The Multilateralisation of Soviet Bloc Security: The Hungarian Revolution from an Eastern European Perspective

Laurien Crump[1]

Abstract

The Hungarian Revolution is often analysed in a national context or from the angle of Hungarian-Soviet relations. From this perspective, the Eastern European satellites seem mere puppets and the Soviet bloc a monolith. Archival evidence nevertheless shows that the Kremlin actually attempted to build a new kind of international relations after Stalin's death in 1953, in which the Eastern European leaders would gain more scope for manoeuvre. This attempt at liberalisation even facilitated the uprisings in Hungary in 1956. Avoiding a teleological approach to the Hungarian Revolution, this article argues that the Soviet invasion was neither inevitable, nor wholly unilateral. Khrushchev even sought to legitimise the invasion in bilateral and multilateral consultations. There was a mutual interest in sacrificing Hungary's sovereignty to safeguard the communist monopoly on power. This multilateralisation of Soviet bloc security is an important explanatory factor in an analysis of the Revolution and its repercussions in Eastern Europe.

Keywords: Hungarian Revolution, Warsaw Pact, multilateralisation, sovereignty, international relations, communist monopoly on power

Introduction: International History and the Hungarian Revolution

The Hungarian Revolution has been studied primarily from a national perspective, in which the Soviet intervention confirms the conventional view of the Warsaw Pact as a

[1] Laurien Crump is Assistant Professor in the History of International Relations at Utrecht University in the Netherlands. She defended her doctoral thesis on the multilateralisation of the Warsaw Pact in January 2014 with distinction. She has done extensive research in Eastern-European archives and she has published widely on the Cold War in Eastern Europe. Her monograph, The Warsaw Pact Reconsidered: International Relations in Eastern Europe, 1955-1969, was published by Routledge (London/New York) in 2015.

Soviet monolith, with any attempt for autonomy quenched by Soviet tanks. It was, however, also a pivotal development in international relations in Eastern Europe. The history of Soviet bloc international relations is, indeed, not so clear-cut as is often assumed. More important still: there was a history of international relations, rather than merely unilateral Soviet pressure on its satellites. The aim of this article is, therefore, to examine the Hungarian uprising and the Soviet intervention from the perspective of international Eastern European history, by placing it in the historical context of the new course in Soviet bloc foreign policy after Stalin's death in March 1953, while also treating it in the international context of the relations between the Eastern European countries after the foundation of the Warsaw Pact in May 1955. The Hungarian historian Csaba Békés is one of the few historians who has already researched the international context *inter alia* in his thought-provoking article on „The 1956 Hungarian Revolution and world politics" (1996). In this article Békés treats the international context of the Hungarian Revolution by also looking at the stance of the Western Great Powers, the United Nations, the Third World, and the Soviet bloc. Another rare example of a treatment of the Hungarian Revolution is Johanna Granville's *The First Domino* (2004), in which she uses theories from the political sciences to analyse the *International Decision-Making during the Hungarian Crisis of 1956* from an American, Polish, and Yugoslav perspective.

This article, however, intends to use the Hungarian Revolution as a case-study to challenge the conventional view of the Soviet bloc as a monolith and the Warsaw Pact countries as Soviet puppets. It therefore concentrates on Eastern Europe and uses newly released archival materials from Eastern European countries *outside* Hungary to claim instead that the Soviet reaction to the Hungarian Revolution proves that international relations in Eastern Europe had changed hugely after Stalin's death (as pointed out in Békés, 2010: 340-342), although the events in Hungary very precisely revealed the limits of those changes. Those who understood the new parameters of their scope for manoeuvre, such as the Romanian leadership, would be able to gain a considerable degree of independence with impunity, whereas those who did not, such as the Czechoslovak leaders in 1968, would also have to deal with a Soviet intervention. Beginning with the death of Stalin as an important turning-point in the Cold War, this article also briefly considers the aftermath of the Hungarian Revolution, up to the Prague Spring in 1968, in order to gauge both how the international context determined the Soviet reaction to the Hungarian uprising and to draw a parallel with similar dynamics in the case of the Prague Spring.

