

Ninety Years of United States-Hungarian Relations¹

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Introductory remarks

There is something wrong with American-Hungarian relations today. Few countries in the world are more important for Hungary than the United States of America; and still, most anniversaries of our rich common history continue to pass unnoticed and the language of public diplomacy on both sides leaves a lot to be desired. Symbolic gestures abound from President Bush's visit to Hungary in 2006 to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the 1956 Revolution to the unveiling of a Reagan statue in Budapest last year. At the same time, Trianon at 90 was commemorated without mention of the United States, and the first ever exchange of ministers between the two countries in 1922 has largely escaped attention so far in 2012. There is no talk of the 150th anniversary of the American Civil War or the bicentennial of the War of 1812 in Hungary. In this paper I will explain major trends in 90 years of official United States-Hungarian relations and speculate about the causes of this selective neglect.

Prewar diplomatic interludes

Although diplomatic relations were established between the United States and Hungary only after World War I, various diplomatic interludes had taken place before. The 1848–49 Hungarian revolution and War of

¹ Research for this paper was funded by TÁMOP 4.2.1/B-09/1/KONV-2010-0007 and TÁMOP 4.2.2/B-10/1-2010-0024, as part of the New Széchenyi Plan, between 2010 and 2012. Earlier research was funded by the Fulbright Commission, OTKA, FKFP, and the Soros Foundation.

Independence was the first such occasion. In December 1848 Kossuth approached the American minister to Vienna, William H. Stiles, to mediate between Hungary and Austria, but the initiative was met with all-out Austrian rejection. Kossuth then decided to send an official diplomatic representative to Washington, but Ede Damburghy arrived at his post only after the Hungarians had surrendered and was not allowed to present his credentials. Meanwhile, the State Department sent Dudley A. Mann to Europe on a secret mission to grant diplomatic recognition for independent Hungary if he saw fit. He did not, but after his return his correspondence with the State Department was published officially. The Austrian diplomatic representative in Washington, Johann von Hülsemann, sent an impolite letter to Secretary of State Daniel Webster and explained that if Mann's mission had been discovered, he would have been executed as a traitor. Webster's reply, generally known as the "Hülsemann letter," postulated that Mann's execution would have been treated as open aggression against the United States, and Washington would have retaliated by force.² War of words, of course, but it established a key Hungarian myth: the US would stand by Hungarians in times of need. The popular reception granted to Kossuth in the New World (1851–52) and the Smyrna incident involving former Honvéd Army officer Márton Koszta (1853)³ all seemed to confirm this belief. The Revolution and Kossuth's subsequent visit to the United States, in turn, helped establish a key American stereotype: Hungary being a country of freedom fighters.⁴

Another, less known, but perhaps even more significant, diplomatic interlude took place between Count Albert Apponyi and President Theodore Roosevelt during the Hungarian constitutional crisis in the early

² Jenő Pivány, *Magyar-amerikai történelmi kapcsolatok a Columbus előtti időktől az amerikai polgárháború befejezéséig* (Budapest: Magyar Királyi Egyetemi Nyomda, 1926) and in English: *Hungarian-American Historical Connections from the Pre-Columbian Times to the End of the Civil War* (1927).

³ Andor Klay [Sziklay], *Daring Diplomacy. The Case of the First American Ultimatum* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1957) and in Hungarian: *Vakmerő diplomácia: amerikai ultimátum egy magyar szabadságharcosért* (Budapest: Argumentum, 1997).

⁴ Tibor Frank, "Az emberiségnek közös sorsa van: Kossuth az Egyesült Államokban, 1851–52" *Rubicon* Vol. 6, Nos. 1–2 (1995), 42–44. Note that Debrecen Televízió is shooting a two-part documentary on Kossuth's trip. Part 1 will deal with the trip itself, while Part 2 with its memory.

1900s. The two politicians first met in 1904 and became good friends. In 1905-06, a political crisis emerged in Hungary, when the opposition (Apponyi among them) won the general elections and threatened not to renew the customs union between Vienna and Budapest. At that point Roosevelt intervened and argued eloquently for the survival of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy with his Hungarian friend. He doubled his efforts through his ambassador to Vienna, Charles Spencer Francis, and advised his daughter, Alice, that if she and her husband were to travel to Vienna on their European honeymoon, they should also go to Budapest. The Roosevelt-Apponyi correspondence suggests that the American president had a calming effect on the Hungarian aristocrat, and the crisis was averted. The two politicians had an opportunity to discuss these events during Roosevelt's much publicized visit to Hungary in 1910.⁵

After World War I

The United States of America entered the war in April 1917 and declared war on Austria-Hungary in December. Following the Frost-flower Revolution in Budapest at the end of the Great War, Hungary restored her independence and full diplomatic relations with the United States became a possibility. As Hungary sank into civil war (1918–20), revolutionary leader Count Mihály Károlyi put all his faith in the American president, describing his policy as “Wilson, Wilson, and again Wilson.” As a result of half a dozen revolutions in key cities, the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy fell apart, as did the old Kingdom of Hungary, which had enjoyed special privileges within the realm of the Habsburgs since the Compromise of 1867. The war in the Carpathian Basin began in earnest after the Great War had ended, as the would-be successor states launched military campaigns, often with open allied (mostly French) support, to occupy territories before the Paris Peace Conference would finalize the new boundaries. The political chaos in Hungary was settled by British intervention (the Clerk mission in late 1919), Admiral Miklós Horthy took control, occupying Rumanian troops were withdrawn from the country, and the Hungarian peace treaty was signed. Trianon became a “second Mohács” for Hungarians, and the revision of the peace treaty

