons was initiated at a top-secret research facility in Moscow, known simply as Laboratory No. 2, in early 1943. Over the next two years the Soviet nuclear bomb program was spurred on by intelligence disclosures about the Manhattan Project in the United States, but it was not until after the fighting ended—and the technical feasibility of nuclear weaponry had been vividly demon-

its own funding and operations, a sign of the overriding priority that Stalin attached to the development of nuclear weapons. An entire directorate was set up within Gosplan to ensure that all necessary resources were available. Despite the ravages of the war and the need for mass reconstruction, no expense was spared in the drive to build a nuclear bomb. Although the extravagance of Beria's efforts proved troubling to some

arkhivnykh dokumentov" (A Compilation of Archival Documents).
7. For one such decree, approved in September 1994, see "Yeltsin's Directive on Declassification," which I translated and introduced in CWIHP *Bulletin* 4 (Fall 1994), 89, 100. For a more recent, though similar, directive adopted by the Russian government, see "Ob ustanovleniya poryadka rassekrechivaniya i prodleniya srokov zasekrechivaniya arkhivnykh dokumentov Pravitel'stva SSSR," *Sobranie zakonodatel'stva Rossiiskoi Federatsii* (Moscow) 9 (27 February 1995), 1539-1542.

* * * * *

DOCUMENT 1:

TOP SECRET
SPECIAL DOSSIER

STATE DEFENSE COMMITTEE
EDICT No. GKO-9887ss/op

specified in Point 3 of this directive.

5. The Atomic Energy Ministry of Russia is responsible for providing organizational and technical support for the activity of the Working Group and for the preparation of materials needed to publish an official compilation of archival documents pertaining to the history of the development of nuclear weapons in the USSR during the period through 1954.

6. The Russian Committee on the Press and Publishing, in conjunction with the Atomic Energy Ministry of Russia, is to ensure the publication in 1996 of an official compilation of archival documents pertaining to the history of the development of nuclear weapons in the USSR during the period through 1954. Funding is to come from outlays in the Federal budget for the periodical press and publishing outlets.

Chairman of the Government of the
Russian Federation
V. Chernomyrdin

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RESEARCH NOTE: SECRET EAST GERMAN REPORT ON CHINESE REACTIONS TO THE 1956 HUNGARIAN REVOLT

Introduced and Translated by Mark Kramer

Following are excerpts from a document prepared by a senior East German diplomat, H. Liebermann, a few weeks after Soviet troops crushed the revolution in Hungary in 1956. The full report, entitled, "Berich uber die Haltung der VR China zu den Ereignissen in Ungarn," is now stored in File No. 120, Section IV 2/20, of the former East German Communist party archives, known as Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR im Bundesarchiv (SAPMDB, or SAPMO), in Berlin. (A copy of the document was recently located at the Berlin archive by Christian F. Ostermann, a researcher currently based at the National Security Archive in Washington, D.C., and provided to the author by CWIHP.)

Liebermann's six-page report, compiled at the request of the East German Foreign Ministry, traces Chinese press cover05.57man 2u6o> BDC -0.009 Tw 1.2 TL T*(Se0eMC /Touch-Up_LFc >> BDC -0.096 Tw E Tw -2.35 -
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nearly as frustrating as the first three in terms of lacking new revelations. Kornienko approves the document collections that have been published since the advent of glasnost, but does not enrich the story they tell with any significant new information of his own. Despite serving as a counselor in the Soviet Union's Washington embassy during the crisis, Kornienko tells us little of his own experiences. He does relate (as does then-Soviet ambassador Anatoly F. Dobrynin in his recently published memoirs) that the Soviet embassy was kept in complete ignorance of the installation of Soviet missiles in Cuba, and was in fact unwittingly used to pass along disinformation.

The meat of Kornienko's story is his role in one of the key moments of the crisis: Khrushchev's two letters to Kennedy, the first of 26 October 1962 promising withdrawal of Soviet missiles in return for an American pledge of non-intervention in Cuba, the second of the next day additionally demanding the corresponding withdrawal of American missiles from Turkey. According to Kornienko, his own detective work played a central role in Khrushchev's decision to sharpen his demands. Soviet intelligence sources reported a conversation with an American journalist on his immediate departure for Florida to cover the imminent American invasion. Hearing these reports as well as taking into account the heightened alert status of American armed forces, Khrushchev accordingly acted to calm the situation by sending his first letter. Kornienko himself knew the journalist, scheduled lunch with him (itself proving that the journalist was not due for immediate departure), and convinced himself that the earlier intelligence reports of imminent invasion had been mistaken. Armed with Kornienko's information, Khrushchev felt prepared to drive a harder bargain with the Americans.