International Relations on a New Footing (1953-1956)

The death of Soviet First Secretary Joseph Stalin on 5 March 1953 has rightly been considered a „turning-point" in Soviet foreign policy (Kramer, 2006: p. xiii). In fact, the prospects for Eastern Europe looked relatively promising after Stalin's death. The collective leadership that succeeded Stalin, consisting of Lavrenti Beria, Vyacheslav Molotov and Georgii Malenkov, immediately decided to build relations with the Eastern European leaders on a new footing, and to introduce a somewhat more liberal „New Course". Already in June 1953 the Hungarian Stalinist leader, Mátyás Rákosi, was invited to Moscow. The Kremlin attempted to break his Stalinist grip on Hungarian politics by compelling him to no longer occupy the simultaneous post of party leader and prime minister, but to divide these tasks with the more moderate Imre Nagy, who would later play a pivotal role in the Hungarian Revolution.[2] Under Soviet pressure, Rákosi was forced to resign as prime minister. The New Course nevertheless became a victim of the rivalry between Rákosi as party leader and Nagy as prime minister. The Kremlin accordingly disassociated itself from Hungary's New Course, but the Hungarian politburo itself compelled Nagy to resign in April 1955 and replaced him with the formerly Stalinist András Hegedüs. So far as the Soviets were concerned, the Hungarian politburo should, however, have embarked on a more liberal course straight after Stalin's death.

In 1955 the Soviet First Secretary Nikita Khrushchev emerged as the undisputed leader of the Soviet Union. Sealing the fate of the collective leadership, Khrushchev did, however, continue its relaxation on international relations. In May 1955 in particular Khrushchev embarked on an intensive foreign policy campaign. Within the scope of one week he founded the Warsaw Pact, withdrew Soviet troops from Austria, and reconciled himself with the Yugoslav leader Josip Tito, whom Stalin had excommunicated from the COMINFORM in 1948 because of his relatively independent stance. All of these initiatives were motivated by the same drive, namely to establish international relations with other Eastern European countries on a more equal footing (Békés, 2010: 341; Crump, 2015: 48). Although the foundation of the Warsaw Pact on 14 May 1955 is often considered a clear Soviet signal that the option of withdrawing Soviet troops was not open to the countries in the Soviet bloc (Mastny, 2008: 143), it was also a genuine attempt to

[2] Notes of a Meeting between the CPSU CC Presidium and a HWP Political Committee Delegation in Moscow, June 13 and 16, 1953 (Békés et al., 2002: 14-23).

involve the Eastern European members in Soviet bloc foreign policy to some extent, and it was even regarded as such by the participating countries, namely Hungary, the GDR, Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Romania.[3] Rather than the Soviets unilaterally calling the shots, the Kremlin had established an unprecedented platform for multilateral diplomacy, which would inadvertently contribute to the „emancipation" of its members from the Soviet Union (Crump, 2015: 291).[4] The ensuing „Warsaw Treaty" enshrined the sovereignty of the Warsaw Pact members, and thus upgraded them from Soviet satellites to sovereign states, at least in theory (Békés, 2010: 341).

This trend was further amplified in January 1956, when the Kremlin formulated the policy of „active foreign policy", according to which other communist countries could „be the first to take action" in foreign affairs (Békés, 2010: 342). Khrushchev's so-called 'secret speech' at the Communist Party Congress in February 1956 constituted another significant break with the past.[5] Propagating peaceful co-existence and denouncing Stalin's personality cult, Khrushchev did not only discredit Stalin, but also indirectly many of the Stalinist leaders in the Warsaw Pact countries. This led to considerable unrest both in Eastern Europe and in the PRC, where the personality cult of Chairman Mao Zedong was greatly reminiscent of Stalin's. Mao was particularly vexed that Khrushchev had not consulted any of his communist allies before delivering the speech, although the Chinese were pleased with the increased room for manoeuvre that Khrushchev declared (Crump 2015, 29). Khrushchev's speech would, however, pave the way for the split between the PRC and the SU that would dominate the 1960s, as Mao himself retrospectively emphasised.[6]