⁵ Tibor Glant, “Roosevelt, Apponyi és a Habsburg Monarchia” *Századok* Vol. 131, No. 6 (1997), 1386–1401, and a short version in English: “American-Hungarian Relations, 1900–1918” *Hungarian Studies Review* Vol. 32, Nos. 1–2 (2005), 1–14.

that moved over three million ethnic Hungarians to the successor states became a cornerstone of Hungarian foreign policy in general and US-Hungarian relations in particular.⁶

In December 1919 Ulysses S. Grant-Smith, formerly working at the Vienna Embassy, returned to Hungary and assumed consular duties. He managed passports for people traveling both ways and protected American business interests in a volatile manner.⁷ So much so, that he was repeatedly reminded that he was not officially a consul, and, on one occasion, was asked by Secretary of State Charles Evans Hughes to respond to accusations regarding his conduct: “Department informed you have REFUSED to GRANT VISAS to passengers not sailing steamers under American flag. Telegraph facts. HUGHES.”⁸ Grant-Smith’s eventful semi-official consular work came to an end in February 1922, when he was replaced by Charge d’Affaires Eugene C. Shoecraft until the newly appointed minister, Judge Theodore Brentano, could occupy his post in May of the same year.

The resumption of *de facto* consular work by Grant-Smith marked the beginning of official bilateral relations more than two years before ministers were actually exchanged. In the two years he spent in Hungary in a diplomatically in-between position, he was responsible for settling three key issues: (1) negotiating a separate US-Hungarian peace treaty to terminate hostilities (signed in August 1921); (2) clarifying which prewar treaties would remain in effect, which would be terminated, and which would be renegotiated; and (3) clearing the new Hungarian minister to Washington (Count László Széchenyi, December 1921). Grant-Smith did a solid job at his old-new post and expected to be named US Minister to Hungary, but diplomatic complaints and domestic political considerations (the incoming Republican administration had its own preferences for overseas posts) prompted President Warren G. Harding to name Brentano.

⁶ The most recent treatise is Éva Mathey, *Chasing a Mirage: Hungarian Revisionist Search for US Support to Dismantle the Trianon Peace Treaty, 1920–1938*. Ph.D. diss. University of Debrecen, 2012.

⁷ National Archives and Records Administration (Archives II: College Park, MD): Record Group 84: Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State: 84.2 Records of Diplomatic Posts: Hungary 1920–35: 84 vols. Hereafter: NA RG 84.2 and volume number.

⁸ NA RG 84.2: Volume 7: 1921: 863–892.3, under “Steamship Matters/Waterways,” State to Grant-Smith, pink cable no. 331, October 11, 1921. Grant-Smith’s explanation was accepted.

Still, Grant-Smith left an indelible mark on bilateral relations: his not necessarily unfounded impatience with the new Hungarian elite (especially corruption) and his open promotion of American business interests in postwar Hungary set the trend for two decades to come. He later served as American Minister to Albania (1922–25) and Uruguay (1925–29).

Bilateral diplomatic relations meant political, economic, and cultural ties. Political contacts were defined by thinly veiled Hungarian expectations that the US should live up to “Wilsonian ideals,” while Americans refused, or did their best to refuse, to even discuss Trianon. Such unwelcome Hungarian attempts to force the hand of the White House included the publication of newspapers and magazines (*The Commentator*, *The Hungarian Nation*, *Külföldi Magyarorság*, and *Magyar Szemle*, the latter in Hungarian, English, and French), the 1928 Kossuth Pilgrimage to unveil a new statue of the Hungarian revolutionary on Riverside Drive in North Manhattan, and the *Justice for Hungary* flight of 1931.⁹

With Hungarians industriously celebrating July 4th in Budapest, diplomatic relations were cordial but remained uneventful. Still, the private and official correspondence of William R. Castle offers unique, and amusing, insights into the everyday life of the legation and into the private spheres of bilateral contacts. Castle was a career diplomat: he first served as Special Assistant to the State Department (1919–21), then as Chief of the Division of Western European Affairs (where the Hungarian desk belonged, 1921–27), and later as Assistant Secretary of State (1927) and Under-Secretary of State (1931–33).¹⁰ His personal remarks on Grant-Smith and Brentano tell a story quite different from official diplomatic correspondence. A letter from May 1922, for example, indicates that the State Department “was annoyed at Grant-Smith’s action in instructing the Consul to give preference in visa matters to Americans sailing on American ships” and that the complaints came not from

⁹ For details see: Mathey, *Chasing a Mirage*. See also Mathey, “Official America and Hungarian Revisionism between the World Wars” *Eger Journal of American Studies* Vol. 1. 12, Nos. 1–2 (2010), 427–45.

¹⁰ William R. Castle, Jr., Papers, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library and Museum (West Branch, IA): Countries Correspondence: Box 8: Hungary (bound volume). Hereafter: Castle Papers and document details.

Hungarians but from the British.¹¹ Castle was unhappy with the performance of the Budapest Legation and asked Secretary Charles B. Curtis in a private letter to provide regular, weekly and monthly reports.¹² In another letter to Curtis, dated May 6, 1925, Castle complained about Brentano's drinking habits and alleged romantic contacts "with some Jewish dancer from the opera." His dislike of Brentano was on display again on November 11 of the same year, when he mockingly informed Charge d'Affaires ad interim George A. Gordon that Brentano "is not a bad old fellow, but if he were not your Chief, I should have to admit that I consider him an awful ass. As he is your Chief, I shall say nothing about him except that he is immensely enthusiastic about you."¹³ Hungarians added their fair share of comic interludes to the 1920s: in the fall of 1927 a California Hungarian, supposedly Archduke Leopold, insulted Minister Széchényi, and challenged him to a saber duel. It took some effort on the part of the State Department to convince the diplomat and the aristocrat that sword fighting was not considered an appropriate means of settling such debates.¹⁴ These stories show the light, relaxed side of official diplomatic affairs, and should be treated accordingly. The Castle papers are unique, because they reveal the uncensored private side of one of the key decision makers in the State Department during the "Republican 1920s." Brentano was replaced by Joshua Butler Wright in 1927, and in 1931 a familiar face from the hectic days of 1919, Nicholas Roosevelt, returned in an official capacity.

