

**July 3, 1956**  
**National Security Council, NSC 5608, Draft of “US  
Policy toward the Soviet Satellites in Eastern  
Europe”**

**Citation:**

"National Security Council, NSC 5608, Draft of “US Policy toward the Soviet Satellites in Eastern Europe”", July 3, 1956, Wilson Center Digital Archive, Obtained and contributed to CWIHP by A. Ross Johnson. Cited Ch3 n5 in his book Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty, NARA release courtesy of Malcolm Byrne, National Security Archive. Unredacted text of redacted document 73, FRUS, 1955-1957, XXV.  
<https://wilson-center.drivingcreative.com/document/114689>

**Summary:**

Staff draft of NSC 5608, concluding that ferment in the Communist world provides new opportunities to challenge Soviet control. A draft annex called for “encouraging evolutionary change” and defined as tasks of RFE and RL (and other USG-funded media) “avoiding any incitement to premature revolt” while “seeking to maintain faith in the eventual restoration of freedom.” Redacted document 76, FRUS, 1955-1957, XXV, unredacted document 12, Csaba Békés, Malcolm Byrne, and János M. Rainer, The 1956 Hungarian Revolution: A History in Documents (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2002.)

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**TOP SECRET**

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NSC 5608  
July 3, 1956

**NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL**

U. S. POLICY TOWARD THE SOVIET SATELLITES  
IN EASTERN EUROPE

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Authority MND 70 / P 1 /  
By JAD/NARA Date 10/25/05

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NSC 5608

TOP SECRET

July 3, 1956

**RECORD**

NOTE BY THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY  
to the  
NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL  
on  
U. S. POLICY TOWARD THE SOVIET SATELLITES  
IN EASTERN EUROPE

References: A. NSC 174  
B. NSC 5605/1  
C. NSC Action No. 1530-b

**COPY**

The enclosed draft statement of policy on the subject, prepared by the NSC Planning Board pursuant to NSC Action No. 1530-b, is transmitted herewith for consideration by the National Security Council at its meeting on Thursday, July 12, 1956.

A Staff Study on the subject is being prepared, and will be circulated for Council information in this connection, as an Annex to NSC 5603.

The enclosed policy does not appear to involve any unusual expenditures over or beyond funds which have been appropriated for normal operating programs of the agencies involved. Accordingly, no Financial Appendix is enclosed.

The enclosed statement of policy, if adopted, is intended to supersede NSC 174.

It is recommended that, if the Council adopts the enclosed statement of policy, it be submitted to the President with the recommendation that he approve it, direct its implementation by all appropriate Executive departments and agencies of the U. S. Government, and designate the Operations Coordinating Board as the coordinating agency.

S. EVERETT GLEASON  
Acting Executive Secretary

cc: The Secretary of the Treasury  
The Attorney General  
The Special Assistant to the  
President for Disarmament  
The Director, Bureau of the Budget  
The Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff  
The Director of Central Intelligence

NSC 5608

TOP SECRET

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Date: 1/23/69

TOP SECRET

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STATEMENT OF POLICY  
by the  
NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL  
on  
UNITED STATES POLICY TOWARD THE SOVIET  
SATELLITES IN EASTERN EUROPE

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

1. Soviet control over the Soviet satellites in Eastern Europe (Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Rumania, Bulgaria, Albania and East Germany\*) has contributed importantly to the power disequilibrium in Europe and to the threat to the security of the United States. Despite economic dislocation and administrative difficulties, the Kremlin has made considerable progress in exploiting the industrial capacity of the satellites and expanding their military capabilities for use as a coordinated whole with those of the Soviet Union. Formation of the Warsaw Pact in May 1955 as a counter to NATO, which had just admitted West Germany, institutionalized and extended existing Soviet coordination and control over the military potential of the Eastern European bloc. The Soviet

\* While many of the considerations set forth in this paper with respect to the Eastern European satellite area as a whole also apply to East Germany, the specific problems of East Germany and Berlin are treated respectively in a supplement to NSC 160/1, being prepared pursuant to Council action on June 15, 1956, and in NSC 5404/1.

TOP SECRET

military position in Europe was affected little, if at all, by the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Austria in October 1955.