Meanwhile, the reception within the WP countries was not very enthusiastic, either. The Stalinist leadership in Romania was very sceptical, and the Albanian leadership decided to purge the Albanian Communist Party from all pro-Soviet members

[3] "Minutes of the Politburo Session of 18 May 1955", Arhivele Naţionale Istorice Centrale (ANIC) ale României, Romanian Workers' Party Central Committee (RCP CC), C, 37/1955.

[4] This term has been used by historiography. Zbigniew Brzezinski (1967: 442) used it *en passant* in his book on Eastern Europe, providing an analysis of Kremlinology. Csaba Békés (2009: 229) introduced this term in "New Cold War history" as a novel approach to the international relations of the Soviet Bloc, based on his extensive multiarchival resarch. Crump used it as an analytical concept to explain the multilateralisation of the Warsaw Pact in her book, *The Warsaw Pact Reconsidered* (2015).

[5] Khrushchev's speech to the 20th Congress of the CPSU, 24-25 February 1956, at https://www.marxists.org/archive/khrushchev/1956/02/24.htm, accessed on 4 November 2016.

[6] „Reply of the CC of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to information of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) on 21 June 1960 (top secret)," 10 September 1960, Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR im Bundesarchiv (SAPMO BArch), DY 30/3604, 22.

two months after Khrushchev's speech (Crump 2015, 38). The Polish First Secretary, Bolesław Bierut, had died from a heart attack on 12 March 1956, right after the very congress where Khrushchev had held his secret speech. Bierut had already introduced some reforms after Stalin's death, and was succeeded by the moderate Edward Ochab. The Polish party leadership was, however, divided between a more conservative and a reformist faction, and the Polish people also demanded national sovereignty and more political freedom in the wake of Khrushchev's speech. Confronted with riots in Poznań in the summer of 1956, the Polish leadership unprecedentedly elected the national communist Władysław Gomułka as First Secretary instead, on 19 October 1956, to salvage the situation (Granville, 2004: 48). Gomułka was an independent-minded former Stalinist victim, who had supported Tito after his break with the Soviet Union in 1948.

The Kremlin panicked, accordingly, and asked the Chinese for advice on a possible military intervention, presumably in order to placate them after the secret speech. The Chinese leaders stressed that this was an internal affair, and advised Khrushchev against mobilising troops. Meanwhile, Gomułka managed both to convince Khrushchev of his loyalty to the Soviet bloc, and to keep the situation in Poland under control. Khrushchev still invited a Chinese delegation to Moscow from 23 to 31 October to negotiate the „political solution" in Poland, possibly in order to withstand East German and Czechoslovak pressure „to restore order" in Poland (Kemp-Welch, 2008: 102). The East German and Czechoslovak leaders, who were also invited to Moscow, considered unrest in Poland a considerable geopolitical risk, since its potential collapse could expose their countries to West German revanchism. All other WP members, apart from Albania, had also been invited. The Hungarian and Romanian leaders did not attend. They were far too busy at home, and visiting Belgrade, respectively.

Liberalisation and escalation (1956)

Khrushchev's secret speech had also created considerable unrest in Hungary, where the Stalinist leader Mátyás Rákosi was replaced with the more moderate (but still Stalinist) Ernő Gerő in July 1956. The new leadership nevertheless failed to carry through reforms and it also failed to keep the Hungarian people under control. There began a string of demonstrations in October 1956.