We know considerably less about economic contacts between the United States and Hungary, but the information available provides ample grounds for a basic outline. First and foremost, Herbert Hoover's American Relief Administration provided food and medication for

¹¹ Castle Papers: Castle to H. Dorsey Newson, 3rd Secretary of the Legation in Budapest, May 2, 1922.

¹² Castle Papers: Castle to Curtis, December 6, 1923: "One thing that troubles us about the work of the Legation is the thoroughly sloppy way in which the Department is kept informed."

¹³ Gordon was standing in for Brentano, who was back in Washington, D. C. for a regular briefing. Castle tried to get rid of Brentano in 1925, after the presidential election of 1924, but had to wait until 1927.

¹⁴ "Challenge to Duel Relieves Monotony: But Washington Believes Leopold Not Serious" *Boston Daily Globe*, July 19, 1927, and Castle Papers: American Minister to Hungary Joshua Butler Wright to Castle, October 28, 1927.

refugees and children until 1923, thus saving thousands of lives.¹⁵ At the end of the war many American businessmen came to Hungary looking for new investment opportunities. According to the above cited consular records, shipping, government purchases of automobiles, and movie theater ownership were the main issues. Once the dust settled, Hungary seemed less inviting: hyperinflation, economic depression, refugees from the successor states, and political isolation added up to diminishing interest. Budapest asked for a League of Nations loan, and the international body responded by demanding financial stability first. To ensure this, an American financial supervisor, Jeremiah Smith, Jr., was dispatched to Hungary. Smith worked in Hungary between 1924 and 1926 and published monthly reports in the *Wall Street Journal*. In between, in 1925, a bilateral trade, consular, and cultural agreement was signed, and the two countries agreed upon the first Most Favored Nation (MFN) agreement for ten years.¹⁶ It was repeatedly renewed until after World War II, when Hungary became a Soviet colony and any such cooperation with the United States was out of the question. The MFN agreement again opened up Hungary for American investment, for example in the oil industry.

Personal and cultural ties also emerged between the wars. Counts Albert Apponyi and Pál Teleki continued to cultivate their prewar contacts and visited the New World during the early 1920s. Both worked in close cooperation with the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, and its then president and later Nobel Peace Prize laureate, Nicholas Murray Butler, on evaluating the costs and consequences of the Great War.¹⁷ Some of the iconic members of the Károlyi revolution

¹⁵ For details see: Tibor Glant, “Herbert Hoover and Hungary, 1918–1923” *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies* Vol. 8, No. 2 (Fall 2002), 95–109.

¹⁶ Zoltán Peterecz, *Jeremiah Smith, Jr. and Hungary, 1924-1926: The United States, the League of Nations, and the Financial Reconstruction of Hungary*. Ph.D. diss. ELTE, Budapest, 2010. See also by Peterecz: “Picking the Right Man for the Job: Jeremiah Smith, Jr. and American Private Influence in the Financial Reconstruction of Hungary” *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies* Vol. 15, No. 2 (Fall 2009), 45–65. For a more specific study see: György Péteri, *Global Monetary Regime and National Central Banking. The Case of Hungary, 1921–1929* (Wayne, NJ: Center for Hungarian Studies and Publications, Inc., 2002), East European Monographs No. 590, Hungarian Studies Series No. 2.

¹⁷ Nicholas Murray Butler Papers, Columbia University, NYC (Butler Library): Arranged Correspondence, Box 13 for Apponyi and Box 407 for Teleki. The

settled in the United States. Most notable among them was Oscar Jászi, who wrote a seminal work titled *The Dissolution of the Habsburg Monarchy* in 1929. Academic exchanges began for both men and women, and Hungarians conducted lively discussions on American matters ranging from fauna to government and contemporary politics. As of 1927, Americans began to attend the Debrecen Summer School, a program that has contributed to the training of many a foreign diplomat in Hungary. The 1924 Reed-Johnson Immigration Restriction Act may have cut transatlantic migration off, but Hungarians continued to find their way into the United States, sometimes as above the quota admissions, sometimes even illegally, across the Canadian or Mexican borders.¹⁸ Still, the most spectacular development took place in the cultural interaction between the two countries.

Hungarians have always been fascinated by film, and Hollywood became a dominant cultural force with strong Hungarian participation. Major movie icons like Dracula, Tarzan, or Mr. Moto were all played by actors born in Hungary, Michael Curtiz emerged as an all-important director, and Miklós Rózsa won three Oscars for his musical scores. Meanwhile, American film, music, and pulp fiction came to define the popular culture of interwar Hungary. Buffalo Bill, Nick Carter, Charlie Chan, and an infinite list of Western heroes shaped the cultural education of the first Trianon generation in Hungary. The golden age of Hungarian sound film (1930s) drew heavily upon the American experience.

