

Official America and Hungarian Revisionism between the World Wars

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The dismemberment of the Kingdom of Hungary after the First World War and consequently the Treaty of Trianon came as a shock for the Hungarians. The treaty, which the Allies dictated and not negotiated with Hungary, was considered unjust, and its revision became a number one concern for interwar Hungarian society regardless of class and status.

Mainly defined by a set of traditional images of America as the land of freedom, democracy and fair play and the image of the United States as *arbiter mundi*, and at the same time based on significant political, historical and ideological tenets (i.e. the question of dismemberment, Wilson and the Fourteen Points, US boundary proposals for Hungary at the Paris Peace conference, American refusal to sign the Treaty of Trianon) Hungarians fed high expectations toward the United States relative to the revision of the Treaty of Trianon. Such Hungarian revisionist aspirations toward the United States, however, were not well-founded. Although some expressions of individual American sympathies with Hungary's cause furnished some hope, official America did not intend to support the revision of the Treaty of Trianon. The official American standpoint in relation to Hungary in general and treaty revision in particular can only be fully understood against a backdrop of the

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general trends of American foreign policy in the interwar period and, within this framework, American policy toward Hungary. Such an analysis, combined with the demonstration of the attitude of the respective American governmental bodies (including the State Department and the representatives of the US in Hungary in the American Legation in Budapest) regarding Hungarian revisionism conclusively demonstrates the lack of official interest in the Hungarian cause.

The fundamental guiding principle of American foreign policy toward Europe following the First World War was the Monroe doctrine, the century-old American policy of political isolation. By the Senate's rejection of the Paris peace treaties and the reluctance to join the League of Nations the United States refused to undertake the political and military commitment to and the responsibility for enforcing the peace. American unwillingness to endorse international causes, as manifested, for example, by the debate about the World Court, the Locarno treaty or the Kellogg-Briand Pact, indicated that she decidedly pursued the policy of non-entanglement, primarily with European issues. While the US refused to accept international commitments and obligations, political isolationism from Europe was somewhat reinterpreted in accordance with ever-increasing American interests in the European economy. What tied American economic interests to Europe were mainly the interrelated questions of debts, war-time and peace time loans and the claims, reparations, occupation costs as well as other economic privileges arising from the separate peace treaties the US signed with European countries. On the other hand, the opportunity for US investments and prospective trade relations with that part of the world also underlined US economic interests.¹ The key to European economic recovery and prosperity, thus to

¹ For more on international relations after the war see Selig Adler, *The Uncertain Giant: 1921–1941. American Foreign Policy Between the Wars* (New York: MacMillan, 1995), 70–92; Peter H. Buckingham, *International Normalcy. The Open Door Peace with the Former Central Powers, 1921–1929* (Willmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 1983), 1–34; 124–153; Frank Costigliola, *Awkward Dominion. American Political, Cultural, and Economic Relations with Europe, 1919–1933* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984). See also Melvin Small, *Democracy and Diplomacy. The Impact of Domestic Politics on U.S. Foreign Policy, 1789–1994* (London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996) and Armin Rappaport, ed., *Essays in American Diplomacy* (New York: MacMillan, 1967). Hereafter respectively cited as Adler, *The Uncertain Giant*; Buckingham, *International Normalcy*; Costigliola, *Awkward Dominion* and Small, *Democracy and Diplomacy*.

the success of American business, as the Young and Dawes Plans demonstrate, was, of course, Germany. Therefore, the US devoted special attention to her. At the same time, other Central European countries, among them Hungary, also became a possible target of American investors. American economic interest largely defined the relative significance of Hungary in terms of American foreign policy in the region.