A large demonstration of university students in Budapest, who requested *inter alia* freedom of speech and the withdrawal of Soviet troops on 22 October, was followed by another one in solidarity with the Polish reform movement the next day. When this spun

out of control in the evening, the Hungarian politburo asked the Kremlin to intervene. After vehement discussions in the politburo, the Soviet leaders agreed to mobilise the Soviet troops stationed in Hungary. The Soviets were well aware of the fact that such a move would undermine their legitimacy, as was indeed the case. After the Soviet intervention on 24 October the Hungarian protests turned into an anti-Soviet liberation struggle.

At the same time the more reform-minded Imre Nagy was reappointed as prime minister in order to gain control over the situation, while also addressing some of the people's concerns. Nagy went further than Gomułka by formulating a new government programme which entailed both the dissolution of the security forces and demanding the departure of Soviet troops. The Kremlin nevertheless agreed to withdraw its troops from Hungary on 28 October, so long as Nagy could regain control over the situation. At this stage, the Polish option – increased autonomy combined with loyalty to the Soviet Union – was still open to Hungary. On 30 October the Soviet leadership even published a „Declaration by the Government of the USSR on the Principles of Development and Further Strengthening of Friendship and Cooperation between the Soviet Union and Other Socialist States", in which it announced to be „prepared to review with the other socialist countries which are members of the Warsaw Treaty the question of Soviet troops stationed on the territory of [the Hungarian, Romanian and Polish republics]" (Békés et al., 2002: 300-302).

This declaration was not a product of the Hungarian revolution, but it had already been prepared for several weeks, which proves that Khrushchev was genuine in his aim to somewhat relax international relations in Eastern Europe. It was slightly modified in reaction to the Hungarian revolution, but it once again emphasised the Soviet intent not to exacerbate the situation. There was, however, one condition in the declaration, which is often overlooked, but which pertained to the situation in Hungary in particular. The declaration stipulated very clearly that it was a „chief and sacred duty" to „guard the communist achievements of people's democratic Hungary". Upon closer reading it appears that Soviet troops could be withdrawn on the condition that Hungary remained a communist country. The declaration was, as such, no cynical subterfuge of real Soviet intentions, as is sometimes argued (Kyrow and Zselicky, 1999: 112-13), but rather a Brezhnev doctrine *avant la lettre*. Like Brezhnev's doctrine on „limited sovereignty", Khrushchev, too, limited sovereignty to countries that remained communist (Békés, 1996: 27).

This was, however, exactly what was at stake in Hungary. When Imre Nagy declared on 30 October 1956 that he would establish a multi-party system and form a coalition government, thus relinquishing communist monopoly on power, he sealed the fate of the Hungarian Revolution. This decision also testifies to the fact that the Hungarian Revolution had gained control over Imre Nagy, instead of vice-versa. Rather than undermining its own declaration, as is often argued, the Kremlin in fact implemented it by sending Soviet troops to Hungary on 4 November. This was, however, not an easy decision either, and it was made under pressure from the international constellation. The Chinese delegation, which had remained in Moscow throughout the crisis, had interpreted the situation in Hungary very differently from the one in Poland. Instead of warning the Soviets *not* to interfere in internal affairs, the Chinese had already warned the Kremlin against troop withdrawal, since they considered the situation in Hungary „an imperialist attack on the big socialist family".[7] The Chinese delegate Liu Shaoqi even accused the Soviet leaders of becoming „historical criminals" if they did not fight against this (Zhai 2006, 182). Moreover, the Chinese assessed the situation as a „counterrevolutionary putsch", similarly to the Hungarian politburo member János Kádár who had been invited to Moscow on 1 November. Counterrevolution was, of course, anathema in the communist world, and it had to be avoided at all costs.