In World War II

During the interwar years nothing suggested the diplomatic break that would come in 1941 or the fact that Americans would bomb major Hungarian cities in still another world war. Even as Hungary began to gravitate towards the newly emerging Nazi Germany, Franklin D. Roosevelt's minister to Hungary, John F. Montgomery, continued to enjoy excellent personal relations with Hungarian head of state Governor

Carnegie Endowment Papers are also held here. None of this Hungary-related material has ever been digested.

¹⁸ For details see: Tibor Glant, "Amerikás könyvek és Amerika-kép a két világháború közti Magyarországon" in Tamás Magyarics and Miklós Lojkó, eds., „*Minden gondolatomra számtalan másik árnya hull...*” *Emlékkönyv Frank Tibor 60. születésnapjára*. (Budapest: Prima Rate Kft., 2008), 79–85.

Horthy.¹⁹ Meanwhile, Minister László Széchenyi moved on to London (1933) and was replaced by his former deputy, János Pelényi.²⁰ When Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union attacked Poland from both sides and World War II began, the United States again declared her neutrality. The partial revision of the Treaty of Trianon took place, with German sponsorship, in the form of two Vienna Awards in 1938 and 1940. Hungary joined the German war against the Soviet Union in the summer of 1941, and it was a matter of time before she would find herself at war with the United States. In fact, Hungary declared war on the United States in December 1941, a dubious claim to fame and the lowest ever point in bilateral relations.

Interestingly, World War II contributed to the positive image of Hungarians in the New World, through the efforts of Hungarian scientists (of Jewish stock) working for the Manhattan Project to develop the atomic bomb, then referred to as the “super weapon.” Ede Teller, Leó Szilárd, János Naumann, and Jenő Wigner were the key players, but Tódor Kármán also contributed. These people fled Hungary for Germany following the first European postwar anti-Semitic legislation, the Numerus Clausus Act of 1920. When Hitler rose to power, they moved to England, then on to the United States. They helped create the image of “clever Hungarians,” a supplement to the freedom fighter image.²¹ Meanwhile, various wartime governments of Hungary participated in the Holocaust despite American warnings (including FDR’s proclamation of March 24, 1944), and many were executed as war criminals after the conflict had ended. Unlike in World War I, this time Hungary experienced war first-hand: western allies bombed many major cities, while the Soviet Union invaded her. The Soviet Army liberated Hungary from Nazi rule (including the puppet regime set up by Hitler under Ferenc

¹⁹ The Horthy-Montgomery connection has been thoroughly documented by Tibor Frank in both English and Hungarian: Frank, ed., *Discussing Hitler. Advisers of U.S. Diplomacy in Central Europe, 1934–1941* (Budapest and New York: CEU Press, 2003) and *Roosevelt követe Budapesten: John F. Montgomery bizalmas politikai beszélgetései, 1934–1941* (Budapest: Corvina, 2002).

²⁰ Pál Pritz, *Magyar diplomácia a két háború között. Tanulmányok* (Budapest: Magyar Történelmi Társulat, 1995), 24, 26, 74, and 99–100.

²¹ For details see: Tibor Frank, *Double Exile: Migrations of Jewish-Hungarian Professionals through Germany to the United States, 1919–1945* (Oxford and Bern: Peter Lang, 2009).

Szálasi on October 15, 1944), but plundered and raped her, and continued to occupy the country until the early 1990s.

The Roosevelt administration weighed two options concerning the future of the Carpathian Basin: Habsburg restoration and spheres of influence. While the former was given serious consideration in the early phases of the war, it was the latter that materialized in the form of the “Four Policemen” idea in general and the Yalta agreements in particular. FDR agreed, in return for Moscow’s cooperation against Nazi Germany, to grant Stalin control over what they called a “buffer zone” along the western border of the territorially enlarged Soviet Union. From the Baltic States through Central Europe to parts of Yugoslavia and Germany, this was seen as a western sellout of the region, and Yalta became a bad word. Similarly to the territorial issues (Yalta), future economic and political cooperation (Bretton Woods agreements and the establishment of the United Nations) were also agreed upon before war’s end. VE-Day and VJ-Day simply terminated hostilities.²² Still, the United States did not escape the war unscathed: she became the first, and to the present day only country ever to deploy an atomic bomb, incidentally on the civilian populations of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Transition after World War II

The two and a half to three years between the end of the European war and communist takeovers by force in the region are generally seen as a period of transition. In February 1945, in Yalta, an agreement was made that coalition governments would be set up following the war, but months before, in November 1944, the timetable and methods of a communist takeover had also been agreed upon between Hungarian and Soviet communists in Moscow. In the postwar world of great power spheres of influence being on the winning or losing side did not matter: Czechoslovakia became a Soviet colony just as Hungary did. To add insult to injury, a second Trianon peace treaty (February 1947) restored the pre-1938 borders and granted additional concessions to Czechoslovakia, in return for direct Soviet entrance into Hungary where

²² On US-Hungarian relations in the Second World War see: Mark Imre Major, *American-Hungarian Relations, 1918–1944* (Astor, FL: Danubian Press, 1974), 216–46, and Mario D. Fenyo, *Hitler, Horthy, and Hungary. German-Hungarian Relations, 1941–1944* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1972).

the Czechoslovak-Rumanian corridor once stood: in the southwestern tip of the Ukraine.²³

The immediate postwar period saw two distinct groups of Hungarians seek entrance into the United States: the 45-ers and the 47-ers. The former were representatives of the interwar elite in Hungary: urban, upper-middle class professionals, mostly lawyers and soldiers. The latter represented the new elite of the coalition period: mostly Smallholders, who won election after election and seemed to provide the social-political backbone of postwar Hungary. It was under this Smallholder-led coalition that Hungary became a republic (1946) and negotiated the peace treaty. They were forced out of power by a thinly veiled, Soviet-sponsored coup in the summer of 1947. These two groups, collectively known as “dipik” (Displaced Persons, and as such, above the quota admissions), made up about 26,000 people. A third wave of refugees joined in 1956, numbering an estimated total of another 50,000 people.²⁴