Although Hungarians liked to believe otherwise, the Kingdom of Hungary was not among the most important American spheres of interest. What is more, Budapest and Hungary had also been labeled as places (relatively) “unimportant”² by the State Department. Still, as part of Central Europe, and more importantly as a politically and economically rather instable state, Hungary continuously held the attention of the Division of Western European Affairs of the State Department. The Western European Desk was concerned about Hungarian affairs, and explicitly stated its desire to receive continuous information regarding Hungarian politics, government, economic life, military and social issues.³

After the armistice in November 1918 the state of belligerency had to be terminated and peace had to be signed between the US and Hungary. Consequently, the general terms and conditions upon which the diplomatic, political and economic relations of the two countries were to rest during the interwar period were defined by the separate peace treaty between Hungary and the United States, signed on August 29, 1921. The specific stipulations of the treaty, setting the framework for the relations of Hungary and the United States, reflect the uneven nature of the relationship between the two countries, with the US dictating the conditions.⁴ While Hungary had to guarantee all the rights, privileges and

² William R. Castle, Jr. to George A. Gordon. October 20, 1926. *The William R. Castle, Jr. Papers*, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, West Branch, Iowa. Hereafter cited as *The William R. Castle, Jr. Papers*. Access to the Castle Papers was made possible for me by Dr. Tibor Glant. With regard to important consular transfers Castle informs Gordon, secretary in the American Legation in Budapest, about the transfer of a high ranking consular officer, Mr. Gale to Budapest, who, as Castle suspects, will “make a terrible fuss about being sent to a place as unimportant as Budapest.”

³ William R. Castle, Jr. to Charles B. Curtis, December 6, 1923. *The William R. Castle, Jr. Papers*.

⁴ See Charles Evans Hughes to Ulysses Grant-Smith, July 9, 1921: “[...] the peace resolution is a clear expression of the Congress that more rights, advantages, and

advantages to the US to which she was entitled under the Treaty of Trianon, the US explicitly renounced all the responsibilities and obligations possibly arising from it, especially in relation to stipulations specified in the Covenant of the League of Nations.

Article I

Hungary undertakes to accord to the United States, and the United States shall have and enjoy, all the rights, privileges, indemnities, reparations or advantages specified in the [...] Joint Resolution of the Congress of the United States of July 2, 1921, including all the rights and advantages stipulated for the benefit of the United States in the Treaty of Trianon which the United States shall fully enjoy notwithstanding the fact that such Treaty has not been ratified by the United States. [...]

Article II

With view to defining more particularly the obligation of Hungary under the foregoing Article with respect to certain provision in the Treaty of Trianon, it is understood and agreed between the High Contracting Parties:

(1) That the rights and advantages stipulated in that Treaty for the benefit of the United States, which it is intended the United States shall have and enjoy, are those defined in Parts V, VI, VIII, IX, X, XI, XII and XIV.

(2) That the United States shall not be bound by the provisions of Part I of that Treaty, nor by any provisions of that Treaty including those mentioned in paragraph (1) of this Article, which relate to the Covenant of the League of Nations, nor shall the United States be bound by any action taken by the League of Nations, or by the Council, or by the Assembly thereof, unless the United States shall expressly give its assent to such action.

(3) That the United States assumes no obligations under or with respect to the provisions of Part II, Part III, Part IV and Part XIII of that Treaty.⁵

Within this larger framework, following the treaty of peace and, of course, in accordance with the provisions of the Treaty of Trianon, other treaties previously made by the US with Hungary had to be renegotiated, with special emphasis on those which guaranteed US trade and business

interests must be secured to the USA, and that our Government will not conclude any treaty that does not secure those rights, etc.” *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States. 1921. Vol. 2* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1936), 250.

⁵ Treaty between the United States of America and Hungary, Signed at Budapest, August 29, 1921. Quoted in Small, *Democracy and Diplomacy*, 257.

interests. Besides such instruments as the copyright and extradition treaties, “there remained still the following: commerce and navigation, property and consular jurisdiction, agreement concerning tobacco, consular convention, naturalization, trade marks and arbitration, etc.”⁶ The Treaty of Friendship, Commerce and Consular Rights with Hungary, signed on June 24, 1925, for example, was one result of such considerations and negotiations.⁷