The Kremlin realised that the price would be high and sought to convince other Eastern European leaders that the situation had escalated beyond a political solution. In a whirlwind tour through Eastern Europe, Khrushchev consulted the Romanians, the Czechoslovaks, the Poles, the Bulgarians and the Yugoslavs. The Romanian and Czechoslovak support for an intervention was hardly surprising, since the Stalinist leaderships in both countries regarded the Hungarian Revolution as an outgrowth of Khrushchev's misguided De-Stalinisation. The Romanian leadership even considered military and strategic support in an intervention „a necessary international duty", out of fear lest the Hungarian minority in Romanian Transylvania and perhaps the Romanian people as a whole would start to rebel, too (Deletant and Ionescu, 2004: 61). Tito's lukewarm support was, however, more remarkable, considering his historically independent stance from Moscow. But he, too, thought that the situation was turning into a counterrevolution, thus reinforcing not only the Chinese, but also, more surprisingly,

[7] „Reply of the CC of the CCP to information of the CPSU on 21 June 1960 (top secret)," 10 September 1960, SAPMO BArch, DY 30/3604, 25-26.

the interpretation of the recently elected Polish leader, Władysław Gomułka. The Yugoslavs nevertheless disagreed with Khrushchev on the post-invasion scenario and advised him to allow the relatively moderate Kádár to form a new Hungarian government. This is indeed what happened after the Soviet invasion on 4 November. Khrushchev yielded to the Yugoslav arguments, even though the Kremlin had preferred the more Soviet-oriented Ferenc Münnich.[8] Khrushchev's travels through Eastern Europe had thus contributed to legitimising the intervention. The salvation of socialism rather than Soviet imperialism carried the day.

The subsequent Soviet invasion on 4 November should, accordingly, be seen in this light. It was not motivated in the first instance by a desire to turn the Warsaw Pact countries again into puppets, nor was it triggered by Imre Nagy's declaration of Hungarian neutrality and appeal to the UN on 1 November, as is often assumed (Kemp-Welch, 2010: 219). In fact, Imre Nagy declared Hungary neutral when he had already received intelligence about the impending Soviet invasion (Békés, 1996: 10). Rather than triggering the invasion, the declaration of Hungarian neutrality was a desperate attempt to gain support from the UN. The Soviet invasion in Hungary was, accordingly, not a reaction to its withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact, but rather an attempt to salvage communism after Imre Nagy's declaration of the multi-party system on 30 October. This distinction underlines that the salvation of communism rather than the integrity of the Warsaw Pact was the Soviet priority.

International repercussions (1956-1968)

The Soviet invasion in Hungary was generally welcomed in Eastern Europe. The Hungarian Revolution was considered a threat to the communist monopoly on power elsewhere, and especially the Stalinist leaders considered the Soviet decision to invade a wise reversal from his de-Stalinisation. The Romanian leadership in particular breathed more freely after Khrushchev's liberalisation had proved counterproductive, and considered the invasion a „great source of satisfaction" (Tismaneanu, 2002, 20-21). It also reaped the fruits of the Hungarian Revolution in another respect: two years after the 30 October 1956 declaration, in which the Kremlin promised to *conditionally* withdraw troops from Hungary and Romania, the Kremlin decided to withdraw all Soviet troops

[8] "Notes of Yugoslav Ambassador to Moscow Veljko Micunović on Negotiations between Yugoslav and Soviet leaders at Brioni", November 3, 1956 (Békés et al. 2002, pp.348-354).

from Romania. This was decided on the basis of that Declaration, and it was officially sanctioned within the Warsaw Pact's Political Consultative Committee in May 1958. Whereas Imre Nagy's proclamation of a multi-party system did not fulfil the declaration's conditions, communism was so firmly entrenched in Romania that Khrushchev could afford to execute the promise he had made in the heat of the Hungarian Revolution. This move would in turn enable Romania to develop an unprecedentedly independent stance within the Warsaw Pact. The undermining of communism in Hungary was thus severely sanctioned, and the implementation of rigid communism in Romania was duly rewarded.