2. Impediments to the consolidation of Soviet control over the Eastern European satellites are:

a. The anti-Communist attitude of the great majority of the population in each satellite. This anti-Communism is intensified particularly by loss of personal freedom and a reduced standard of living, as well as by outraged religious and national feelings; but its undiminished survival over the long run is jeopardized by Communist control over every aspect of the lives of the people, particularly the young, as well as by the new Moscow policy of allowing the satellites greater latitude in the conduct of their own affairs.

b. The continued presence of nationalist sentiment among the people and even within the satellite Communist parties themselves.

c. The continued refusal of the West to accept the permanence of the imposed satellite regimes as compatible with the freedom and self-determination of nations.

3. Despite these impediments, Soviet domination of the Eastern European satellites remains firm and there appears little immediate prospect of basic change in this regard. While the satellite regimes have not been able to overcome widespread

NSC 5608

- 2 -

TOP SECRET

Authority AND 70 1.4.14  
By NARA Date 10/28/05

TOP SECRET

popular dissatisfaction with their Communistic program and with their inclusion within the Soviet world, nevertheless there are no known underground groups capable of coordinated, sustained resistance activities to the governments in power in any of the countries concerned. As long as a Moscow-dominated Communist leadership remains in power in these countries and is backed by Soviet military force or threat of force, it is unlikely that Soviet ability to exercise effective control over and to exploit the resources of the European satellites can be appreciably reduced.

4. On the other hand, the many changes in the USSR since the death of Stalin--particularly the introduction of collective leadership, Moscow's acceptance of Titoism and acknowledgement that there are "difference roads to Socialism", and the denigration of Stalin--are being reflected in current satellite developments. These developments have varied in pace and scope in each of the satellites and are continuing, but common to them all are a reduction in the role of the secret police embodied in the emphasis on the need for "socialist legality" and the admission of past errors attributed to the "cult of personality". Some personnel changes have occurred at the top in certain satellite governments and others may follow. Although the basic political and economic policies and objectives have not been successfully challenged nor the fundamental subjection of the satellites to the Soviet Union effectively threatened, there are indications that

NSC 5508

- 3 -

TOP SECRET

Authority: WND 73/PT 17  
By: NARA Date: 10/23/85

TOP SECRET

Moscow now recognizes the advantage of using greater flexibility as well as more camouflage in its control of the satellites, and of giving them certain latitude or responsibility of decision on matters of local detail within the general framework of Soviet bloc policy.

5. Nationalism in the satellites, even within the Communist movement itself, remains a disruptive force in Soviet-satellite relations. There is a real and growing split in most satellite parties between those amenable to close Soviet control and the "national Communists". However, since the combination of basic factors which made possible the successful Yugoslav break with Moscow is lacking in the satellites, it is unlikely that the Yugoslav experience will be repeated in any of them. Moreover, by its reconciliation with Tito, Moscow has sought with some success to neutralize the competing attraction originally exercised on the satellite governments by Belgrade's independent position and policies.

6. Tito's establishment of an independent Communist regime provides a standing example of successful defiance of the Kremlin and a demonstration that the West is prepared to assist nationalistic Communist leaders to assert their independence of Moscow. Despite Moscow's apparent reconciliation with Belgrade, it may be still possible to exploit Yugoslavia's unique position in promoting future changes in the Soviet satellite relationship. Any diminution of Yugoslavia's independence of the Kremlin will limit its usefulness in this

NSC 5608

- 4 -

TOP SECRET

Authority MND 10/17/71  
By J. NARA Date 10/28/71

TOP SECRET

regard. On the other hand, a Yugoslavia which maintains a position of independence between East and West, would be an important asset in promoting possible future changes in the Soviet-satellite relationship.

7. U. S. strategy and policy with respect to the German problem and the satellite issue are so closely interrelated that each must be considered in the light of its effect on the other. The intransigence of the Soviets on German reunification, at Geneva and subsequently, arises in part from their German policy and in part from their regard for Eastern Germany as an advanced position for control of the satellite area. These considerations provide strong Soviet incentives for postponing an agreement on German reunification. The inability of the West to make the satellite issue an agenda item at the negotiating table or to offer substantial promise of the early elimination of Soviet control depresses the hopes of the satellite peoples for freedom and reduces their will to resist, thereby increasing the tendency to accept accommodation with Moscow.