Chapter 5 on the prelude to détente and Chapter 6 on détente itself offer slightly more. Détente came not from any alterations on the Soviet side, but from Nixon and Kissinger's decision to undertake a more pragmatic and conciliatory policy towards Moscow. In early 1972, Kornienko worked closely with Henry Kissinger on the "Basic Principles" statement on Soviet-American relations. Despite being at the heart of political decision-making at the highest levels, Kornienko strays from standard accounts of the most important stages of détente—Kissinger's secret visit to Moscow, Nixon's Moscow summit and Ford's Vladivostok summit with Brezhnev—only to comment bitingly on Brezhnev and Ford's lack of mental ability, or to claim that Kissinger deliberately scheduled meetings in Moscow to keep his deputy Helmut Sonnenfeldt away from discussions on the Middle East (allegedly due to fear of Sonnenfeldt's "zionist inclinations").

Détente was short-lived. In Kornienko's interpretation, the beginning of the end was the 1975-76 Angolan Civil War; Carter's presidency only furthered the deterioration of U.S.-Soviet relations already begun and represented another missed chance at an end to the Cold War. The main obstacle to improving relations, in Kornienko's account, was not Carter's concern for human rights, which was irritating but rather insignificant to Soviet leaders, but instead more concrete issues of international politics. While Carter himself might have been prepared for a more open-minded approach to the Soviet Union, the Carter Administration, hamstrung by unnamed (but easily identifiable) hawks within its ranks, was not prepared for a full settlement. The United States' fundamental goals still included superiority not equality in arms control policy, and even the Carter-brokered Camp David accord only undermined the chances for a general Mideast peace via U.S.-Soviet joint action, Kornienko alleges.

Chapters 8 and 9 cover the war in Afghanistan and the downing of KAL 007 as discussed above; Chapter 10 brings us to the Reagan years and the beginnings of glasnost, for which Kornienko has saved his bitterest venom. His target is not Stalin, Brezhnev, or any Western cold warrior, but his last two superiors: Mikhail Gorbachev and Eduard Shevardnadze. In Chapter 10 and his conclusion, he presents the case for the prosecution in Mikhail Gorbachev's treason trial. Traitor is not too strong a word to express Kornienko's evaluation of Mikhail Gorbachev, but Kornienko admits that blunders began before Gorbachev took power in 1985. Chapter 10 first examines at the pre-Gorbachev decision to replace aging Soviet medium-range SS-4 and SS-5 missiles in Europe with SS-20s. In keeping with Kornienko's general portrait of the late Brezhnev years, in contrast with more effective policy under Stalin and Khrushchev, Soviet efforts in foreign policy were sabotaged by bungling and short-sightedness. He tells us that West German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt suggested to Aleksei Kosygin that the replacement SS-20s be limited to a quantity significantly less than the outgoing SS-4s and SS-5s, given the qualitative superiority of the new missiles, and that this policy be linked explicitly to an attempt to head off a new arms race in Europe. Kornienko, an invited guest at the Politburo meeting that discussed Schmidt's suggestion, spoke above his station and out of turn to support this initiative. Ustinov challenged him with the possibility of an American arms buildup even after conciliatory Soviet gestures. Even in this worst-case outcome, Kornienko believed, any temporary advantage the Americans might gain in medium-range missiles would be far outweighed by the beneficial effects of the resulting strains in the Western alliance and strengthening of Western Europe's anti-nuclear movement. With Brezhnev too feeble to make his presence felt, and Gromyko's refusal to speak up for Kornienko, Ustinov simply proved too powerful. Once again Kornienko, the lone voice of reason, had his advice unthinkingly disregarded, and the upgrade went forward as planned.

