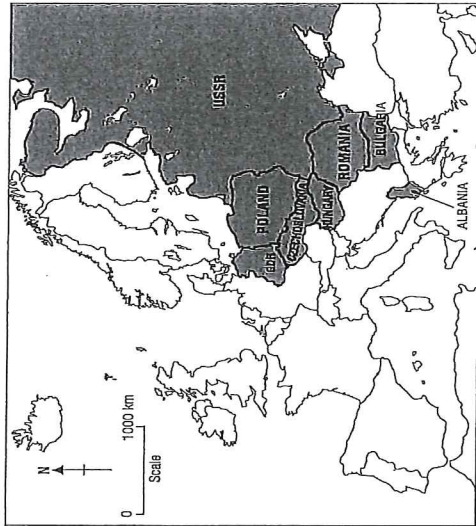


# CHALLENGES TO SOVIET CONTROL 1945-1980

16

- When reading the chapter, consider the following essay questions:
- What was the nature of Soviet control over the satellite states?
  - How successful were challenges to Soviet control?
  - Why did the USSR intervene in Afghanistan and what was the impact of this invasion on the development of the Cold War?

This map shows the satellite states of the Soviet Union.



Between 1944 and 1948, the Soviet Union under Josef Stalin established control over the countries on its borders. By 1949, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Romania and Poland were on the eastern side of the 'Iron curtain'. For each of these countries, the system established by Stalin meant tight Soviet control:

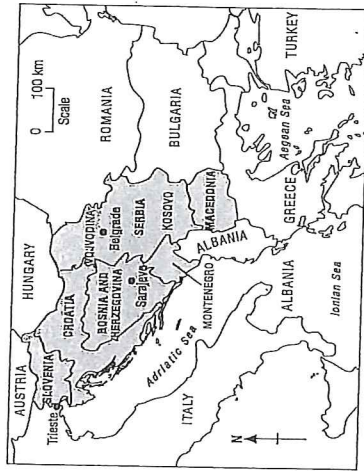
- The establishment of one-party rule, including installation of national leaders dependent on the USSR.
  - Nationalization of private enterprise.
  - The establishment of Soviet-style Five Year Plans. Heavy industry was encouraged and agriculture collectivized.
  - Integration of the economy and agriculture with the Soviet Union to offset the weakness of industry and agriculture in the USSR. Each country had to produce what the USSR needed; for example, Poland produced coal and steel ships. The satellite states were not to co-operate economically with each other; however, this situation was one of exploitation of the satellite states for the economic advantage of the USSR, and it had disastrous effects on any attempts at economic modernization in the satellites.
- This economic and political system was backed up by:
- social and ideological controls (Cominform, secret police)
  - censorship of all media
  - suppression of religious freedom
  - military presence of Soviet troops
  - political purges.

However, from 1945 onwards there were attempts by the satellite states to resist this extreme level of Soviet control.

## Timeline of Soviet control in Eastern Europe

1948	June	Yugoslavia expelled from Cominform
		Purges begin in other satellite states to get rid of 'Titoists'
		Riots in Czechoslovakia
1953	June	Strikes break out in East Germany and Soviet troops restore order
	June	Khrushchev gives de-Stalinization speech
1956	Feb	Polish workers' revolt suppressed by Soviet troops
	June	Soviet suppression of Hungarian uprising
	October	Dubcek reveals plans for modernization of Czechoslovakia
	April	The Prague Spring
	August	Warsaw Pact forces invade Czechoslovakia
	Sept	Brezhnev announces Brezhnev Doctrine
		Albania leaves Warsaw Pact
1979	Dec	Soviet forces invade Afghanistan
1980	Aug	Strikes in Poland. Gdansk agreements recognize Solidarity
1981	Dec	Martial law imposed in Poland

## The challenge of Yugoslavia



This map shows Yugoslavia in 1945.

The Yugoslavs had organized a successful resistance campaign against the Germans during World War Two and had liberated their country in 1945. Marshal Tito was one of the resistance leaders. He had been head of the Yugoslav Communist Party since 1937 and was elected leader of the new republic in 1945. Tito was popular because he had resisted the Germans. Therefore, in Yugoslavia the establishment of Communism was not due to Soviet influence. Moreover, Tito was not interested in being tied too tightly to Moscow, and wanted to be free to trade with the West as well as with the Soviets. In addition, the Yugoslavs were unhappy with Stalin's lack of support for Tito's claim to Trieste, for the Greek Communists or for a Balkan Federation.