The three chief points of interest to the government of the US in connection with Hungary, as was confidentially stated by George A. Gordon, a secretary of the American Legation in Budapest, were (1) legitimacy and the King question, (2) the fiscal policy of the Hungarian government and the economic consolidation in Hungary, and (3) Trianon and Hungarian revisionism.⁸ While the legitimist threat was ruled out after Emperor Charles’ second unsuccessful attempt to return to the throne, economic questions and Hungarian revisionism remained the major focuses of attention for official America. The consolidation of the Hungarian economy, a budget standing on firm grounds and the solvency of Hungarian banks became the prerequisite of the sympathies of American business circles and the American government.⁹ The international loan to Hungary for reconstruction, known as the League of Nations loan, to which the US government also consented in 1924, served the very aim to help Hungary get back on her feet.¹⁰ It indirectly secured American economic interests (including the payment of debts and claims) and rendered prospective investments (for example in shipping, agriculture, forestry and railways) safer. A memorandum sent to the State Department by Ulysses Grant-Smith, the US commissioner to Hungary from 1919 to

⁶ Horace Dorsey Newson to William R. Castle, Jr., November, 29, 1922. *The William R. Castle, Jr. Papers*.

⁷ For more detail see the 69th Congress 1st Session (March 17–April 5, 1926) *Records of the Senate Vol. LXVII. Part 6. 1926*. RG46 NARA.

⁸ George A. Gordon to Secretary of State, June 3, 1927. M710 Roll 1 and 2 RG59, NARA.

⁹ See the conversation between Regent Miklós Horthy and William R. Castle, July 23, 1920 and Castle’s account on his conversation with Hungarian Finance Minister on November 2, 1922. *William R. Castle, Jr. Diaries*. Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA. This source was made available to me by Dr. Tibor Glant of Debrecen University.

¹⁰ The American Jeremiah Smith, commissioner of the League of Nations was sent to Hungary to provide assistance and help in the consolidation of Hungarian economy.

1922, summarized the situation as follows: until serious post-war problems of Central Europe and Hungary were

solved to some appreciable degree the commerce of the West must suffer the delet[e]rious effects of one portion of the body being deceased and in a stage of high fever. [...] It is evident, therefore, that the United States has a vital interest in desiring an early solution of these great problems and the consequent pacification of so large and populous an area of the earth's surface.¹¹

That American economic interest defined American action in Hungary is also demonstrated by the following incident. In the winter of 1926 the Tripartite Claims Commission dealing with claims arising under Article 231 of the Treaty of Trianon set the prewar rate of exchange concerning the payment of debts according to the average rate during the month preceding the outbreak of the war. In case of the US, as of November 1917, this rate amounted to 9.4 cents per crown, which Hungary found too high. The Hungarian government, via the Hungarian Legation in Washington and the American Legation in Budapest, tried to bargain for a reduction or, as George A. Gordon of the American Legation in Budapest remarked somewhat furiously, it “solicit[ed] an out and out gift.” This Hungarian demand, however, did not find favorable reception in the State Department. On the one hand, the Commission was an independent body which governments could not influence. On the other hand, by that time the State Department judged the conditions of the Hungarian economy and budget good enough to pay that rate. Other favors such as the postponement of the payment of other unpaid claims (for example reparations for prisoners of war) due to the US had already been granted to Hungary previously. Therefore, there seemed to be no legitimate reason for the Hungarian Government “to plead the necessity of poverty” and economic instability or try to classify legitimate American claims as “treaty charges,” a State Department memorandum argued.¹² Such bargaining on the part of the Hungarian government was labeled as “evasive haggling,” and the argument put forth by the Hungarian government as to why such a favor for them was necessary

¹¹ Ulysses Grant-Smith to the State Department, December 13, 1920. Roll 1 and 2 M710 RG 59, NARA.

¹² George A. Gordon to William R. Castle, Jr., November 27, 1926. *The William R. Castle, Jr. Papers*.

was designated as “preposterous.” The memorandum continued to pass a devastating judgment concerning the Hungarian attitude:

[The Hungarian] Government in general seems to be somewhat in the habit of regarding the United States as the purveyor of all good things, including an unceasing flow of foreign loans, and the quality of its gratitude is certainly not devoid of a lively sense of favors to come; it therefore behooves it not to confine its responsiveness to lip service.¹³

Gordon’s opinion may stand out as rather extreme, but a general conclusion may be drawn that while the US was willing to cooperate with and assist Hungary for the sake of Hungary’s economic consolidation, it was not altruism or America’s sense of responsibility that made the US do so. Her down-to earth and well-calculated interest explained her economic policy toward Hungary.