The second half of Chapter 10 examines the fate of the SS-23 "Oka" missile. This is one episode of the Cold War whose significance is interpreted in radically different ways on either side of the former iron curtain. Barely noticed in the West, Gorbachev and Shevardnadze's decision to include the SS-23 with its 400km range in the list of intermediate range (that is, with range 500 km and higher) missiles slated for elimination is the touchstone of Russian military and conservative condemnation of Gorbachev, what one officer terms the "crime of the century." While the opposition to Gorbachev can hardly argue that the elimination of a single missile system was the root cause of the downfall of the Soviet Union, they do see the case of the Oka as an example of all the worst in Gorbachev's diplomacy: unpreparedness, unwillingness to listen to expert opinion, and, most seriously, sacrifice of Soviet national interests in the name of agreement, *any* agreement, with the West. As Kornienko puts it, the inclusion of the Oka under the provisions of a treaty that did not concern it was "only one of the examples of what serious consequences occur when

high-placed leaders ignore the competent judgment of specialists and as a result sacrifice the very interests of the state trying for one thing—to that much quickly finish the preparation of this or that treaty and light off fireworks in celebration."

The conclusion of Kornienko's book, a shortened version of a case set forth earlier at greater length and in greater detail in *Nezavisimaia Gazeta* (16 August 1994), is what his argument has been leading to all along: the Gorbachev era as the epitome of unprofessionalism in foreign policy. It is a full-fledged condemnation of almost every action undertaken by Gorbachev and Shevardnadze from 1985 through the final collapse of the Soviet Union. In particular, Kornienko strives to discredit the idea that Gorbachev offered something truly new and revolutionary in international politics. As Kornienko reminds us, it was Lenin who first enunciated the principle of "peaceful coexistence" with the capitalist world (as another form of class struggle), and Stalin actively endorsed the idea of coexistence with the West as late as 1951. Ever since a rough nuclear parity had been achieved in the 1960s, reasonable people on each side had seen the need for an end to the arms race and confrontation. Gorbachev's innovation was not living in peace with the West, but the unilateral "betrayal of the Soviet Union's vital interests."

Kornienko enunciates a number of specific examples of Gorbachev's craven behavior—submission to the United States over the Krasnoyarsk radar station and Soviet acquiescence in the use of force against Iraq—but his most substantial comments are reserved for the reunification of Germany. Kornienko, having passed over in silence the Soviet interventions in Czechoslovakia and Hungary, takes pains to emphasize the right of the German people to self-determination, free from outside influence. His objection is to the manner in which this unification took place and the status of the resulting German state. Why, he asks, should Germany remain in NATO and why should NATO troops remain in Germany with Soviet troops completely evacuated from Eastern Europe? The fact that Germany has stayed in NATO he attributes to the absolutely incompetent way in which Gorbachev handled the German question, avoiding the enunciation of any clear policy until too late, insisting on the unacceptability of German NATO membership to George Bush in Washington only in February 1990 and then conceding Germany's right to remain in NATO without receiving guarantees and concessions in return.

Here *Kholodnaia voina* particularly suffers by comparison to Kornienko's 1992 collaboration with to Kornienko's 1992
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are the following:

To What Extent Were the Chinese Communists Involved in Soviet-Dominated Communist International Espionage in China in the 20th Century? Recent memoirs in Chinese, notably by Chen Hansheng and Shi Zhe,[2] suggest that the Chinese Communists were deeply involved. In the 1930s and 1940s, for example, as the Shi Zhe memoirs reveal, both the NKVD and GRU of the USSR and the Department of International Res. (OMS) of the Comintern ran a large spy training school in Yanan; Chinese Communist spies penetrated deep into the Nationalists' (GMD) wartime intelligence organizations for Moscow.[3] Chen Hansheng's story further illustrates this Moscow-Yanan tie. Chen was recruited by the Russians as a Comintern intelligence agent in 1926. One year later, the warlord Zhang Zuolin raided the Soviet Embassy in Beijing which was being used as an intelligence base. This raid exposed a large international espionage scheme controlled by Moscow.[4] Chen Hansheng then fled to Moscow and returned to China in 1928 to become a member of the well-known Richard Sorge Spy Ring, then based in Shanghai. When Sorge was reassigned by Moscow to Tokyo, Chen went along and worked closely with Ozaki Hozumi and others of the ring until 1935, when the unexpected arrest of a messenger from Moscow almost exposed Chen's real identity. Chen sensed the danger and fled to Moscow again (pp.61-62). For much of his early life, he was directly controlled by Moscow, and highly active in international intelligence. Chen's identity as a Comintern agent was so important and secret that Richard Sorge, during his marathon interrogation in Tokyo by the Japanese police, never gave out Chen's real name to the Japanese.[5]

What Was the True Relationship Between the Soviets and the Chinese Communists during WWII? Some historians have minimized the extent and importance of the relationship between the Chinese Communist Party and the Soviet Union during World War II. Chen Hansheng's memoirs and other recently available documents from various sources fundamentally challenge this interpretation.