8. Nevertheless, Eastern Germany poses a special and more difficult problem of control for the USSR than do the other satellites. While the Eastern German regime has made some progress with the program of basic industrial development and socialization, and while there are various factors operating to weaken resistance of the Eastern German population to the Communist regime, there is little likelihood that the East

NSC 5608

- 5 -

TOP SECRET

Authority NND 710 1411  
By/Date 12/28/65



TOP SECRET

Germans can be brought to accept the Communist system imposed on them. The fact that the main body of the German nation in the Federal Republic has made considerable advances in freedom and well-being, and the fact that West Berlin provides a means of contact with the Free World, serve to keep alive in Eastern Germany the hope for an escape from Soviet domination. The situation in East Germany provides opportunities for the West to continue to exploit strong popular anti-Communism, to maintain East Germany as a focal point and example of disaffection for the rest of the Soviet satellites, and to make difficult full utilization by the Soviet Union of East Germany's economic resources.

9. The denigration of Stalin and Moscow's acceptance of Titoism have created difficulties in Soviet relations with the satellites; they have raised questions as to the infallibility of Soviet leadership among important elements of the satellite communist parties; they have aroused to varying degrees latent popular aspirations for relaxation of oppression, restoration of national independence, and the establishment of governments responsive to popular will. This fluid situation in the satellites has increased the previously limited U. S. capabilities to influence a basic change in Soviet domination of the satellites. Although the Eastern European peoples continue to feel that liberation is remote, they remain responsive to our interest in their independence, provided it is expressed persistently and in terms which make it clear that this is our

NSC 5608

- 6 -

TOP SECRET

Authority AND 72 7471  
BY 1983/05 Date 1983/05

TOP SECRET

basic objective. There is a possibility that an internal relaxation might result in the long run in the development of forces and pressures leading to fundamental changes of the satellite system in the direction of national independence and individual freedom and security.

#### POLICY CONCLUSIONS

10. It is in the national security interests of the United States to oppose Soviet control of the satellites in Eastern Europe and to seek the eventual elimination of that control. At the same time it must be recognized that the attainment by any of the present satellites of national independence free of Soviet domination is remote, and that whatever degree of independence may be granted from Moscow or may evolve in differing circumstances in individual satellites, Soviet Russia by reason of its power status and its geographical position is bound to possess and exercise strong influence in the Eastern European area.

11. The United States is not prepared to resort to war to eliminate Soviet domination of the satellites, nor does attainment of this goal through internal revolutionary means appear likely or practicable. Therefore, the principal emphasis of our efforts should be directed to the encouragement of evolutionary change resulting in the weakening of Soviet controls and the attainment of national independence by the countries concerned, even though there may be no immediate change in their internal political structure. While some

NSC 5508

- 7 -

TOP SECRET

Authority AND 721474  
By J. J. NARA Date 10/28/05

TOP SECRET

policies and actions may be applicable for the Soviet bloc as a whole, others may be suitable only for one or more of the satellites. Treatment of the satellites as a bloc without regard for significant differences among them may support and encourage Moscow's dominating position.

12. Flexible courses of action involving inducements as well as pressures are required to create and exploit troublesome problems for the USSR, complicate Soviet control in the satellites, and retard the growth of the military and economic potential of the Soviet bloc while encouraging the growth of forces in the satellites tending to assert national independence aims. This policy should be carried out in the light of current estimates of the Soviet Government's reactions and of the situation in the satellite states concerned.

#### BASIC OBJECTIVES

13. Long-range: The eventual fulfillment of the rights of the peoples in the Soviet satellites to enjoy representative governments resting upon the consent of the governed, free of Soviet domination and participating as peaceful members in the free world community.

14. Interim:

a. To foster changes in the character and policies of the satellite regimes by influencing them and their peoples toward the choice of those alternative lines of action which, while in their national interests, do not

NSC 5603

- 3 -

TOP SECRET

Authority: WND 72 1771  
By: JAD/NARA Date: 10/28/05

TOP SECRET

conflict with the security interests of the United States.

b. To minimize satellite contributions to Soviet power and to encourage changes in the present Soviet-satellite relationship toward national independence for the individual countries concerned.

c. To conserve and strengthen the assets within the satellites, and among their nationals outside, which may contribute to U. S. interests in peace or war, and to the ultimate freedom of the satellites.

d. To lay the groundwork, as feasible with reasonable risk, for resistance to the Soviets in the event of war.

