Reactions and Memory of Hungarian-Americans in Response to the 1956 Hungarian Revolution

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On the brisk autumn day of 4 November 1956, Soviet tanks rolled through the streets of Budapest. Just twelve days earlier, the Hungarians had gained freedom from Soviet rule after intense fighting in the streets of Budapest. The Soviets returned with an iron resolve to crush the rebellious Hungarians. They intended to have the incident serve as an example to other states conspiring to break free of authoritarian Soviet rule over the satellite states. The events that followed live in infamy as one of the most brutal examples of Soviet oppression during the Cold War. The revolution resulted in a diaspora of Hungarians to many other nations, including the US. Many Hungarians felt disillusioned with their crushing defeat, as they had expected aid from the NATO nations, especially the US. Since Stalin’s death, the US policy towards the Soviets had grown increasingly aggressive. While Truman’s presidency was marked by the policy of Containment, which sought to not let Soviet influence spread any more than it already had, Stalin’s death brought about a new resolve for US policy makers. Eisenhower critiqued Truman’s leniency on communism and pushed for Rollback and Liberation for the nations under the iron curtain. Yet, when put to the test, Eisenhower’s anti-Soviet policies held little ground.

While the other NATO nations at the time can be held equally responsible for their failure to respond to the 1956 Hungarian Revolution, my research will focus specifically on the US. The Hungarian Revolution occurred alongside the Suez Crisis, which saw the United Kingdom, France, and Israel all become entangled in a joint invasion of Egypt. While important to the overall outcome of the revolution, any discussion of the Suez Crisis will come from the perspective of how it affected the decision making process of the US government in particular.