The United States found it increasingly difficult to handle the situation she herself had helped create with the Yalta deals. Attempts were made to secure cooperation on the part of various countries now under Soviet occupation, but these all failed. An invitation to join the Marshall Plan was rejected under Soviet duress, and the return of the gold and silver reserves of the Hungarian National Bank as well as the partial restitution of art treasures taken out of Hungary by the Nazis remained a unilateral gesture. On secret Hungarian insistence, Washington refused to return the Holy Crown of Hungary and the assorted coronation regalia delivered to the US Army in Austria by the Royal Hungarian Crown Guard in the dying days of the war. Hungarians felt betrayed by the West yet again, as Soviet control was becoming absolute and more open. This, in turn, led to the rise of anti-Americanism on a large scale for the first

²³ On the communist takeover see Charles Gati, *The Bloc that Failed: Soviet-East European Relations in Transition* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990), also in Hungarian: *Magyarország a Kreml árnyékában* (Budapest: Századvég, 1992). On the 1947 peace treaty: Ignác Romsics, *Az 1947-es párizsi békeszerződés* (Budapest: Osiris, 2006) and Mihály Fülöp, *The Unfinished Peace: The Council of Foreign Ministers and the Hungarian Peace Treaty of 1947* (Wayne, NJ: Center for Hungarian Studies and Publications, Inc., 2011), East European Monographs No. 752, Hungarian Studies Series No. 22.

²⁴ Steven Bela Vardy [Béla Várdy], *The Hungarian-Americans* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1985), 113–50.

time ever in Hungary. Communists fed off this sentiment and the two countries began to expel each other's diplomats and businessmen. The Hungarian show trials (especially of Robert A. Vogeler and Cardinal Mindszenty) were followed with keen interest in the United States: by 1949 the Cold War was on.²⁵

The Cold War

The postwar transition was followed by three distinct phases in US-Hungarian relations during the Cold War: hostility (1947–69), normalization (1969–78), and the gradual disintegration of Soviet control (1979–89).²⁶ This period was as irrational as it could be, and saw both extremes: open confrontation with public hate speech during the 1950s as well as cordial relations in the 1980s, which made East-West conflicts seem redundant.

In the period of open hostility, Washington spoke of “slave nations” and “red Fascism,” while Budapest promoted the concept of “fascist American geopolitics” and accused the White House of conspiracy against the Hungarian people. The two parties continued to expel diplomats and placed restrictions on the free movement of the remaining staffs. Hungary settled financial claims with all western powers except the United States, and Washington kept Budapest out of the United Nations until December 1955. Relations hit rock bottom as result of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution and War of Independence. Hungarians believed American “liberation” and “roll-back” rhetoric and stood up to the Hungarian version of Stalinism. While the American public supported the Revolution, the White House had its doubts about Imre Nagy, who himself was a communist. Without permission, American-sponsored propaganda radios (Radio Free Europe and Voice of America) promised military support and urged Hungarians to fight. The November 4 Soviet

²⁵ On the Holy Crown and show trials see: Martin Mevius, “A Crown for Rákosi: The Vogeler Case, the Holy Crown of St Stephen, and the (Inter)national Legitimacy of the Hungarian Communist Regime, 1945–1978” *The Slavonic and East European Review* Vol. 89, No. 1 (January 2011), 76–107, also in Hungarian: “Koronát Rákosinak! A Vogeler-ügy, a Szent Korona és a magyar szocialista rendszer nemzet(köz)i legitimációja, 1945–1978” *Múltunk* Vol. 22, No. 2 (2011), 145–74.

²⁶ The best survey of US-Hungarian relations in the Cold War is the editor's introduction to László Borhi, ed., *Magyar-amerikai kapcsolatok, 1945–1989. Források* (Budapest: MTA Történettudományi Intézet, 2009), 13–221.

invasion, Operation Whirlwind, ended in bloodbath. 200,000 Hungarians fled the country, tens of thousands were tried for treason, and several hundred, among them children under 18, were executed. Cardinal Mindszenty emerged from house arrest in the country, gave a much publicized speech demanding the restoration of the prewar order (which only very few supported), and then sought refuge in the American Legation. Diplomatic relations were reduced to the lowest possible level: temporary charge d'affaires.

It took ten years for the new Kádár regime to assert itself and win some international recognition. Kádár was admitted to the United States to attend a UN session as early as 1958. Partial amnesties (1961, 1962) were followed by a “general amnesty” in 1963 which still left hundreds of freedom fighters in jail. Following the reality check of the Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962, “bridge building” began between East and West. In 1964 Hungary signed an agreement with the Holy See, and in 1966 US-Hungarian relations were raised from the lowest to the highest, ambassadorial, level. The Kádár regime sustained the myth of 1956 being a “CIA coup” to bring down the “democratic” government of Hungary, but toned down its rhetoric in English. This was partly due to the fact that the centrally controlled socialist economic system, which, against all common sense, superimposed political decisions over economic ones, turned out to be a disaster by 1968. Hungary needed western loans and was willing to change her tone to accommodate the spirit of détente created by West German Chancellor Willy Brandt.²⁷