Instead, these new publications show that from the very beginning the CCP was intrinsically connected with the international communist movement centered in Moscow. Every major step of the CCP followed orders from Moscow. In 1935, when the Soviet Union was threatened by rising fascism in Europe and Asia, the CCP followed Moscow's order to adopt a policy of a "United Front" (Popular Front) with the Nationalists in a joint effort to fight Japanese expansion in Asia. Yet, when Stalin stunned the world by signing the Nazi-Soviet Pact in late August 1939, the United Front policy collapsed in China. Mao Zedong followed Stalin most closely among all the Comintern party chiefs, hailing the Hitler-Stalin deal as a major victory against the West and the partition of Poland as necessary for the communist cause.[6] In January 1940, Mao Zedong proclaimed that "the center of the Anti-Soviet movement is no longer Nazi Germany, but among the so-called democratic countries."[7] The modus vivendi of communism and fascism in late 1939 created such intense friction between the Chinese Nationalists, who had been engaged in an all-out and bitter war with the Japanese imperial army in China, and the Chinese Communists, who were following Stalin's rapprochement with Germany, whose ally was Japan, that in early 1940, an army of communist troops was ambushed by the Nationalists in Southern Anhui, an event which essentially ended the superficial United Front. Yet when Hitler attacked the Soviet Union in June 1941, Stalin reversed his policy on the Popular Front: all member parties of the Comintern, both in Europe and in Asia, were now ordered to fight fascism. Unfortunately, in China this did not mean the re-establishment of the former United Front against the Japanese, because the Soviet Union had already signed the notorious Neutrality Pact with Japan. The Chinese Nationalists, not the Japanese, remained the CCP's main enemy.

In fact, a stunning recent discovery at the Japanese Foreign Ministry archives of a secret Soviet-Japanese treaty at the outset of WWII reveals a deeply conspiratorial scheme worked out between Moscow and Tokyo. On 3 October 1940, Soviet and Japanese diplomats reached a secret deal that stipulated, "The USSR will abandon its active support for Chiang [Kai-shek; Jiang Jieshi] and will repress the Chinese Communist Party's anti-Japanese activities; in exchange, Japan recognizes and accepts that the Chinese Communist Party will retain as a base the three (Chinese) Northwest provinces (Shanxi, Gansu, Ningxia)."[8]

Chen Hansheng's memoirs has made a significant contribution to reconnecting this CCP-Moscow tie.

Was Agnes Smedley A Comintern Agent? Despite vigorous denials by Smedley herself, Chen Hansheng discloses unequivocally that Smedley was no less than an agent of the Comintern (p.52). (Historian Stephen MacKinnon has only established that Smedley was Sorge's mistress in Shanghai.) Further, we also know from Chen's memoirs that Smedley was involved in every major step of the Sorge group's espionage activities. In fact, it was Smedley herself who recruited Chen into Sorge's Tokyo operations (p.58). Recent Comintern archives also confirm Smedley's identity as a Comintern agent.[9]

Was Owen Lattimore A Communist Spy? Lattimore topped Senator Joseph McCarthy's list of alleged communist spies in the early 1950s. McCarthy accused Lattimore of not only having manufactured a Far East policy leading to the loss of China to the communists, but also of being a "top Soviet agent."[10] Chen's memoirs provide surprising insights on this matter from the perspective of a communist intelligence agent. After Chen fled from Tokyo to Moscow in 1935 to prevent the Sorge Ring's operations from exposure, Owen Lattimore, then the editor of the New York-based journal *Pacific Affairs*, the mouthpiece of the Institute of Pacific Relations (IPR), asked the Soviet Union, a member nation of IPR, for an assistant (p.63). In 1936, Moscow recommended Chen Hansheng to Lattimore, who readily accepted the nomination. Chen then went to New York, this time under the direct control of Kang Sheng, who was also in Moscow, to work with Lattimore from 1936 until 1939, when Chen was reassigned by Kang Sheng to a Hong Kong-based operation.

