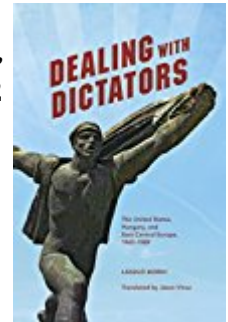


László Borhi. *Dealing with Dictators: The United States, Hungary, and Eastern Europe, 1942-1989.* Translated by Jason Vincz. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016. 562 pp. \$68.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-253-01939-4.



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László Borhi's *Dealing with Dictators* makes a valuable contribution from both a theoretical and empirical point of view to the history of communist regimes leading up to the end of the Cold War. The work is based on Borhi's PhD dissertation. It is meticulously documented, drawing from Hungarian archives, US State Department archives, and US presidential libraries. The work engages in a broad sweeping discussion of the history of relations between the United States and Hungary from 1942 to 1989. It also deals with East Central and Southeastern European states, such as Poland and Romania, set against the background of Soviet-American relations. Through this lens, Borhi explains the factors that led to the collapse of communism in Hungary and Eastern Europe.

From a theoretical point of view, the book makes a significant contribution to the academic literature on small and weak state foreign policy and diplomacy. The study stands in sharp contrast to the work of the neorealist perspective epitomized by Kenneth Waltz in *Theory of International*

Politics (2010). Although there is not a formal discussion of Waltz's theory in Borhi's book, it is obvious that neorealist theory underlies much of the book. Borhi also places a great deal of emphasis on the domestic factors that brought about regime change in Hungary in 1988-89 with the end of three decades of János Kádár's rule via a peaceful series of roundtable talks. That is, a revolution from above occurred in Hungary.

The central thesis of the book is that small and weak states such as Hungary were responsible via internal developments for changing the hierarchical order of power. The Hungarians, therefore, by 1989, according to this thesis, were responsible for their own self-liberation as the collapse of communism in Hungary and Eastern Europe was not the result of any grand strategy on the part of the United States. Regime change in Hungary was the result of a series of gradual incremental developments. No single individual was responsible for the collapse of communism in Hungary, but the end of the system came about as a result of the interplay of factors at work at dif-

ferent levels of analysis, such as the individual, domestic, interstate, and global levels. Borhi attributes most importance to the domestic level of analysis.

Borhi argues that although Hungary was at the mercy of the Great Powers, it could still have some influence on the foreign policies of the Great Powers. Herein lies the contradiction of Borhi's main thesis. Comparatively, Waltz's theory argues that small and weak states, for the most part, have no influence on the international system. According to Waltz, what takes place domestically within a state has no effect on power relationships in an international system that is marked by anarchy and domination by the Great Powers. According to this rather Hobbesian view of an anarchic international system, the strong will do what they will, and the weak must accept it. By offering a counter to Waltz's theory, Borhi advances the field of international relations.

A major theme of Borhi's book is that external factors, such as the policies of the Soviet Union under Mikhail Gorbachev and the United States under George H. W. Bush, were not the most important determinants of the collapse of communism in Hungary. Rather the domestic forces of self-liberation played a key role in ending communism in Hungary and the bipolar system that characterized the structure of international power. As a small state, Hungary had little leverage in dealing with Germany during World War II and the Soviet Union and the United States during the Cold War. As a weak state, Hungary had to use whatever leverage it could by playing off Moscow against Washington.

Hungary's successful ability to affect Great Power relations was not always historically true. The Great Powers used *realpolitik* against Hungary during the Second World War when Hungary, as a member of the Axis, sought to negotiate an exit from the war through a series of complex Byzantine negotiations with the Americans and the British. Allen Dulles, the head of the Office of

Strategic Services, wanted Germany to learn about the secret negotiations undertaken by Miklós Horthy's regime. The Americans calculated that once Germany discovered Hungary's policy of defection from the Axis alliance, Berlin would need to occupy Hungary with ten to fifteen Wehrmacht divisions, detracting from the military force that the Allies would face when and wherever they invaded "Fortress Europe."