Tensions came to a head in 1948. Stalin expelled Yugoslavia from Cominform, which then declared that the Yugoslav party was 'in the hands of murderers and spies' and cut off economic aid. However, these actions failed to topple Tito who was able to continue without Soviet support. His regime remained Communist, but Tito followed his own road to Communism, which also involved full contact and trade with the West and acceptance of aid from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). (See page 190 for Tito's involvement in NAM.)

## Why was Tito able to survive?

Because of his resistance against the Nazis in World War Two, Tito was a popular leader; the government had not been installed by the Soviet Red Army (the Red Army left in 1944) and did not depend on Soviet support to remain in power. In addition, from 1950 Tito received both military and economic aid from the USA, which enabled him to maintain his independence from the Soviet bloc.

## What was Stalin's reaction to Tito?

Having failed to get rid of Tito, Stalin took his revenge on suspected 'Titoists' by carrying out East European purge trials. By using fabricated charges, leaders, such as the Hungarian foreign minister Laszlo Rajk, were demoted, tried and either imprisoned or executed during the late 1940s.

Although this got rid of open Tito sympathizers, secret sympathizers remained. The exploitative and repressive nature of the regimes in the satellite states meant that Soviet rule was resented by ordinary people and never achieved any popular support. Thus on several occasions, from 1945 onwards, there were to be more challenges to Soviet control: East Germany in 1953, Poland and Hungary in 1956, Czechoslovakia in 1968 and Poland in the 1980s.

## Challenge in East Germany, 1953

It was the combination of relaxation of controls with continuing repression which helped to trigger the East German riots of 1953. East Germany was facing a crisis at this time due to the mass exodus of East Germans to the West through Berlin. Beria, the Deputy Soviet Prime Minister, suggested that the USSR should get rid of the unstable and expensive GDR by selling it to the West. This idea was not taken up, as his colleagues still believed that it was possible to work towards a unified Socialist Germany. However, the East German leader, Walter Ulbricht, was forced by the Soviet government to take a more conciliatory approach in his policy of forced collectivization of farms and socialization. Unfortunately, this softer approach came too late and no attempt was made to reduce the high production targets, which had been set for the workers by Ulbricht. This created a dangerous situation and, on 16–17 June, workers in Berlin and elsewhere in East Germany rose up in revolt.

### STUDENT STUDY SECTION

#### Document analysis

We, the working-people from the district of Bitterfeld demand:

1. The immediate resignation of the so-called German Democratic government which has come to power through manipulation of the elections
  2. The creation of a provisional government consisting of the progressive working-people
  3. Admission of all the big West German democratic parties
  4. Free and secret direct elections within four weeks at the latest
  5. Release of all political prisoners (the plain political ones, the so-called fiscal criminals, and those persecuted because of their religious confession)
  6. Immediate abolition of all borders and withdrawal of the Peoples Police
  7. Immediate normalization of the social standard of living
  8. Immediate dissolution of the so-called National Army
  9. No reprisals against even a single striking worker
- Demands of the East Berlin Strike Committee, 1953 (telegram sent to the government of the GDR)

#### Question

From these demands, what can you learn about the actions and policies of the East German Government?

This was the first time that anything like this had happened in the Soviet sphere of influence and the uprising was quickly suppressed by Red Army troops; however, the revolt was very embarrassing for the Soviet Union. Beria was arrested and executed for being a Western agent. The idea of having a friendly neutral Germany was abandoned. Repression continued and Ulbricht and Khrushchev now concentrated on building up the GDR as a separate state.

## Challenges to Soviet control under Khrushchev

### Khrushchev and de-Stalinization

In 1956, at the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party, Khrushchev proclaimed his policy of de-Stalinization. Although for a time this did strengthen his position at home, it seriously weakened his authority over Communism elsewhere. It is ironic that Khrushchev got rid of Stalin's weapons of terror and yet he had to use more force than Stalin had ever done in order to keep control in Hungary.