However, Chen states in his memoirs that Lattimore was kept in the dark as to his true identity as a Communist agent directly dispatched from Moscow (p.64). Lattimore's scholarly activities were only to be used as a cover for Chen. Further, Kang Sheng specifically instructed Chen that while in New York, his position at the IPR should only be used as a means of getting a salary; and that Chen's real task was to help Rao Shushi, a Comintern and CCP chief also in New York, organize underground activities (p.65). Therefore, Chen's memoirs seem to clear Lattimore from any complicity associated with Chen Hansheng's secret operations in

New York.

Was Solomon Adler A Communist? Solomon Adler, chief intelligence agent for the U.S. Treasury Department in China during WWII, was also prominent on McCarthy's communist list. In the 1950s, Elizabeth Bentley, a courier of a Soviet apparatus in Washington, further identified Adler as a member of Soviet intelligence.[11] Adler at the time denied Bentley's accusation. Surprisingly, in Chen's memoirs, as well as in some other recent Chinese documents, Adler has resurfaced in Beijing as a bona fide communist intelligence official.[12] According to these sources, Adler moved to Beijing permanently in the late 1950s and has since worked in various capacities in CCP intelligence. Today, he is identified in Chinese documents as an "Advisor" to the External Liaison Department of the Central Committee of the CCP, the department that handles such well-known figures as Larry Wu-tai Ching of the CIA, who was arrested by the FBI in 1983 for espionage, and committed suicide in jail in 1986.

Were the Chinese Communists Part of the International Communist Movement or Merely "Agrarian Reformers" in the 1930s and 1940s? Chen Hansheng's memoirs provides much new information about the Chinese Communist Party's extensive international connections. Besides the Sorge and Lattimore cases, Chen served as a chief communist intelligence officer in Hong Kong in the late 1930s and early 1940s, running a cover organization funnelling huge amounts of funds—$20 million in two and a half years—from outside China to Yanan, mostly for the purpose of purchasing Japanese-made weapons from the "Puppet" troops in North China, with considerable Japanese acquiescence.[13] When wanted in 1944 by the Nationalist secret police for pro-Soviet activities in Guilin (China), Chen was rescued by the British and airlifted to India where he was miraculously put on the payroll of British intelligence in New Delhi. Between 1946 and 1950, while undercover as a visiting scholar at the Johns Hopkins University in Maryland, Chen became Beijing's secret liaison with the Communist Party of the U.S.A. (CPUSA) (p.81).[14] After the CCP took over mainland China, Chen was summoned back from America to Beijing by Zhou Enlai in 1950 and has remained a major figure in his own business for much of the rest of his life.

When Intellect And Intelligence Join, What Happens? Chen is a seasoned intelligence officer with high academic accomplishment as an economic historian. While his erudition has provided him with excellent covers for intelligence operations, it was also

THE 1980-1981 POLISH CRISIS: THE NEED FOR A NEW SYNTHESIS

by Mark Kramer

Robert Zuzowski, *Political Dissent and Opposition in Poland: The Workers' Defense Committee "KOR"*

RESPONSE

To the Editor:

In the letter from the well-known KGB functionary Pavel A. Sudoplatov, published in the American journal Cold War International History Project *Bulletin* (Issue 5, Fall 1995, pp. 156-158), a suggestion or, rather, direct charge, is made against my colleague of many years, Yuri Smirnov, all of whose scientific and literary efforts I have witnessed, that these efforts were in some way connected with the KGB. As is usual in such cases, in place of evidence the letter provides only murky references to a conversation between Sudoplatov and his former colleagues on this matter.

Fairly or unfairly, the reputation of the KGB, as well as that of similar agencies in other countries has always been very low. There has never been a better way to ruin a person in the eyes of public opinion and his close friends than to suggest that he has connections with these services.