In 1968 Hungary announced economic reforms which amounted to an attempt at squaring the circle: the plan was to introduce elements of free market economy into the centrally controlled system that was kept afloat by Soviet assistance, and which was under direct Soviet supervision. This resulted in a culture of cheating and lies: a population that needed to survive in spite of the economic incompetence its inefficient political leadership began to operate a booming black market economy. Hungary also negotiated a deal to join the IMF, but Moscow prevented the move. Still, in the West this was seen as a major departure by Budapest. Incoming United States President Richard M. Nixon embraced the idea of détente and the “normalization” of bilateral relations began. In the summer of 1969 Budapest and Washington identified four

²⁷ Tibor Glant, *A Szent Korona amerikai kalandja, 1945–1978* (Debrecen: Kossuth Egyetemi Kiadó, 1997), 35–53.

issues to start with, including the potentially explosive matter of American pensioners in Hungary. Mindszenty left the Embassy in 1971, cultural exchanges were set up, financial claims were settled, and a consular agreement was hammered out. Kádár's Hungary became one of the favorite sons of Washington in a policy that can best be described as "divide and rule:" the Nixon White House tested each East European communist country to see how far they were willing to go on bilateral issues and to what degree they were ready to defy Moscow. For different reasons, Poland (some 6 million immigrants in the US), Rumania ("independent" foreign policy with no Soviet army inside the country), and Hungary ("liberal" domestic policies, the "happiest barracks") were favored over others. Hungary and Poland were invited to supervise the armistice in Vietnam (1973), and the Helsinki Accords (1975) seemed to have taken détente to its logical conclusion: if the Cold War is here to stay indefinitely, let us make it as cordial as possible. In 1978 the Coronation Regalia were returned to Hungary and a bilateral MFN agreement was signed against the expressed will of the Soviet Union. United States-Hungarian relations became as "normal" as possible between a Soviet colony and the leader of the Free World.²⁸

Two events in 1979 shook the very foundations of the bipolar world order: the Soviet army invaded Afghanistan and an Islamic Revolution gained control of, and took American hostages in, Iran, which, up to that point, had been a key ally for Washington in the Middle East. Interestingly, the coming of the "second cold war" between Washington and Moscow had a positive effect on US-Hungarian relations, although, for example, Hungary decided to join the Soviet boycott of the 1984 Los Angeles Summer Olympic Games. Hungary now was allowed to join the IMF and the World Bank, and took out western loans. Items on the COCOM-list were still off limits, but American cultural diplomacy was stepped up. Budapest proved supportive, and the Soros Foundation (which promoted an "open society") was granted permission to commence operations in Hungary. The diplomatic records of this period remain partly classified, but one is under the impression that by the early 1970s Hungary had managed to develop a new guard to conduct foreign affairs: people who spoke good English and were willing and able to

²⁸ Glant, *Szent Korona*, 53–143. On Vietnam see: Zoltán Szőke, "Magyarország és a vietnami háború, 1962–1975" *Századok* Vol. 144, No. 1 (2010), 47–97, and Szőke, "Magyar békefenntartók Vietnamban" *Külpolitika* Vol. 5, Nos. 3–4 (1999), 149–75.

engage in meaningful interaction: Gyula Horn, János Fekete, and János Nagy are among the names that come to mind.

As of the early 1970s Hungary received loan after loan for structural reforms of the economy, but the money was spent on sustaining a high level of corruption and a standard of living which was not warranted by the performance of the economy. Economic incompetence navigated the country to the verge of bankruptcy again and again (1968, 1981, 1989, and later in 1995 and 2008), but for the United States political concessions mattered more than economic common sense. In 1989 the communist system collapsed, but it left behind an unmanageable economic crisis. Instead of a “new Marshall Plan,” western investors looked for cheap labor and new markets, which set Hungary (as well as the whole region) on the economic collision course she is still trying to get off of. The burial of Imre Nagy and his fellow revolutionaries on June 16, 1989 was a moment to remember. The officially promoted but privately rejected anti-Americanism of the latter communist period evaporated in a matter of weeks, not least because of the televised public speech of President George Bush at the Karl Marx University of Economics. In 1989 everything seemed possible, and most Hungarians entertained a surrealistically positive image of the United States and high hopes of things to come.

Since 1989

The lands between Germany and Russia fell victim to Nazism first and then communism. Its peoples expected some genuine assistance from the West that repeatedly sold them out (Munich, 1938, Yalta, 1945, Trianon, 1947). The West, on the other hand, saw strategic possibilities and investment opportunities. The concept of an expanded European Community surfaced with promises of including the new democracies, and a Partnership for Peace program was launched to secure US military influence in the region. Hungary joined NATO in 1998, just in time to provide crucial air bases for the US bombing of Serbia as Yugoslavia was disintegrating in war. In fact, Hungarians demonstrated their desire to belong to the West in two referenda: on joining NATO (1997: 85% voting in favor) and the European Union (2003: 83% supporting).²⁹

²⁹ <http://www.valasztas.hu/> (accessed: March, 23, 2012). For details see the links on the right-hand side of the page.

In the absence of reliable information, hindsight, and archival sources like the Castle papers discussed above, bilateral United States-Hungarian relations since 1989 are not easy to evaluate,³⁰ and the following discussion is based, in part, on personal impressions. On the surface, everything seems alright: the two countries are military allies for the first time, and Hungarians are fighting (and dying) in America's war on terror. Cultural relations are blossoming, economic ties are strong, and many Hungarians are choosing the United States as a tourist or professional destination. Americans have long been able to travel to Hungary without a visa, and finally Hungarian tourists can also avoid the long lines outside the Embassy in the heart of Budapest. Hungary provided diplomatic and consular services for United States citizens in Syria earlier this year, when Washington withdrew diplomats from Damascus on February 6, 2012. The two countries may formally be allies, but under the surface tensions sometimes still overflow. These alarming signs deserve attention.