### Khrushchev and Tito

As part of his attack on Stalin, Khrushchev claimed that Stalin had made a major error concerning Tito and Yugoslavia. He argued that had Stalin understood Tito and the national cause he represented, Yugoslavia would never have broken away from the East European bloc. He thus restored relations with Yugoslavia, visiting Tito in 1955 and 1956. However, Tito continued to maintain his non-aligned status in his relationship with the USSR.

### Khrushchev and Poland

In revising the USSR's relations with Yugoslavia, Khrushchev did not intend to revise the USSR's relations with its other satellite states. However, many of the satellite states saw Khrushchev's approach to Yugoslavia as a sign that he also would accept them finding their own way with regard to Communism.

In Poland at the end of June 1956, workers in the industrial city of Poznan revolted. During the next few months, the Polish Communist Wladyslaw Gomulka, who had been outlawed in Stalin's day, was brought back to political prominence as First Secretary (without Khrushchev's approval) and he implemented a rapid de-Stalinization programme. On 19 October 1956, Khrushchev flew to Warsaw and Soviet military forces moved into intimidating positions. However, Gomulka refused to be intimidated by Khrushchev, even threatening to arm the Polish workers to resist the Soviets. Importantly, however, Gomulka also told Khrushchev that he had no intention of taking Poland out of the Warsaw Pact. This calmed Khrushchev's fears. He agreed to allow Gomulka to remain in power; this was significant as it was the first time that the Soviet Union had compromised with another Communist state on its choice of leader. In fact, Gomulka turned out to be a trusted ally of Khrushchev and the freedoms acquired by the Poles in 1956 were gradually taken away.

### Khrushchev and Hungary

Khrushchev, however, did not compromise over Hungary, and it was here that it became clear that Khrushchev was as determined as Stalin to maintain Soviet control over the satellite states.

### What was the American reaction?

The United States felt that it had to do something to help the East Germans. It therefore called for a four-power foreign ministers' conference to discuss the future of Germany, but also continued provocative broadcasts from its radio stations in West Berlin to try to prolong the unrest in East Germany.

### Khrushchev's de-Stalinization speech

(see also Chapter Seven) In 1956, Khrushchev gave a speech to the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party, in which he denounced Stalin. He criticized the excesses of Stalin's regime and denounced Stalin's crimes and the growth of the cult of personality. This was shocking to the Communist world.

Communists were not used to having mistakes admitted at the top, and certainly not on this scale. It was, as Secretary of State Dulles commented at the time, 'the most damning indictment of despotism ever made by a despot.' John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War* (Penguin, 2005) p.107