An unparalleled expert in the life of Russian bureaucrats and behind the scenes dealings, the author Nikolai Leskov, described a similar intrigue in his story *Administrative Grace*. In this story, a police official wishing to compromise a provincial public figure organizes what we would now call a "leak" at the suggestion of a highly-
placed church official. Simply put,ghlyx eyes of public opin1 >> BDR5009 /J 1 >> 6

9 October 1995

To the Editor:

I read the essay "Poland, 1956: Khrushchev, Gomulka and the Polish October," by L.W. Gluchowski, and the accompanying documents in CWIHP

RESPONSE

do with the threat of Soviet military intervention.

My first departure with Mr. Leitenberg comes when he elevates "the circumstances in which the Polish party leadership learned of the movements" to some kind of special moment in the negotiations. We still don't have enough Soviet evidence to draw Mr. Leitenberg's conclusions. This is particularly true when we consider his comment: "It seems very likely, even obvious, that Khrushchev gave the order for the movement of Soviet forces based in Poland in his meeting with Marshals Konev and Rokossowski in the Soviet embassy on October 19, also referred to in his memoirs." In this case, an omission on my part may have resulted in the confusion, and I am grateful to Mr. Leitenberg for bringing it to my attention.

In my attempt to edit out a number of long historiographical comments about the documents from the essay I submitted to the *Bulletin*, I deleted a remark about the reliability of Khrushchev's memoirs on the Polish crisis, which was originally included with Molotov's characterization of Rokossowski in the Felix Chuev interview (contained in *One Hundred and Forty Conversations with Molotov*) cited in endnote 28. I should have left in place the following observation:

> This is another example of how Khrushchev's memoirs are accurate in so far as the general atmosphere of the discussions are concerned, and at the same time confusing because he again tends to take what were obviously a series of discussions and compress them into one important conversation. Surely, as Document 1 clearly shows, Rokossowski could not have gone with Khrushchev to the Soviet embassy on 19 October [1956], although Khrushchev's emphasis on Rokossowski as a main source of information for what was happening in Poland at the time tells us a lot about what everyone in Poland took for public knowledge: Rokossowski was Moscow's man in Warsaw. The Polish Minister of Defense was at the Politburo meeting, held immediately after First Secretary Ochab put the 8th Plenum on hold, to further discuss the Polish position towards Khrushchev, while the Soviets went to their own embassy. Rokossowski attended all the meetings of the Polish Politburo during this tense period. The Stenographic report of the 8th Plenum also notes that Rokossowski attended all sittings of the 8th Plenum from 19-21 October 1956. It would be difficult to imagine Rokossowski not attending meetings of the only legal bodies that could force him from the leadership. Khrushchev probably decided to let the Poles begin the 8th Plenum for a number of reasons, including the necessity of providing Gomulka with the legal status he needed to negotiate on behalf of the Polish side at the Belvedere talks. More important, Rokossowski was a full member of the PUWP Politburo and Central Committee. Gomulka had to treat Rokossowski as part of the Polish negotiation team, at least officially, and no one on either side would have suggested, at least in public, otherwise.

Military aspects of the 1956 crisis, with which I have been grappling since 1986, have been among the most difficult issues to date to discuss with any degree of confidence. Documentary evidence, until recently, has been limited, while humanist sociology, brushed with rumors, hearsay, and unsubstantiated gossip, grows with every memoir. With some exceptions, the latter part of the little story from the long Belvedere meeting recited to Mr. Leitenberg by his Polish source has a ring of truth. I can imagine, during the most heated moments, Khrushchev and Gomulka exchanging veiled threats, using language that spawned images of heroic Polish resistance and Soviet military glory. Khrushchev and Gomulka were not the quiet diplomatic types. But it would be a leap to suggest that "one of the most crucial aspects" determining the "ultimate outcome of the confrontation" was the "circumstances in which the Polish party leadership learned of the [Soviet military] movements," at least with the limited selection of documents I included in my essay.

However, I will let Mr. Leitenberg and the readers of the *Bulletin* decide for themselves the merits of my case when I present it in full, in a second documentary essay I have begun to put together, this time with Edward Nalepa of the Military Historical Institute in Warsaw, before I was made aware of Mr. Leitenberg's letter, for an upcoming issue of the *Bulletin*. Our documents include a series of reports prepared by Polish military counter-espionage (*Informacja*) officers throughout the period of the crisis.