The third major issue of interest for the US government was Hungarian revisionism. The questions of economic stability and the revision of the Treaty of Trianon were interestingly linked, inasmuch as the harsh peace terms and the subsequent political, economic and social burdens which Trianon imposed on Hungary were argued to have created a considerable threat to the economic viability of the country, and also to the economic stability of the whole of Central Europe. On the grounds of economic, political and moral considerations American politicians from official circles often gave voice to their belief that the treaty was a mistaken one, and that its economic, financial and political stipulations were too harsh. Such views, however, never affected the official position of the United States on the revision of the Treaty of Trianon. Official US retained its uncompromisingly consistent policy of non-entanglement in this question.

William R. Castle, Jr., chief of the Division of Western European Affairs at the Department of State, was in charge of Hungarian matters. Since he was actively involved in dealing with Hungarian issues, his papers and official correspondence offer reliable grounds for reviewing official American views about treaty revision. Several of his comments in his diary suggest that he deeply understood the “bitterness” of Hungarians over the peace treaty.¹⁴ When discussing the difficulties of the Hungarian

¹³ George A. Gordon to William R. Castle, Jr., November 27, 1926. *The William R. Castle, Jr. Papers*.

¹⁴ See for example the July 27, 1921 entry in *William R. Castle, Jr. Diaries*.

economy, the failure of the crops, and Hungary's difficulties in 1921 and 1922 in stabilizing its currency, he did not view the large payments the Reparation Commission tried to force on Hungary as timely. He warned of the possibility of an immediate and disastrous economic and financial crash in Hungary:

Personally, I have no sympathy whatever for reparation demands on Hungary. The people who want the money are the Czechs, Yugoslavs and Roumanians who should be satisfied with the vast Hungarian territories they have acquired. I think there can be no doubt in this case that what they all three want is the utter ruin of Hungary, to absorb the country altogether, which would mean trouble for generations to come.¹⁵

Castle was aware that the peace treaties "created impossible nations with impossible boundaries and the ruling groups in these new nations are playing havoc with their own states as well as bringing on an international crisis."¹⁶ Still, in his official capacity as undersecretary of state of the Western European Desk he never promoted changes in the postwar European system. He consistently warned his colleagues in the American Legation in Budapest to avoid any connection with Hungarian revisionist propaganda, popular, unofficial, or semi-official.

At the time, as the immediate effect of the Kossuth Pilgrimage in 1928, the Hungarian patriotic organizations in the US were preparing to carry out pro-Hungarian propaganda, "[t]his, of course, include[ing] propaganda for the revision of the treaty." They were also preparing to organize a Hungarian congress in Buffalo. Neither of the ideas was welcomed by the State Department. The Department assumed that the Buffalo congress expected its proceedings and speeches to be "widely reported in all the papers [...] and thereby" it hoped to "influence the American government and [...] demand the revision of the treaty."¹⁷ The issue was even more delicate since some representatives of the Hungarian government were also expected to attend the congress. Therefore, Castle sent the following instructions to the American minister in Budapest:

[Y]ou could well find the opportunity to say to some of your friends in the Hungarian Government that the American Government is not at all

¹⁵ November 22, 1922. *William R. Castle, Jr. Diaries*.

¹⁶ July 27, 1921. *William R. Castle, Jr. Diaries*.