**Khrushchev**

**Background**

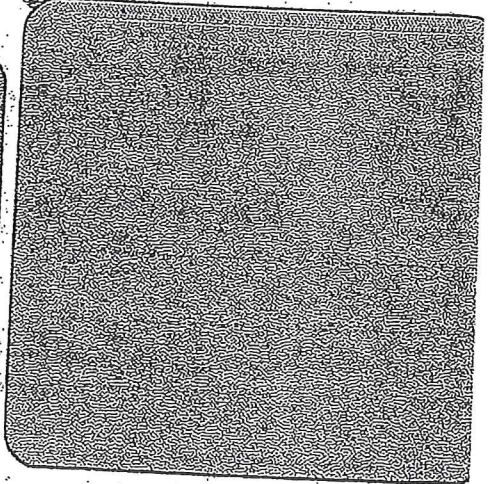
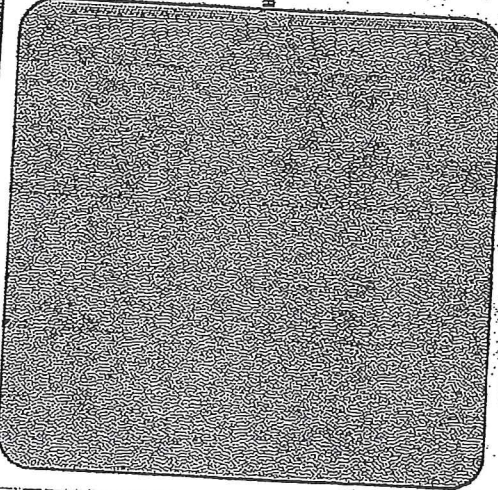
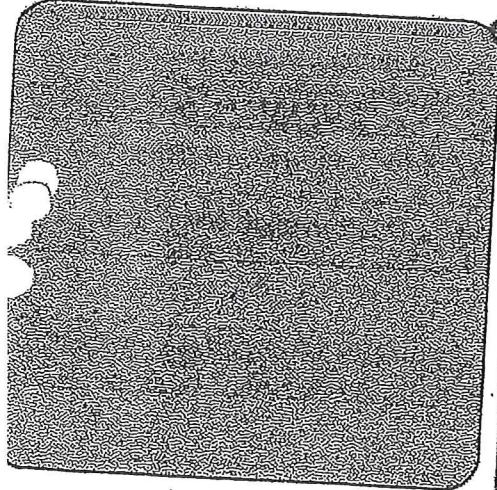
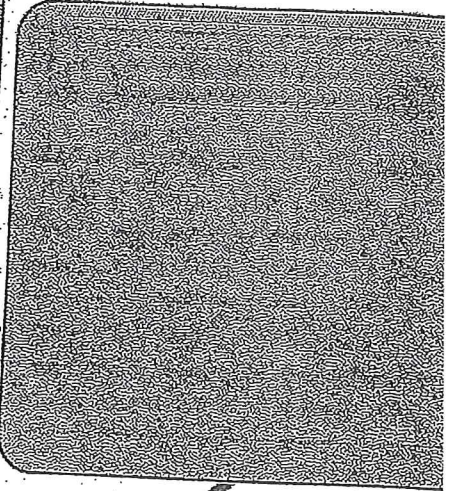
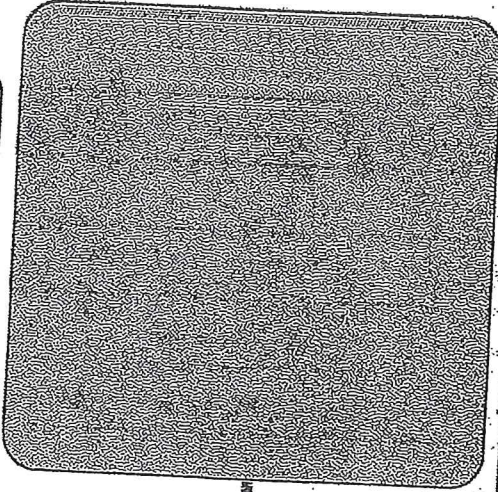
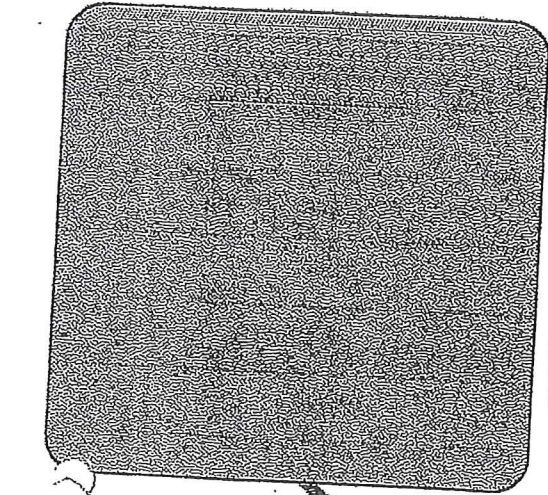
**Overthrow**

**What happened in Hungary in 1956?**

**Red Army**

**Pleas for help**

**Consequences**



News of the Polish success had spread to Hungary, where people lived under the repressive regime of Matyas Rakosi. Crowds took to the streets and demanded that Rakosi be replaced with the more moderate Imre Nagy. Khrushchev agreed to this, but riots continued. Khrushchev ordered the Red Army to restore order, but, surprisingly, it failed to do this, and Nagy was able to negotiate the withdrawal of Soviet forces on 28 October 1956. Shortly afterwards he announced that Hungary would leave the Warsaw Pact and become a neutral state. He was also planning to share power in Hungary with non-Communist groups.

This was something that Khrushchev could not tolerate and, aware that the attention of the West was focused on the Suez crisis, Soviet forces launched a general offensive against the Hungarians. There was bitter fighting in the streets of Budapest. Twenty thousand Hungarians and 3000 Soviet troops were killed, but the Soviets were successful in bringing Hungary back under their control. A new Hungarian government under Janos Kadar was created and Imre Nagy was later executed by the Soviets.