Meanwhile, relations between other communist countries and the Kremlin soured, not so much as a consequence of the Soviet intervention in Hungary, but rather because the Soviet leadership had not intervened earlier. The PRC leadership in particular continued to rebuke the Kremlin for its failure to act proactively. Throughout the rest of the 1950s and 1960s, Mao would incessantly rebuke Khrushchev in letters and meetings for the „capitulation" to the Hungarian counterrevolution.[9] The radical Albanian leadership sided with the Chinese against the Soviets and it was particularly disgruntled about the fact that the Kremlin had not involved Albania in the decision-making about the intervention. According to Li Fenglin, the Chinese ambassador to Moscow at the time, Albania had even been instrumental in „inciting Bejing's opinions" (cited in Liu and Mastny, 2004: 36). The Hungarian revolution certainly paved the way for Sino-Albanian opposition to the Kremlin, which was an important factor in both the Sino-Soviet split and the Soviet-Albanian schism in the early 1960s.

At the pivotal international communist party conference in Moscow in November 1960, which sealed the Sino-Soviet split, the Albanian leader Enver Hoxha even used the Hungarian Revolution to join the PRC in denouncing the Kremlin (Crump, 2016: 154-155). Hoxha blamed Khrushchev for consulting the „renegade" Tito, „the traitor of Marxism-Leninism" about the possibility to intervene in Hungary, without convening the Warsaw Pact. Hoxha therefore stressed that „from the moment we created the Warsaw Pact, we should have decided together, otherwise it makes no sense to talk about an alliance, about comradeship, about collaboration between parties".[10] Albania was in fact the only Warsaw Pact country, which Khrushchev had not consulted during the

[9] "Meeting of a delegation of the CPSU and the CCP", July 1963, SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/3608, 72.

[10] „Speech of comrade Enver Hoxha. First Secretary of the CC of the Albanian Workers Party, at the conference of representatives of the communist and workers' parties in Moscow", 16 November 1960, ANIC, Romanian Workers' Party CC, International Relations, 76/1960, 46.

Hungarian Revolution. This was particularly painful to Albania. It is indeed remarkable that Khrushchev on the one hand involved his Eastern European comrades in bi- and multilateral discussions, but on the other hand he apparently forgot to convene the alliance it had recently founded in order to involve his allies in the decision-making.

This, however, might have been due not only to the Warsaw Pact's dormancy in the second half of the 1950s. There is another aspect that played a role. The Warsaw Pact was, after all, intended to safeguard European Security through offering its allies protection against potential aggression from the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. There was no article in the Warsaw Treaty, which could legitimise a military intervention in another Warsaw Pact country, not even under the guise of „fraternal assistance". On the contrary, in a prelude analogous to its North Atlantic counterpart, the Warsaw Treaty specifically stated that the alliance would function „in accordance with the principles of respect for the independence and sovereignty of states and of non-interference in their internal affairs".[11] Contrary to Khrushchev's informal bilateral and multilateral discussions, the Warsaw Pact could, accordingly, not be used to legitimise Soviet intervention in Hungary. It was, therefore, more convenient to ignore its existence in the heat of the Hungarian Revolution.

This same development can be seen more clearly in relation to the Soviet treatment of the Prague Spring in 1968. Even though the military intervention on 21 August 1968 is generally considered a „Warsaw Pact intervention" (Bischof *et al*., 2011), the decision-making on the reaction to the Prague Spring was deliberately made outside the confines of the Warsaw Pact. Between March and August 1968 the Kremlin repeatedly convened its East German, Polish, Bulgarian and Hungarian allies to discuss the developments in Czechoslovakia, but the Kremlin chose not to use the Warsaw Pact on purpose. Apart from bypassing the dissident Romanians and Albanians, the Soviet leaders were well aware of the fact that the existence of the Warsaw Pact did not legitimise, but delegitimised a potential intervention in Czechoslovakia. It was therefore decided to form a kind of coalition of „five socialist countries", a kind of Eastern European „coalition of the willing" to invade Czechoslovakia (Crump 2015: 249). The Eastern European leaders who wanted to join the invasion agreed to do so with the Soviet Union on a bilateral basis, instead of multilateral one. The supreme commander of the Warsaw Pact was replaced

[11] Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance, Warsaw, 14 May 1955, http://www.php.isn.ethz.ch/lory1.ethz.ch/collections/coll_pcc/wapa_treaty.html, accessed on 4 November 2016.

with the Soviet supreme commander at the last minute to lead the operation, to avoid even the semblance of a Warsaw Pact invasion (Crump, 2015: 240).