In my first essay I wanted to focus on the political aspects of the crisis, particularly the bottom line positions staked out by the two key> BDph-Up_6r theon thver, I wg6cumstances in wh

RESPONSE

MORE ON THE 1956 HUNGARIAN CRISIS

23 October 1995

To the Editor:

The Spring 1995 issue of the *Bulletin*, as rich and as informative as ever, contains two stimulating articles by Professor Johanna Granville. Permit me to make a few comments on both.

In the first article—"Imre Nagy, Hesitant Revolutionary"—Professor Granville correctly argues that Prime Minister Nagy, a lifelong Communist, hesitated to side with the revolutionaries during the early days of the 1956 Hungarian uprising (October 23-27); that he created a new, reform-minded party leadership that was more congenial to his way of thinking only on October 28th; and that, finally, he embraced the revolution's main demands of neutrality and political pluralism on November 1st, after he realized that Moscow had deceived him.

Alas, this is not a new interpretation, nor do the documents that follow Professor Granville's article provide important new evidence to confirm it. Hence your claim, not hers, made in the Table of Contents Box on p. 1—"Imre Nagy Reassessed"—is misleading. Ten years ago, and thus long before the archives opened, this is what I wrote in *Hungary and the Soviet Bloc*, 1986, pp. 128-29 (all emphases in the original):

> [I]t is one of the paradoxes of political life in Eastern Europe that, until the last days of this short-lived revolution, *Nagy was the man Moscow counted on, and could count on, to save its cause in Hungary*. Indeed, from the time of the first demonstration on October 23 to October 31, Nagy could only envisage a Hungarian future based on Soviet tutelage. With Soviet consent, he sought to make order by pro9e s0gal life9om the time of the th10ro9e s0gal life9r
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menting on the Hungarian-language broadcasts of Radio Moscow no one heard, let alone listened to. As one of his Muscovite colleagues would observe many years later, even the leading émigrés "had nothing of consequence to do but they behaved as if they had. They practiced assiduously something they referred to as politics, plotted one another's downfall, and generally pranced and cantered and whinnied like superannuated parade horses at the knacker's gates." (Julius Hay, *Born 1900: Memoirs* [La Salle, Ill.: Library Press, 1975], pp. 218-19.) Given the atmosphere of suspicion prevailing in Moscow at the time, the Russian commissars did not trust information conveyed by foreign Communists.

Could Nagy, a nonentity among the nonentities, have been a petty mole, then? *Yes*. Could his reporting have contributed to the bloody purge of foreign, especially Hungarian, Communists in the 1930s? *Yes*. Could he have been directly responsible for the arrest of 25 Hungarian Communist émigrés, of whom 12 were executed and the rest sent to prison or exile? *No*. One: The Soviet authorities were always both suspicious of and contemptuous toward all foreign Communists; the NKVD surely did not rely on one such informant's reports. Two: As Kryuchkov put it, the 1989 release of the "Volodya File" to Károly Grósz, General Secretary of the Hungarian Socialist Workers Party (HSWP), was meant to be "expedient" and Grósz was to be advised "about their possible use" (p. 36). Three: Given the KGB's aptitude for falsifying documents, the authenticity of anything emerging from its archives must be carefully scrutinized.

A few hitherto unknown details will amplify the skepticism implicit in these reservations and supplement Professor Granville's able account of the political circumstances of 1989.

In 1988, KGB Chief Vladimir Kryuchkov flew to Budapest on a secret fact-finding mission. Long familiar with, and reportedly very fond of, Hungary, he stayed for several days. He met a few party leaders, the head of the political police, and at least one mole the police had planted in the country's increasingly vocal democratic opposition movement. Judging by the questions he asked and the people he met, he wanted to gain a first-hand impression of the bitter struggle that engulfed the HSWP leadership after the forced resignation of János Kádár earlier that year and of the character, composition, and objectives of the democratic opposition. His visit confirmed what he must have known: that the critics both inside and outside the party were gaining new adherents by using Imre Nagy's execution in 1958 to discredit not only Kádár and his associates but to undermine the whole post-1956 Hungarian political order. As in 1955-56, Nagy—a man Kryuchkov knew while he was the Soviet Embassy's press attaché in Budapest—had once again become the flag for the gathering storm.