One of the more controversial episodes in Hungarian-US relations revolves around the extent of US responsibility for encouraging the Hungarians to rebel against the communist regime in 1956, resulting in the Soviet intervention and the crushing of the revolution. The author, basing his discussion on extensive and well-documented research, shows that the Dwight Eisenhower administration regarded the revolution as suicidal. Radio Free Europe, in an effort to roll back communism in Eastern Europe, did lead the Hungarian freedom fighters to believe that aid would be forthcoming from the United States. However, the Soviet leadership's discussions of the decision to intervene in Hungary did not consider the possibility of US military intervention, according to documents available to date. Furthermore, the Soviet leaders considered that given the French and British invasion of the Suez in 1956, Moscow could not afford not to react to the Hungarian revolution as this would show weakness to the West. As Borhi writes, the Eisenhower administration stressed to the international community that it would not engage in military intervention to come to the aid of the Hungarians. For example, in response to a Spanish proposal on November 6, 1956, to intervene in Hungary, the US State Department responded that it could not, either overtly or covertly, support any military intervention in Hungary in the present circumstances. The United States did not want to become involved in a nuclear war with the Soviets.

Following the failure of the Hungarian revolution, the policy of "rolling back" communism

from Eastern Europe was followed by President John Kennedy's policy of "peaceful engagement" and President Lyndon Johnson's policy of "bridge-building." Borhi argues that these policies were realist policies that accommodated the Soviet Union. The only president who was not a realist, according to Borhi, was Ronald Reagan, an idealist who genuinely believed that the mission of the United States was to promote the democratization of Eastern Europe.

Following the crushing of the 1956 Hungarian revolution, the Hungarian leader, Kádár, pursued a policy of reimposing communist rule in Hungary through "normalization." Normalization meant the restoration of the status quo ante, with the continuation of the party's leading role in society. Normalization also meant executions, including of several leaders of the revolution, such as the hapless Imre Nagy; imprisonment for others; and the flight of nearly two hundred thousand refugees.

Borhi stresses that another important step in the evolution of Hungarian-US relations was the US policy of differentiation toward Hungary and Romania. Hungary was rewarded for its policy of internal economic liberalization, while Romania was rewarded for its independent foreign policy. Borhi stresses that even under a "relaxed" form of socialism, political power continued to be centralized and controlled by Kádár. For example, the United States awarded Romania the Most Favored Nation (MFN) status in 1975, while Hungary had to wait until 1989 for this status. The United States prioritized, unfairly in the author's view, Romania over Hungary. Romania was seen as more of an "international factor" because of its autonomous foreign policy, while Hungary did not pursue a foreign policy that deviated from the Soviet Union, and needed to engage in further economic liberalization. According to Borhi, Romania enjoyed the status of a quasi-ally of the United States. Romania was rewarded for its independent foreign policy, in spite of the existence of a

neo-Stalinist system, characterized by a personality cult headed by Nicolae Ceaușescu. The United States pursued a realist policy toward Romania, motivated by national interest and geopolitical considerations. The policy resulted in a reconfiguration of a more favorable balance of power for US interests in the Balkan Peninsula. In 1964, Romania had issued its "Declaration of Independence," which was a manifestation of national communism. In comparing Romania to Hungary, Borhi argues that geopolitics trumped domestic politics. By encouraging Romania's independent foreign policy, the United States was provided with a further opening into the Soviet sphere of influence in the Balkans. Romanian independence affected US interests in Western Europe and the Middle East, and relations with Vietnam and China as a useful intermediary.

Borhi emphasizes that Hungarian-US relations were also driven by mutual economic self-interest. MFN was very important to Hungary, especially as its economy worsened in the 1980s. Eventually, the postrevolutionary tensions between the United States and Hungary decreased.

By 1988, the collapse of the social contract in Hungary, the decrepitude of Kádár, and the pressure for change from Gorbachev created a force for change in Hungary. Kádár, who resigned his leadership position in 1988, was an ideal scapegoat for the failed reform efforts in Hungary. Borhi makes a major point of noting that with the collapse of communism in Hungary and Eastern Europe in 1989, President Bush remarked to Gorbachev that together we liberated Eastern Europe. However, it is a central thesis of Borhi's book that the Hungarians and East Europeans liberated themselves. The United States preferred a transitional change that was marked by stability and subordinated Hungarian interests to the Soviet Union. Consequently, according to Borhi, it was the internal domestic factor that resulted in the liberation of Hungary and Eastern Europe, and

the end of the bipolar structure of the international system.

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