For an informed Hungarian observer the two most disturbing elements are a clear political preference on the part of Washington for the former communist party and a marked turn in American cultural diplomacy. In the past 20 years the various American administrations, Republican and Democrat alike, have openly preferred the Hungarian Socialist Party over any other force in Hungarian politics. The fact that Washington prefers to deal with the very same people the White House has been dealing with since the 1970s³¹ only partly explains this trend. Another reason must be the fear of Trianon and/or the status of Hungarian

³⁰ A success story interpretation is projected by the State Department publication, *The United States and Hungary: Paths of Diplomacy, 1848–2006* (esp. 82-96). A more analytical evaluation was offered by Tamás Magyarics in one of a series of lectures on US-Hungarian relations, offered in Debrecen in the spring of 2010: “Jelenetek egy házasságból: a magyar-amerikai kapcsolatok a hidegháború után” (April 29, 2010). These lectures are available on YouTube.

³¹ I explained in detail the emergence of this trend in my book on the 1956 Revolution in American memory, especially in the chapters on the press and diplomatic memoirs: Glant, *Remember Hungary 1956: Essays on the Hungarian Revolution and War of Independence in American Memory* (Wayne, NJ: Center for Hungarian Studies and Publications, Inc., 2007), and *Emlékezzünk Magyarországra 1956: Tanulmányok a magyar forradalom és szabadságharc amerikai emlékezetéről* (Budapest: Kiss József Könyvkiadó, 2008).

minorities in the neighboring countries being officially brought up under a more nationalist government.

A case in point is the period between 2002 and 2010, when a socialist government got away with driving the country to the verge of bankruptcy and faking economic data for both the Hungarian Parliament and the EU between 2005 and 2008, and thus wistfully misleading American businessmen in Hungary. The same administration appointed a KGB-trained senior officer, Sándor Laborc, as head of Hungarian national intelligence, thus risking sensitive NATO information.³² Major human rights violations were committed by masked policemen without clearly visible identification on the 50th anniversary of the 1956 Revolution, and an opposition MP was beaten unconscious and had to be hospitalized. Although Prime Minister Gyurcsány's "Öszöd speech" displayed a major deficit in democratic principles,³³ his party still kept him in power for years; but no public American protests came on any of the above accounts. By 2010 most Hungarians agreed that the compromise of 1989 had failed and a total makeover was needed. The newly elected FIDESZ government received unprecedented mandate for change (68% of the seats in a single-chamber legislature) from the Hungarian people but barely receives the benefit of the doubt from Washington, although in the American system of elections there would be one single opposition MP out of the 386. Absurd accusations fly of a possible return to the fascist era of the 1930s and of the dismantling of democratic institutions, while American diplomatic correspondence is regularly leaked to *Népszabadság*, originally established in 1942 as *Szabad Nép*, the official organ of the communist party and a living reminder of the communist dictatorship that many of us fought against.³⁴ Most Hungarians find what they

³² "Nem mindneki tudott Laborc életrajzának pikáns részleteiről" on the *Index* news portal, dated February 7, 2008: <http://index.hu/kulfold/laborc9466/> (accessed: March 23, 2012). I have not been able to find any article raising this issue in the American press at the time. He is now under criminal investigation in Hungary for entrusting a supposedly Bulgarian (but probably Russian) security firm to review the security clearance of people working in Hungarian national intelligence.

³³ Although the full speech is not available in English, the partial BBC translation tells the whole story: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/5359546.stm> (accessed: March 23, 2012).

³⁴ http://nol.hu/kulfold/hillary_clinton_levele_orban_viktornak_-_itt_a_teljes_szoveg (accessed: March 23, 2012). The page has the original in pdf. Much of the criticism is based on the arguments of the "independent" think-tank, *Haza és Haladás*, which is

consider double standards disturbing, and the 80% support for NATO and EU membership is slowly eroding. On January 21, 2012, a Woodstock-size crowd gathered in the Hungarian capital for a “March for Peace” to support the current administration: one key issue they raised was Secretary of State Clinton’s letter, in which she lectured the government of Hungary on democracy and raised such particular domestic issues that could only be brought up by the practically nonexistent, and politically badly discredited, domestic opposition.³⁵ The unconditional admiration most Hungarians felt for the United States in 1989 is vanishing.

American cultural diplomacy has also gone through major changes since the 1980s. Back then, American diplomats knew all American Studies professionals, and traveled extensively in the country.³⁶ The Hungarian Fulbright Commission was set up in 1992. Academic exchanges are flourishing, just like they did between the wars. However, during the Clinton years United States Information Agency and Service (USIA and USIS) were closed down and its libraries were given away to universities and research institutions. The establishment of American Corners in various cities around Hungary was a new and welcome initiative to restart cultural diplomacy in 2004-2006. In the 1990s the US helped fund Hungarian citizens studying at the Salzburg Seminar and American ambassadors opened American Studies conferences in person. In 1997 I worked in close cooperation with the Embassy not only on putting out a book on the return of the Holy Crown of Hungary but also on the anniversary celebrations, which were honored by Ambassador Peter Tufo within two weeks of his arrival. In contrast, a December 14, 2007 cable released by *wikileaks* proves that the then ambassador identified me, much to my surprise, as a “conservative political science professor” and not as the head of one of the very few American Studies departments in Hungary.³⁷ No ambassador has lent her personal support

actually run by defeated Socialist Party premier Gordon Bajnai and his campaign chief, Viktor Szigetvári: http://www.hazaeshaladas.hu/en/registration_information-1.html (accessed March 23, 2012).