### What actions did the USA take?

The Hungarian revolt had been encouraged by CIA broadcasts on Radio Free Europe which led Hungarians to believe that they would get U.S. support. However, the Americans made it clear to the Soviet leaders that the United States would take no action to save Nagy. It is true that U.S. attention was being diverted by the Suez Crisis, but there is no evidence that President Eisenhower ever considered interfering in Hungary. This was because he believed (probably mistakenly) that Khrushchev might have been prepared to risk nuclear war rather than lose this satellite state.

### Why did the Soviets act differently in Hungary and Poland?

In Poland, the Communist Party had retained control, while in Hungary they had lost control. Nagy's decision to declare Hungary a neutral state would have meant the exclusion of Soviet influence and a weakening of the defensive ring of states established on its Western borders since 1944. Khrushchev's actions in Hungary showed that de-Stalinization did not mean a softening of the USSR's fundamental attitudes. When the Communist Party was in danger of losing control over state machinery, or where its control of the Eastern bloc was challenged, it was prepared to use whatever pressure was necessary to pull the satellites back into line.

#### STUDENT STUDY SECTION

##### Document analysis

###### Document A

*We have almost no weapons, no heavy guns of any kind. The Hungarian people are not afraid of death. You can't let people attack tanks with their bare hands. What is the United Nations doing? ... Civilized people of the world! Our ship is sinking. Light is fading. The shadows grow darker over the soil of Hungary. Help us!*

The above are extracts from radio messages sent by Hungarian rebels during the fighting.

###### Document B

*A Socialist state could not remain an indifferent observer of the bloody reign of fascist reaction in Peoples' Democratic Hungary. When everything settles down in Hungary, and life becomes normal again, the Hungarian working class, peasantry and intelligentsia will undoubtedly understand our actions better and judge them aright. We regard our help to the Hungarian working class in its struggle against the intrigues of counter-revolution as our international duty.*

From an editorial in *Pravda* dated 23 November 1956



▲ Stalin's statue being taken down during the Hungarian revolution.

##### The Suez Crisis

This occurred after President Nasser of Egypt took the decision to nationalize the Suez Canal. The British, French and Israelis invaded Egypt to take back control of the canal, but faced condemnation from both the USA and the USSR as a result. Britain and France were forced to withdraw and Nasser retained control over the canal. (See Chapter Fourteen for more details.)

##### Questions

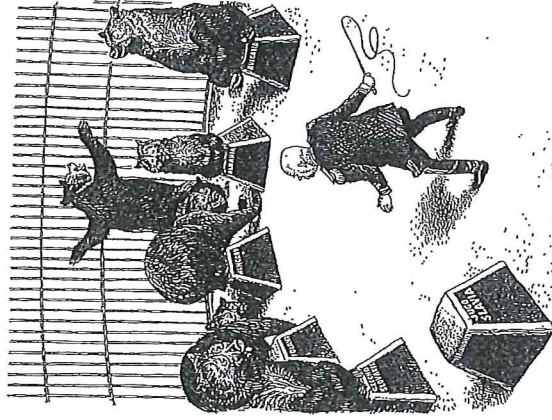
- 1 What do the extracts in Document A tell you about Hungarian expectations regarding the involvement of the West?
- 2 Using the information in Chapter Fourteen, explain the UN response to events in Hungary.
- 3 In Document B, what was *Pravda's* view of the uprising in Hungary? How might a Hungarian argue against this view?
- 4 What was *Pravda's* view of the values and limitations for the historian in using extracts from *Pravda* to understand events going on in Hungary?

### What were the results for Khrushchev and the Soviet Union?

Khrushchev's position in the USSR was strengthened by the events in Hungary and Suez. It also meant that the Soviets could now feel confident that there would be no American influence in their area of control. However, events also made clear that the Warsaw Pact (unlike NATO) was not based on voluntary participation, and that the USSR could not always rely on the loyalty of its satellite states.

#### STUDENT STUDY SECTION

##### Cartoon analysis



◀ This cartoon, entitled 'Trainer Khrushchev's Problem', by Leslie Illingworth was published in *Punch*, a British magazine, on 31 October 1956.

##### Questions

- 1 Using your knowledge of events in Eastern Europe, explain the actions of the different bears in the cartoon.
- 2 What is the overall message of the cartoonist?