¹⁷ William R. Castle, Jr. to Joshua Butler Wright, March 8, 1929. *The William R. Castle, Jr. Papers*.

keen about this kind of business. When foreigners become naturalized, we feel that their efforts should be devoted to improving things in the country of their adoption. This does not at all mean that we expect them to lose interest in the problems of the country from which they come, but merely that they should not publicly devote themselves to propaganda, which in this case is not only pro-Hungarian, but anti-Czech, Roumanian and Yugoslav and is, therefore, directly against governments with which we are on friendly terms. [...] [I]t would create a storm of abuse [...] not favorable to Hungary and that besides making trouble in this country, it would undoubtedly do serious harm to the Hungarian cause. Anything that Hungary does to spread pro-Hungarian ideas, such as sending over exchange students and exchange professors to the universities or people who will talk or write in a reasonable way, we naturally have no objection to whatever, but I can only reiterate that these patriotic organizations can and do make a lot of trouble.¹⁸

So, even the least possible association with revisionist propaganda was viewed by official America as most unacceptable and dangerous.¹⁹

Similarly, the State Department and the American Legation in Budapest handled the dedication of the statue to General Harry Hill Bandholtz in August 1936 with caution. Bandholtz was the American member of the Inter-Allied Military Mission to Budapest in 1919. He enjoyed great popularity and the respect of the Hungarians, because he prevented the Rumanian army from looting the Royal Hungarian Museum in Budapest²⁰ during the Rumanian occupation of Budapest in the fall of 1919. To commemorate the activities of the general, the American Hungarian community raised funds for the statue. Hungarians viewed the Bandholtz statue as a living proof of the Rumanian aggression as well as

¹⁸ William R. Castle, Jr. to Joshua Butler Wright, March 8, 1929. *The William R. Castle, Jr. Papers*.

¹⁹ Even the indirect danger of revisionist “junketing” prompted the immediate action of the State Department, as was the case when Countess Bethlen wished to deliver a lecture in the US under the title “The Habsburgs, Mussolini and other European public characters.” “If Countess Bethlen should come over and give some rather scandalous lectures about European personalities, I have no doubt that she would draw an audience of sorts, but it would be distinctly disagreeable for us and disagreeable for Hungary. Personally,” Castle observed, “I don’t like to see the wife of the Prime Minister come to this country for a more or less junketing expedition and if I were a really rich man, I should offer to pay her to stay away. That would also be because of my liking for Hungary.” William R. Castle, Jr. to Nicholas Roosevelt, June 20, 1931. *The William R. Castle, Jr. Papers*.

²⁰ The Royal Hungarian Museum is known as the Hungarian National Museum today.

symbol of the devastation of Trianon and American sympathy for the Hungarian cause.²¹ John F. Montgomery, then American minister to Budapest, was not only invited to be present at the unveiling, but was asked to speak as well. Reference to Trianon and covert revisionist appeals to the American nation were expected at the ceremony, which took place on July 4.²² Therefore, the State Department took immediate steps to instruct the US representatives in the American Legation “to be careful not to take an active part in the ceremony and under no circumstances should [any of them] make any remarks.”²³ Minister Montgomery shared the concerns of the State Department and also wished to refrain from participation at the unveiling. He could only excuse himself from being present by way of an official leave of absence signed by the secretary of state which instructed him to be in Washington before June 15th, well before the ceremony.²⁴ The unveiling of the Bandholtz statue in Budapest, as was foreseen, set Hungarian anti-Trianon propaganda into motion, when after the erection of the statue the American Hungarian daily, *Szabadság*, launched a campaign to collect signatures in support of the revision of the treaty. Official US stayed out of that project as well.

Official representatives of the US to Hungary during the interwar period displayed the same attitude toward revision. Of course, the American ministers to Hungary had to comply with the official American approach. But was there a personal side to all this? Did any of them, even tacitly, support Hungarian revisionism? Did their personal relations to the

²¹ For more detail on the political significance of the statue see János Pótó, *Az emlékeztetés helyei. Emlékművek és politika* (Budapest: Osiris Kiadó, 2003).

²² The unveiling of the Bandholtz statue finally took place on August 23, 1919.

²³ Secretary of State Cordell Hull to John F. Montgomery, March 23, 1936. *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States. Diplomatic Papers. 1936. Vol. 2* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1954), 335. Hereafter cited as *FRUS. 1936*.