³⁵ <http://hu-hu.facebook.com/pages/B%C3%A9kemenet-Magyarorsz%C3%A1g%C3%A9rt/328610253825746?sk=info> is the Facebook page of the event.

³⁶ A unique personal perspective on the era is offered by John J. Jablonski, “The Road Taken: Reflections of a Sometime Cultural Attaché” *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies* Vol. 8, No. 2 (Fall 2002), 153–65.

³⁷ <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2007/12/07BUDAPEST1956.html> (accessed March 23, 2012).

to any of the last four biennial conferences of the Hungarian Association of American Studies, which would be unthinkable in Austria or Germany. American preferences have understandably changed after the 9-11 terrorist attacks, but the traditional anti-American sentiment still so prevalent in Hungarian academic circles and rising anti-Americanism in the general population threaten the very existence of genuine discussion of American culture as well as the survival of American Studies in Hungary. Work needs to be done on the high school and university curricula, all the way down to language teaching, since symbolic gestures like the restoration of the Bandholtz statue to Szabadság tér³⁸ or President Bush's visit to Hungary on the 50th anniversary of 1956 cannot mend the damage caused by the "if you don't talk about it, it does not exist" policy of communist brainwashing.

Conclusions

The above survey of 90 years of bilateral relations indicates that the two foreign services tend to look at the partner country through the prism of their own culture and expectations. Ever since 1848–49 Hungarians have expected some vaguely defined "fair play" from the United States and felt betrayed when American interests prompted a course other than the one they had counted on. Such unrealistic expectations manifested themselves as early as the immediate post-World War I period and continued to surface during the 1956 Revolution and in 2006. This expected American support never came, mostly because Hungary is viewed in Washington as an unimportant country and a possible source of trouble on account of Trianon and two world wars fought against one another. Since 1922 Washington has not felt the urge to understand Hungary; consequently, her decisions are defined not by any informed policy, but by improvisation on the basis of the input of special interest

³⁸ Harry Hill Bandholtz was the American member of the Allied Military Mission to Hungary following the collapse of the Hungarian Soviet Republic in early August 1919. He protected the Hungarian National Museum from looting Rumanian soldiers and was honored with a statue in the center of Budapest. This statue was removed by the communists after 1945, but it was restored in 1989. For details see: János Pótó, *Az emlékeztetés helyei. Emlékművek és politika* (Budapest: Osiris, 2003), 90–99. Because of official Hungarian protests, a reference to Bandholtz was scratched in the very last minute from Secretary of State Cyrus Vance's speech on the occasion of the return of the Holy Crown in 1978: Glant, *Szent Korona*, 125–26.

groups or individuals. This is why American conduct sometimes appears condescending to Hungarians, which, in turn, feeds anti-American sentiments. Cultural studies calls this process “othering,” and it is on display in mutual stereotypes as much as in diplomatic conduct.

Hungarians have always looked upon the New World as an economic and political promised land. Whereas the economic dimension has immense staying power, the political dimension, as I have explained elsewhere, never took root. Most Hungarians admire the American constitutional tradition and appreciate the democratic advances American society continues to make in terms of race and gender relations, but when the time for decision comes the American model is systematically ignored. Anti-Americanism first emerged in the 1890s, and became official government policy during the Cold War.³⁹ Spontaneous anti-Americanism appeared in the transition period after World War II and returned after the millennium. On both occasions, it was triggered by American political action, or lack thereof.

Americans have always looked upon independent Hungary as an exotic country, and since World War I as a source of potential trouble. Trianon generated fears of political instability as American business interests were threatened, or believed to have been threatened, over and over again: after the Great War, in World War II, during communism, and more recently when Hungary chose Gripens over F-16 aircraft during the Clinton years. The cultural history of Hungary in the 20th century shows that the State Department has not been able to capitalize on the surrealistically positive bias Hungarians have always had for the New World. For reasons outlined above, Hungarians traditionally go out of their way to accommodate expressed and presumed American expectations. Hungarian governments lent full diplomatic and military support to American war efforts in 1992 (the first Gulf War), 1999 (bombing of Serbia), and more recently in Afghanistan. Most of the time, this takes place under a conservative government, but this is not reflected in American public diplomacy. It was the gap between American rhetoric and action that government-sponsored Cold War anti-Americanism was based upon, and it is responsible for rising anti-American sentiments today.

³⁹ Glant, “Travel Writing as a Substitute for American Studies in Hungary” *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies* Vol. 16, Nos. 1–2 (2010), 171–84.

The balance sheet of 90 years of diplomatic relations clearly shows that political and economic diplomacy are not enough: they must be supplemented by active cultural diplomacy. Half a century of communist rule and brainwashing prevented the study, discussion, and dissemination of American culture, which cannot be made up for in a single generation. Hungarians are blatantly unaware of American history, not just our common past: there is no discussion of key historical events such as the Civil War or the War of 1812, and the various “history months” pass unnoticed over here. Consequently, American culture is misrepresented in the public discourse from gay rights through civil disobedience to checks and balances.⁴⁰ Informed discussion is thus replaced by finger pointing: when Americans make a point, legitimate or not, about Hungarian domestic politics, the gut reaction is a reference to the fate of Native Americans, slavery, Hiroshima, or Guantanamo. American presidents routinely issue statements and proclamations on the major anniversaries of key Hungarian events but rarely go beyond that the way Theodore Roosevelt had done in the early 20th century. Better cultural diplomacy and more genuine effort on both sides to understand the other are the keys to better relations in the new millennium.

⁴⁰ This is the result of a mixture of genuine misunderstanding and wistful political manipulation, and would deserve a special study.