# The Hungarian Uprising of 1956



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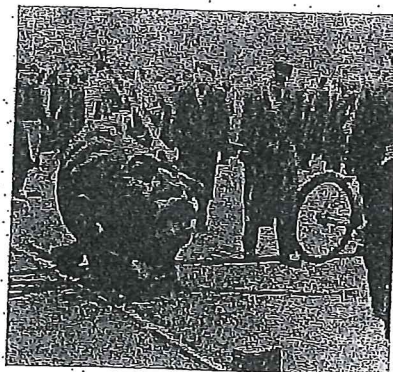
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Hungary in 1956 seemed to sum up all that the Cold War stood for. The people of Hungary and the rest of Eastern Europe were ruled over with a rod of iron by Communist Russia and anybody who challenged the rule of Stalin and Russia paid the price. The death of Stalin in 1953 did not weaken the grip Moscow had on the people of Eastern Europe and Hungary, by challenging the rule of Moscow, paid such a price in 1956.

From 1945 on the Hungarians were under the control of Moscow. All wealth of whatever nature was taken from Hungary by the Russians who showed their power by putting thousands of Russian troops and hundreds of tanks in Hungary. The Hungarian leader, Rakosi, was put in power by Stalin of Russia. When Stalin died in 1953 all people in Eastern Europe were given some hope that they might be free from Soviet (Russian) rule.

In February 1956, the new Russian leader Khrushchev made a bitter attack on the dead Stalin and his policies and in July 1956 in a gesture to the Hungarians, Rakosi was forced to resign. In fact, the Hungarians had expected more but they did not get it. This situation, combined with 1) a bad harvest 2) fuel shortages 3) a cold and wet autumn all created a volatile situation.

On October 23rd 1956, students and workers took to the streets of Budapest (the capital of Hungary) and issued their Sixteen Points which included personal freedom, more food, the removal of the secret police, the removal of Russian control etc. Poland had already been granted rights in 1956 which had been gained by street protests and displays of rebellion. Hungary followed likewise.



A ruined statue of Stalin in Budapest

Imre Nagy was appointed prime minister and Janos Kadar foreign minister. They were thought to be liberal and in Moscow this was felt to be the best way to keep happy the "hooligans" as the Moscow media referred to the protesters. As a gesture, the

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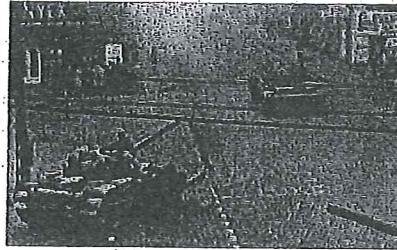
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Red Army pulled out and Nagy allowed political parties to start again. The most famous man to criticise the Russians was released from prison - Cardinal Mindszenty.

On October 31st, 1956, Nagy broadcast that Hungary would withdraw itself from the Warsaw Pact. This was pushing the Russians too far and Kadar left the government in disgust and established a rival government in eastern Hungary which was supported by Soviet tanks. On November 4th, Soviet tanks went into Budapest to restore order and they acted with immense brutality even killing wounded people. Tanks dragged round bodies through the streets of Budapest as a warning to others who were still protesting.



Russian tanks in Budapest

Hundreds of tanks went into Budapest and probably 30,000 people were killed. To flee the expected Soviet reprisals, probably 200,000 fled to the west leaving all they possessed in Hungary. Nagy was tried and executed and buried in an unmarked grave. By November 14th, order had been restored. Kadar was put in charge. Soviet rule was re-established.

President Eisenhower of USA said "I feel with the Hungarian people." J F Dulles, American Secretary of State, said "To all those suffering under communist slavery, let us say you can count on us." But America did nothing more.

So why did Europe and America do nothing except offer moral support and condemn Russia?

1) Because of the geographic location of Hungary, how could you actually help without resorting to war? Both sides in the Cold War were nuclear powers and the risks were too great. Any economic boycott of the Soviet Union would have been pointless as Russia took what it needed from the countries it occupied.

2) The Suez Crisis, which took place at the same time, was considered far more important and of greater relevance to the west than the suffering of the Hungarians. Hence why Britain, France and America concentrated their resources on this crisis.

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