²⁴ Montgomery to Hull, March 27, 1936; Hull to Montgomery, March 31, 1936. *FRUS. 1936*, 336. Hungarians were utterly disappointed by the absence of the American minister. To avoid offending Hungarian sensibilities and bad impressions about the American Legation, one of the charges represented the American Legation at the unveiling ceremony. For further detail also see Tibor Frank, ed., *Roosevelt követe Budapesten. John F. Montgomery bizalmas politikai beszélgetései, 1934–1941* (Budapest: Corvina, 2002), 50–53. Hereafter cited as Frank, ed., *Roosevelt követe Budapesten*.

country and its leaders influence their official views? The record shows a range of reactions.

During the interwar period five American diplomats served as senior American representatives in Budapest: Ulysses Grant-Smith (1919–1922), Theodore Brentano (1922–1927), Joshua Butler Wright (1927–1931), Nicholas Roosevelt (1931–1933) and John Flournoy Montgomery (1933–1941). Ulysses Grant-Smith was the unofficial diplomatic representative of the US in Hungary from December 1919 to January 1922, and served as *chargé d'affaires pro tempore* until May 1922.²⁵ He was sent to the region to safeguard American interests, and had the responsibility to establish the foundations of the official contacts between the two countries.²⁶ The difficulties of his task defined not only his official, but also his reserved and often negatively biased personal relations to the country and her people. The “habitual, unconscious exaggeration practiced by all the people” and their “tendency to speak in figurative phrases, and [...] consequently misunderstand and discount one another’s statements”²⁷ made him a stern critic of postwar Hungary. During most of his stay in Hungary, until August 29, 1921, no official diplomatic relations existed between the US and Hungary. This set the framework for his actions and explained why his activities were guided by extraordinary caution with respect to any kind of political utterance relative to Hungarian problems after the war, among them the Treaty of Trianon.²⁸ His opinion and the instructions he received from the State Department, for example, in connection with the Conference of Allied

²⁵ *The National Cyclopaedia of American Biography. Current Volume F. 1939–1942* (New York: James T. White & Co., 1942), 403.

²⁶ “While exercising the utmost caution not to commit yourself and this government to preference for one or the other of the many political groups which seeks to control the government of Hungary, you will be expected tactfully to encourage such constructive movements among the Hungarians as would appear to lead toward the firmer establishment of a representative government.” Secretary of State to the Ulysses Grant-Smith, December 10, 1919. *FRUS. 1919. Vol.1 and 2* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1934), 410–411. Hereafter cited as *FRUS. 1919. Vol.1 and 2*.

²⁷ Ulysses Grant-Smith to Secretary of State, May 17, 1920. Roll 1 and 2, M710 RG 59, NARA.

²⁸ Secretary of State to the Ulysses Grant-Smith, December 10, 1919. *FRUS. 1919. Vol.1 and 2*, 410–411. Ulysses-Grant Smith served during the term of three secretaries of state, namely Robert Lansing, Bainbridge Colby and Charles Evans Hughes.

Diplomatic Representatives in Budapest, shows how undesirable he considered even the least direct connection with issues relating, in any way, to Hungarian politics. Grant-Smith was of the opinion “that any participation of the American representative in Hungary in the conference should be in response to a request from the British, French and Italian Governments and that it should be strictly informal.”²⁹ “It appears to me,” says Grant-Smith,

that the best American policy would be to avoid becoming implicated in any demarche which may be taken in this regard; and I am more than ever impressed by the wisdom of the telegraphic instructions sent me under date of November 23, last, [...] that I should take no part, even as an observer, in the conferences of diplomatic representatives of the Principled Allied powers at this capital. The longer I follow the development of affairs in Central and Eastern Europe the more do I become convinced of the wisdom of a policy of detachment and a minimum interference on our part in the regulation of the numberless complicated questions which continue to arise as a result of the war. The tendency would ever become more marked, on the part of all concerned, to shift the responsibility for failures to our shoulders, as well as the expense. The presence of foreign communities in the United States makes our country peculiarly susceptible to alien propaganda, and we should shortly find domestic problems overshadowed by issues far removed from our shores, and not infrequently inimical to our national interests.³⁰

