

November 1, 1956

Working Notes from the Session of the CPSU CC Presidium on 1 November 1956

Citation:

"Working Notes from the Session of the CPSU CC Presidium on 1 November 1956", November 1, 1956, Wilson Center Digital Archive, TsKhSD, F. 3, Op. 12, D. 1006, Ll. 19-22, compiled by V. N. Malin. Published in CWIHP Bulletin 8-9, pp. 394-395
<https://digitalarchive.umd.edu/document/111883>

Summary:

At this session of the Presidium, Mikoyan argues that in the face of a universal demand for troop withdrawal the best option is to support the Hungarian government. Mikoyan promotes negotiations over force. The other members support the application of force to put down the uprising. Supporters of force refer to the necessity of keeping Hungary within the Soviet sphere and preventing the uprising from spreading to other Eastern European nations.

Original Language:

Russian

Contents:

Translation - English

Working Notes from the Session of the CPSU CC Presidium on 1 November 1956
(Re: Point I of Protocol No. 50)(1)

Those Taking Part: Voroshilov, Bulganin, Kaganovich, Mikoyan, Saburov, Suslov, Brezhnev, Zhukov, Shvernik, Furtseva, Pospelov, Konev, Serov(2)

On the Situation in Hungary.
(Cdes. Mikoyan)

The demand for the withdrawal of troops became universal. Anti-Soviet sentiments have intensified. (Cde. Mikoyan) In current circumstances it is better now to support the existing gov't. Right now, the use of force will not help anything. We should enter into negotiations. For 10-15 days.

If the regime slips away, we'll need to decide what to do. We simply cannot allow Hungary to be removed from our camp. We shouldn't quarrel right now with the army.

If the situation stabilizes, we should decide at that point whether we'll withdraw the troops. We should wait another 10-15 days and support this government. If the situation stabilizes, everything will change for the better.

Cde. Suslov: The unstable polit. situation. The danger of a bourgeois restoration has reached its peak. The situation will be clarified in the next few days. Events are developing wildly, but without the control of the party. A schism in the HWP—the intra-party struggle has spilled out onto the streets. I don't believe that Nagy organized the uprising, but his name is being used. If we back this gov't—there is no guarantee. Only by means of an occupation can we have a government that supports us.

Cde. Serov—the demonstrations were meticulously prepared. Nagy was connected with the rebels. We must take decisive measures. We must occupy the country.

Cde. Bulganin—provides information about the decision taken on 31-X-56 and about the discussions with the Chinese comrades. (3)

Cde. Bulganin: The international situation has changed.(4) If we don't take measures we will lose Hungary.

Cde. Konev—Budapest is in the hands of the rebels. Anarchy is spreading; reaction is triumphing. The decision: occupation.

Cde. Kaganovich: The discussion was complicated.(5) The Chinese said we should not withdraw troops. Objectively—a sharp reactionary movement. The party doesn't exist. We can't wait long. The reactionary forces are attacking, and we are attacking.(6)

Cde. Furtseva—reactions to the Declaration. Are worried that we're giving away Hungary. (7)

Cde. Zhukov—there is no basis for reconsidering the decision of 31-X-56. I don't agree with Cde. Mikoyan that we must support the current gov't. Our actions must be decisive. Remove all the unsavory elements. Disarm the counterrevolution. Delay the parliamentary delegation to France. To the ambassador in Budapest—send the

families.(8)Reconsider sending a parliamentary delegation to Thailand.

Cde. Bulganin—everything is being done in the spirit of the decision of 31 X.

Cde. Zhukov: Everything will be restored to order. We are acting on the basis of the Declaration— the redeployments will bring order.

Cde. Suslov—now the situation has become clearer. Separate out the honest ones.(9) Zhukov, Suslov, Konev, Serov, Brezhnev (the plan of measures).(10) Those Taking Part: Voroshilov, Bulganin, Kaganovich, Mikoyan, Saburov, Suslov, Brezhnev, Zhukov, Shepilov, Shvernik, Furtseva, Pospelov, Konev, Serov

On the Situation in Hungary
(Mikoyan)

About our embassy in Hungary.(Bulganin, Kaganovich, Mikoyan, Zhukov, Shepilov) So far, to keep the embassy.(11) On the main question.

Cde. Shepilov: There were two paths: to reckon with the mass nature of the movement and not to intervene; or second, the military path; it turned out there was a third path: both that we intervened and that reaction triumphed. The current situation: a counterrev. Putsch has been carried out, and the state order has changed; the main trend is anti-Soviet; the chief orientation of forces is being orchestrated from outside. If we don't embark on a decisive path, things in Czechoslovakia will collapse.(12) We must establish order by the use of force.

Cde. Mikoyan: If Hungary becomes a base for imperialism, that's a different matter. What we're talking about here is the current situation. We should not tolerate a pedantic approach. There are still 3 days to think it over; there'll be advice from the comrades. The tactic: to maintain contacts with them.(13) Cdes. Suslov, Brezhnev, + Hungarian comrades— to prepare measures (on which cadres to rely and what we will do).

Translator's Notes

1 Protocol No. 50 (in APRF, F. 3, Op. 64, D. 484, L. 58) contains directives from the sessions on both 1 and 2 November (see Note 146 infra).