#### GENERAL COURSES OF ACTION

15. Use appropriate means short of military force to oppose, and to contribute to the eventual elimination of, Soviet domination over the satellites; including, when appropriate, concert with NATO or other friendly powers, resort to UN procedures, and diplomatic negotiations.

16. Seek to create and increase popular and bureaucratic pressures through the exploitation of discontents and other problems to promote evolutionary changes in Soviet-satellite policies and relationships which will advance U. S. objectives.

17. When appropriate, depict the causes of the discontents and other problems which are to be exploited not as conditions reparable only by revolution but as susceptible to

NSC 5608

- 9 -

TOP SECRET

Authority: NSC 5608  
Date: 1/28/65

TOP SECRET

correction by the satellite regimes if they should choose to take the necessary action.

18. Continue basic opposition to the Soviet-Communist system and continue to state its evils; but stress evolutionary rather than revolutionary change.

19. Seek to cause each satellite regime to occupy itself increasingly with internal problems and to pose difficult decisions tending to create uncertainty or divisions within the regime.

20. Encourage the satellite peoples in passive resistance to their Soviet-dominated regimes when this will contribute to minimizing satellite contributions to Soviet power or to increasing pressures for desirable change. Avoid incitements to violence or to action when the probable reprisals or other results would yield a net loss in terms of U. S. objectives.

21. Foster satellite nationalist sentiment as a force to weaken and disrupt Soviet domination while avoiding commitments to national territorial ambitions in the Eastern European area.

22. Encourage democratic, anti-Communist elements in the satellites. Cooperate with other forces--such as religious, cultural, social--which are natural allies in the struggle against Soviet imperialism, and seek to revive and vitalize the centuries-old bonds between these peoples and the West.

SC 5608

- 10 -

TOP SECRET

Authority: MND 10-1-11  
Date: 10/23/05

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TOP SECRET

23. As a means of encouraging the eventual establishment of freely elected governments in the satellites and not as an end in itself, be prepared on a case-by-case basis to assist "National Communist" movements where U. S. and free world cohesion would not be jeopardized thereby. While avoiding the appearance of encouraging the export of Tito's Communism, use Yugoslavia's unique position in Eastern Europe to promote the weakening of the Soviet grip on the satellite countries. X

24. When appropriate to achieve the basic objectives set forth in this paper, stimulate and exploit conflicts within the Communist ruling groups in each satellite, among such groups, between them and the Kremlin.

25. Seek authority for and\* use, as appropriate, greater flexibility in U. S. economic policies (both incentives and restrictions) toward the satellites. X

26. Exploit the developing organizations of Western unity (OEEC, CSC, etc.) as a force of attraction for the satellites, and emphasize on appropriate occasions the concept of a European community to include ultimately the Eastern European countries.

27. Support or make use of those refugees or exile organizations which can usefully contribute to the attainment of U. S. objectives, but do not recognize governments-in-exile. Encourage exile unity and combat the Communist campaign to fragment and repatriate the emigration.

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608

- 11 -  
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TOP SECRET

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By JNARA Date 10/28/05

TOP SECRET

28. Continue propaganda and special operations by official and unofficial means, with appropriate adjustments as Communist controls and obstructions of communications are relaxed.

29. Be prepared to negotiate issues between the United States and the individual satellite regimes, taking into account varying conditions in the different countries with a view to:

- a. Protecting and advancing the interests of the United States and its citizens.
- b. Removing obstacles to communications between the peoples of these countries and the outside world.
- c. Encouraging changes in the satellite regimes in line with the objectives set forth in this paper.

30. Emphasize (a) the right of the peoples of Eastern Europe to independent governments of their own choosing, and (b) the violation of international agreements by the Soviet and satellite Governments, whereby they have been deprived of that right, particularly the Yalta Declaration on liberated Europe and the Treaties of Peace with Bulgaria, Hungary and Rumania.

5603

- 12 -

TOP SECRET

Authority AND 70 1471  
By JAD/NARA Date 10/28/09