Grant-Smith knew that although Hungary accepted the loss of her territories temporarily, she would not submit forever to the conditions brought about by the peace treaty.³¹ He had strong opinions about Hungary’s new frontiers:

The Magyars, just as the Serbs, Roumanians, and Czechs, if victorious, would have laid claim to vast territories as due them. It is their nature, it is their habit of mind to make exaggerated claims. [...] Consequently, had the new boundaries of Hungary been made to include all the contiguous Magyar populations which lie at present in Czechoslovakia, Roumania, Yugoslavia, the Hungarians would have immediately claimed

²⁹ Grant-Smith to Secretary of State, September 29, 1920. Roll 1 and 2, M710 RG59, NARA.

³⁰ Ulysses Grant-Smith to Secretary of State, December 24, 1920. Roll 1 and 2, M710 RG 59, NARA.

³¹ Ulysses Grant-Smith to Secretary of State, May 31, 1920. Roll 1 and 2, M710 RG 59, NARA.

something beyond. As it is presented, however, the League of Nations might very well and, in justice, ought to hand back those populations to Hungary. This might keep them quiet for a time and would afford them no legitimate grounds to carry on a propaganda for regaining lost territories.³²

In August 1921 the US and Hungary signed a separate peace treaty ending the state of belligerency. In consequence, official diplomatic relations between the two countries were established as well. The first official representative of the US to Hungary after the war was Theodore Brentano.

Brentano was a retired judge when he entered the diplomatic service and was appointed minister to Hungary in 1921. He served in Budapest between 1922 and 1927.³³ His diplomatic activities in Budapest were met with some criticism in the State Department, since Castle was not fully satisfied with his work.³⁴ Unfortunately, only a small amount of State Department documents are available regarding Theodore Brentano's stand on the revision of the Trianon peace treaty. His monthly memoranda to the secretary of state on revisionist propaganda in Hungary and abroad, however, contained no personal comments. Thus, in the absence of personal remarks his opinion is impossible to analyze. His successor, Joshua Butler Wright was the exact opposite.

Having served at various important diplomatic posts both in Europe (Brussels, London, The Hague) and in Latin America (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil and Santiago, Chile), Wright was appointed envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary to Hungary in 1927.³⁵ His diaries contain some objective comments regarding Hungarian questions and treaty

³² Ulysses Grant-Smith to Secretary of State, May 17, 1920. Roll 1 and 2, M710 RG 59, NARA.

³³ *The National Cyclopedia of American Biography. Current Volume C* (New York: James T. White & Co., 1930), 487–488.

³⁴ Rumors were spread that Brentano was drunk more often than sober. "There has been a good deal of agitation in the Department to replace Judge Brentano by a Service Minister. There are innumerable stories that he is drunk most of the time and if these stories are true he is, of course, a peculiarly unfit representative of this dry country. There have also been rumors of personal misbehavior with some Jewish dancer from the opera, but in these stories I take no stock whatever." Castle to Charles B. Curtis, May 6, 1925. *The William R. Castle, Jr. Papers*.

³⁵ *The National Cyclopedia of American Biography. Volume XXX* (New York: James T. White & Co., 1943), 196–197.

revision, including the one according to which the League of Nations was not paying enough attention to the local questions in this [Central Europe] part of the world.³⁶ His official correspondence with the State Department on the other hand is more indicative of his critical stand on Hungarian issues. The fact that Wright kept a shrewd eye on Hungarian affairs, especially on revisionist propaganda is best demonstrated by his comment regarding the Hungarian exaggeration and overestimation of the successes of the Rothermere campaign.³⁷ The American Legation in Hungary continuously informed the State Department about issues relating to Rothermere's campaign, as well as about the press coverage it received both in Hungary and abroad, with special respect to the successor states. State Department documents make it clear that official American circles deemed Rothermere's eccentric activities unfortunate and harmful, encouraging false hopes.³⁸ Joshua Butler Wright's somewhat harsh judgment concerning Hungarian tendencies to overestimate the significance of the Rothermere's campaign sheds light on official American attitudes toward revisionism. Considering the extent to which the Hungarians believed that their difficulties interested the rest of the world, "[o]ne gains the impression," Wright said,

that these people are convinced that Hungary is an important factor in the general European policy of England and other great Powers; this is bred from their intense national spirit and love of country, which, I

³⁶ Joshua Butler Wright on October 9, 1927. Box 3. Series IV. Diaries. *Joshua Butler Wright Papers*. Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ.