Still, more so than in the Hungarian case, Khrushchev's successor Leonid Brezhnev was under considerable pressure from most of his Warsaw Pact allies to invade Czechoslovakia. The East Germans, Poles and Bulgarians already favoured a military intervention in March 1968, since they feared the repercussions of the Prague Spring in their own countries. Meanwhile, the Hungarian leader János Kádár attempted to mediate between the Czechoslovak leadership and the hawkish Warsaw Pact members in order to arrive at a political solution. His experience from the Hungarian Revolution put him in a particularly important position to prevent the Czechoslovak leader Alexander Dubček from losing control over the Czechoslovak developments, as had happened to Imre Nagy in Hungary twelve years earlier. The Hungarian revolution was an important point of reference throughout the decision-making on the Prague spring. As in Hungary in 1956, the key questions were whether it was turning into a counterrevolution and whether Dubček was still in control. Kádár himself became Brezhnev's closest confidant during the Prague Spring, and Brezhnev hoped that he and Kádár could together convince the more radical Warsaw Pact members that an invasion in Czechoslovakia was not necessary.

On 12-15 August 1968, a week before the invasion, Brezhnev even invited the Hungarian leader to Yalta to discuss the matter bilaterally. Both still preferred a „political solution", but Kádár added that „we have seen and recognised that military assistance may prove necessary on our part", since Dubček seemed to have lost control over the situation.[12] Brezhnev even asked Kádár to discuss the matter once more with Dubček in order to press for a political solution. Kádár's loss of faith in Dubček's ability to act was pivotal in the decision-making, that led to the invasion in Czechoslovakia on 21 August 1968. At the same time, Kádár had been instrumental in delaying the invasion for so long. The Kremlin seemed to have learned from the Hungarian experience that a military intervention should not be decided overnight. The fact that it should be avoided at all costs, only dawned on the Kremlin in the case of the Polish Crisis, in 1980-1981.[13]

[12] "János Kádár's Report on Soviet-Hungarian Talks at Yalta", 12-15 August 1968 (Navrátil *et al.*, 2006: 360-362).

[13] "Transcript of CPSU CC Politburo Meeting", December 10, 1981 (Paczkowksi and Byrne, 2007: 446-453).

Conclusion: The Multilateralisation of Soviet Bloc Security

The treatment of the Hungarian Revolution revealed a number of important conclusions, which either problematise or nuance the conventional narrative of the Soviet bloc as a monolith, with Eastern European puppets suffering from Soviet pressure. First, it challenges the conventional view of the Warsaw Pact as a Soviet instrument, in which any attempt at autonomy is punished with a military intervention. Imre Nagy's declaration of neutrality and the Hungarian withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact were not decisive in terms of the military intervention. Nagy's declaration of the multi-party system and his failure to gain control over the situation were. This also explains why Czechoslovakia was invaded, whereas Romania and Albania were not. Despite the fact that the Romanian and Albanian leaderships sailed a far more independent course than their Hungarian and Czechoslovak comrades in the Warsaw Pact, recent archival material shows that the Soviet Union never considered invading either of them. Both countries openly defied the Kremlin, and Albania even withdrew from the Warsaw Pact in September 1968 with impunity. In both countries the communist monopoly on power was, however, never at stake.[14] Communism was clearly the price a country had to pay for gaining some scope for manoeuvre. Most Warsaw Pact leaders paid that price more than willingly.