I do not know if it was Kryuchkov who then initiated the KGB's search for information on Nagy's past. Nor does it much matter. Both he and Grósz were anxious to discredit Nagy in order to deprive the Hungarian people—and the anti-Kádár, anti-Grósz reformers in the HSWP—of a symbol of courage and sacrifice, of a reformer who broke ranks with Moscow. An astute Kremlinologist may also interpret their effort as an attempt to disparage Nagy in order to undermine Mikhail S. Gorbachev's reputation.

I do know, however, who went over to the headquarters of the KGB to authenticate Nagy's handwriting and pick up the newly found "Volodya File." Accompanied by Gyula Thürmer—Grósz's special assistant for Soviet affairs who, married to a Russian woman, spoke excellent Russian—and possibly by a "Third Man," also from Budapest, the Hungarian in charge of the transaction was Sándor Rajnai, the Hungarian Ambassador to Moscow. Unlike the young Thürmer and the "Third Man," Rajnai had long known Nagy and his handwriting very well indeed. For, in 1957-58, *Lieutenant-Colonel* Rajnai of the Hungarian political police was responsible for Nagy's arrest in and forced return from his involuntary exile in Romania; for Nagy's year-long interrogation in a Budapest jail where even his presence was top secret; and for the preparation of Nagy's equally secret trial whose scenario Rajnai had drafted. (Loyal, competent, sophisticated, and admired by his superiors and subordinates alike, this creative author of the last bloody Communist purge was subsequently richly rewarded for a job well done. After a long tenure as head of Hungarian foreign intelligence, he served as Ambassador to Romania and then—the top prize—to the Soviet Union. In the 1980s he became a member of the HSWP Central Committee as well.)

By the time Rajnai "authenticated" Nagy's handwriting in July or early August of 1989, Nagy had received—on 16 June 1989—a ceremonial reburial at Budapest's Heroes Square in front of hundreds of thousands of people while millions watched the event live on Hungarian TV all day. Still, Rajnai clung to the hope that he could save the regime in which he believed and his own skin, too, by publicizing damaging information about Nagy—by portraying him as a false pretender, a deceiver who sold out his friends and comrades, a Stalinist stooge. Only in this way could Rajnai help the hardliners in the HSWP, notably Károly Grósz, to defeat such critics as Imre Pozsgay who used Nagy's name to gain political ground. Not incidentally, only in this way could Rajnai justify his own past and clarify the meaning of his life. He told me as much during the course of some 40 hours of conversation over several months in 1991 and '92.

As it happened, Rajnai forwarded the "Volodya File" to Grósz; it was translated from Russian into Hungarian by Mrs. Thürmer. Grósz presented a verbal summary, similar to Kryuchkov's, to the HSWP Central Committee on 1 September 1989. In his speech Grósz told the Central Committee of Nagy's direct responsibility for the arrest and sentencing of 25 leading Hungarian cadres in Moscow and the execution of 12 of them. But then Grósz declined to open the floor for discussion or answer any questions. The Central Committee resolved to send the "Volodya File" to the archives where it was shelved. Oddly enough, even Grósz seemed doubtful of Volodya's political value at this late date. "It is my conviction," he declared, "that what you have just heard will not be decisive when it comes to making the ultimate judgment about Imre Nagy's whole life." (The text of Grósz's speech was published on 15 June 1990—ten long months later—in the hardline *Szabadság*, a small-circulation Communist weekly edited by Gyula Thürmer.)

In the end, Rajnai's hope of saving the one-party Communist regime by publicizing the "Volodya File" was dashed, and his fear of being held accountable for the phony charges he had concocted against Nagy in 1957-58 turned out to be unwarranted. For, while the Hungarian Supreme Court in 1989 declared the trial of Imre Nagy and his declaredeclaned to open thej he declared,

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Account of secret Soviet 1959 testing of atomic weapons in Pacific. (Mikhail Rebrov, "Otriad osobnogo naznacheniia: Khronika neob 'iavlennoi ekspeditsii'" [An Order of Special Significance: The Story of an Unreported Expedition], *Krasnaia Zvezda*, 7 May 1994, 6.)

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Obozrevatel, 1995), on problems and achievements of Russian secret services published. (Itar-Tass, 11 October 1995, in FBIS-SOV-95-196 (11 October 1995), 39-40.)

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[Ed. note: For detailed lists of recent sources, see the essays by Michael Hunt and Chen Jian elsewhere in this issue of the *Bulletin*.]

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