2 On the evening of 31 October-1 November, Mikoyan and Suslov returned to Moscow, presumably accompanied by Serov. This was the first Presidium meeting in which Mikoyan had taken part since 23 October. In Khrushchev's absence, Bulganin presided over this session.

3 Other than Mikoyan and Suslov, who were still in Budapest, all the Presidium members took part in the 31 October decision and the subsequent discussions with the Chinese delegation. Hence, Bulganin provided this information for the benefit of Mikoyan and Suslov.

4 It is not entirely clear what Bulganin is referring to here, but he probably had in mind one or more of several developments: Hungary's withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact and demand for the removal of all Soviet troops from Hungary; the commencement of French and British military operations against Egypt (see Note 101 supra); China's sudden decision to support rather than oppose Soviet military intervention in Hungary; new intelligence about the West's position vis-avis Hungary; and the warnings coming in from neighboring East European countries, particularly

Czechoslovakia (see below) and Romania.

5 Kaganovich uses a word here, *obsuzhdenie*, that is normally translated as “discussion,” but it could also mean “deliberations” in this context. Presumably, he is referring to the meeting that Soviet leaders had on 31 October with the Chinese delegation after the CPSU Presidium approved a full-scale invasion of Hungary.

6 This is how the sentence reads in the text. Presumably, Malin meant to say that “we are not attacking.”

7 It is unclear precisely who was “worried that we're giving away Hungary.” Furtseva may have been referring to one of several groups: orthodox Hungarian Communists who had sought refuge in Moscow; neighboring East European (especially Czechoslovak and Romanian) leaders; Chinese officials; members of the CPSU Central Committee and the heads of union-republic Communist parties and of regional and local CPSU organizations; and employees of the Soviet embassy in Budapest. By this point in the crisis, all of these groups had expressed concerns very similar to the ones that Furtseva mentions.

8 Presumably this refers to the decision at the end of October to evacuate the families of Soviet embassy employees to the USSR. For a brief account of the evacuation, see the highly tendentious but occasionally useful memoir by Vladimir Kryuchkov, *Lichnoe delo*, vol. 1, p. 57.

9 Presumably, Suslov is referring to the plan to bring Janos Kadar and Ferenc Munnich to Moscow.

10 The formal protocol for the session, “Vypiska iz protokola No. 50 zasedaniya Prezidiuma TsK ot 2 noyabrya 1956 g.: O polozhenii v Vengrii,” in APRF, F. 3, Op. 64, D. 484, L. 58, states that “taking account of the exchange of views at the CC Presidium, Cdes. Zhukov, Suslov, Konev, Serov, and Brezhnev are to work out the necessary measures in connection with the events in Hungary and report their proposals to the CPSU CC.”

11 A passage from Kryuchkov's memoir (*Lichnoe delo*, vol. 1, pp. 57-58) sheds light on what may have been discussed here: “At the end of October and beginning of November . . . the situation around Soviet buildings [in Budapest] deteriorated significantly; the embassy was under siege, and any attempt to exit the building was fraught with danger. The diplomats long ago had essentially shifted over to a barracks-type operation, spending the night in their offices and only rarely—once our troops had returned [to Budapest]—taking a half-hour ride home one by one in armored personnel carriers to see their families, who were holed up in living quarters several blocks from the embassy. . . . Ordinarily, knowledge of Hungarian allowed me to engage in conversations with Hungarians and to receive fresh information directly from the center of events . . . but [by late October] attempts to strike up a conversation often caused me to have to flee, since they could tell by my accent that I was a Russian. The fulfillment of official instructions, which entailed visits to appropriate buildings and agencies, also was a difficult matter, both in somehow getting there and in then returning to the embassy while holding on to the needed documents. This did not pass off without a number of serious incidents.”

12 It is unclear precisely what Shelepin is referring to here, but this seems to be an indication of Moscow's growing concerns about a spillover into the rest of Eastern Europe. Urgent warnings to this effect had been pouring in from the Czechoslovak authorities since late October. See, for example, “Stenograficky zapis ze zasedani UV KSC,” 5-6 December 1956 (Top Secret), in SUA, Arch. UV KSC, F. 07, Sv. 14, Archivna jednotka (A.j.) 14; “Zabezpeceni klidu na uzemi CSR a statnich hranic Mad'arskem,”

Report from Col.- General Vaclav Kratochvil, chief of the Czechoslovak General Staff, and Lieut.-General Jaroslav Dockal, chief of operations, 29 October 1956 (Top Secret), in Vojensky historicky archiv (VHA) Praha, Fond Ministra narodni obrany (MNO) CSR, 1956, Operacni sprava Generalniho stabu cs. armady (GS/OS), 2/8-39b; and "Souhrn hlaseni operacniho dustojnika Generalniho stabu cs. armady," Notes from Col.-General Vaclav Kratochvil, chief of the Czechoslovak General Staff, to the KSC Central Committee (Top Secret), 27 October 1956, in VHA, F. MNO, 1956, GS/OS, 2/8-49b.

13 Mikoyan's references here to "comrades" and "them" are to Nagy's government. His mention of "three days" in the line above indicates that the timetable for the invasion (code-named "Whirlwind") had already been set. Mikoyan was hoping that some last-ditch attempt could still be made to head off the military operation.