Contrary to conventional wisdom, the Warsaw Pact has never been used as an instrument for an internal invasion either. Quite on the contrary, Khrushchev even promised using the Warsaw Pact to withdraw Soviet troops in the Declaration on 30 October 1956. Soviet troops were indeed withdrawn through the framework of the Warsaw Pact and on the basis of the same declaration from Romania in 1958. The Hungarian case nevertheless clearly indicated that the declaration was a kind of precursor of the Brezhnev doctrine, which stipulated that a country was only sovereign to the extent that it was communist. This worked both ways: in the Romanian case, the sovereignty was enhanced by the firmly entrenched communism. In the Hungarian case the collapse of communism entailed the end of sovereignty. The retrospective formulation of Brezhnev's doctrine on limited sovereignty in September 1968 testifies to the fact that the Warsaw Pact did not cater to such a concept.

[14] The discussion in the Italian Communist Party on 23 August 1968 fully corroborates this analysis: "Meeting of the leadership on 23 August 1968" (16), Fondazione Istituto Gramsci, Archivio Partito Comunista Italiano, Leadership, 1968, mf 020, 0911.

The Soviet alliance was, however, a clear sign that the Kremlin had gained an interest in multilateral diplomacy, in stark contrast to Stalin's unilateral decrees. This interest also became apparent in the heat of the Hungarian Revolution, when Khrushchev consulted many of his allies either bilaterally or in multilateral meetings in Moscow in order to sanction the Soviet intervention. The support of the Soviet invasion was a product of self-interest rather than subversion. Moscow's allies wanted to avoid developments similar to those in Hungary in their own countries and all of them had a vested interest in the salvation of communism. The fact that the Chinese leaders had already been invited to Moscow to negotiate a political solution in Poland, shows that an enormous qualitative change had taken place in the Kremlin: The communist countries were actively involved in the decision-making on the Hungarian Revolution and the role of the People's Republic of China may have been particularly decisive.

The salvation of communism in the Soviet bloc was not solely a Soviet preoccupation. On the contrary: Khrushchev's consultations with his communist comrades had paved the way for *the multilateralisation of Soviet bloc security*, as I propose to call it. All leaders agreed with Khrushchev that the salvation of communism sanctioned the sacrifice of sovereignty. The Soviet invasion in Hungary thus reflected a newly forged Eastern European interpretation of security, which fell outside the confines of the Warsaw Treaty. Only communism could consolidate this mutual interest in security, because that was the common denominator that kept Eastern Europe together.

The Soviet response to the Hungarian Revolution accordingly reveals an irresolvable tension between Soviet bloc security and national sovereignty. Brezhnev tried to resolve this tension by limiting national sovereignty, but this tension would ultimately prove fatal to the Soviet bloc. When Soviet First Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev openly denounced the Brezhnev doctrine, he inadvertently paved the way for the collapse of the Soviet bloc and the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact. Most Eastern European communist regimes were aware of this. As in the case of Khrushchev's „Secret Speech", the Warsaw Pact leaders did not unanimously welcome this Soviet attempt at liberalisation either. They fully realised how delicate the balance of power in the Soviet bloc was. The Hungarian people were, however, among the first to reap the harvest of Gorbachev's *un*limited sovereignty, in a belated spinoff of the Hungarian Revolution. The reburial of Imre Nagy in June 1989 marked Hungary's transition to a liberal democracy. The rehabilitation of Imre Nagy followed a reassessment of the Hungarian Revolution: in February 1989 the Hungarian State Minister Imre Pozsgay had called the Hungarian

Revolution „an uprising against oligarchy and authoritarianism" instead of a „counterrevolution".[15] In this new political climate, the Hungarians became the first to open the border with Austria and tear down the Iron Curtain, thirty-three years after the Hungarian Revolution. They proved that communism and sovereignty were, indeed, mutually exclusive. This time sovereignty prevailed at the expense of communism.

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[15] Quoted at http://budapestbeacon.com/politics/imre-nagy-reburied-viktor-orbans-political-career-launched-25-years-ago-today/8864, accessed on 4 November 2016.

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