³⁷ Lord Harold Sidney Harmsworth Rothermere's all-out anti-Trianon press campaign in the London *Daily Mail* energized Hungarian revisionism from abroad. He made the Hungarian question the focus of attention in Britain, as well as in the United States. Although Rothermere's efforts did not yield any political results, he became the hero of the day. He won over many Americans and Hungarian-Americans after his unofficial visit to the United States in the winter of 1927–1928. While official America ignored him, Hungarian-American communities welcomed the Englishman as the savior of Hungary. He became popular with "the man of the street and of the press." His eloquent, enthusiastic and highly emotional argumentation stressed the responsibility of the United States in creating an unjust peace and appealed to the American liberal and democratic tradition. He had great influence on his audience by reciting popular slogans such as, for example, that "Trianon was born in the US" and made them believe that "Hungary's future will be decided in the United States." *Amerikai Magyar Népszava*, April 28, 1928.

³⁸ Wright to Secretary of State, July 31, 1927. Roll 1 or 2, M710 RG 59, NARA.

believe, is unsurpassed anywhere else in the world. It is therefore to be regretted that they appear to be blind to the ill-effects of this untimely agitation.³⁹

Wright's comment went to the heart of the matter: Hungarian expectations of official American support were not well-founded.

Nicholas Roosevelt's personal papers and correspondence with the State Department reveal the same approach. Nicholas Roosevelt, diplomat and journalist, served at diplomatic posts in Paris and Madrid, and was a captain in the military in France after the US entered the First World War. After the armistice President Wilson appointed him his *aide* in Paris, then member to the American Commission to Negotiate Peace. Later he was commissioned to Vienna in 1919–1920 as member of the American field mission.⁴⁰ Therefore, when in 1930 he received an appointment as minister to Hungary, he arrived in a region which was familiar to him. While in office Roosevelt concentrated mostly on the economic and financial life of both Hungary and Central Europe.⁴¹ He never really liked the place. His condescending attitude toward “semi-feudal” Hungary, the behavior of Hungarians and their conduct in life are duly illustrated by Roosevelt's memoirs, *A Front Row Seat*.⁴² As Roosevelt was regarded “the best informed American in Central Europe,”⁴³ a former journalist and a diplomat who had widespread contacts with the American business and political circles, Hungarians expected much from him: “Mr. Roosevelt is not only a diplomat but also a journalist who writes striking articles for the best American reviews and dailies. His sympathy therefore not only

³⁹ Wright to Secretary of State, September 30, 1927. Roll 1 and 2, M710 RG 59, NARA.

⁴⁰ Roosevelt was in Budapest in March 1919 when the Hungarian Soviet Republic (Tanácsköztársaság) was declared.

⁴¹ *The National Cyclopaedia of American Biography. Current Volume F. 1939–1942* (New York: James T. White & Co., 1942), 324–325.

⁴² For further details see Nicholas Roosevelt, *A Front Row Seat. A Sparklingly Personal Narrative of the History-Making Events in Which Mr. Roosevelt Has Participated, and the Notable Figures He Has Known, Especially the Roosevelt Family* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1953), 186–205. His retrospective recollections may have become somewhat more critical of contemporary Hungary than they actually were in 1930–1933. On the other hand his critical approach to Hungarian issues and cautious policy are also underlined by his correspondence with the State Department.

⁴³ *The National Cyclopaedia of American Biography. Current Volume F. 1939–1942* (New York: James T. White & Co., 1942), 324.

means that he communicates the favorable impressions gained in Hungary in an official quality but he gives even greater publicity to the same.”⁴⁴ In an interview Roosevelt was asked what Hungary could expect from the United States? He gave a very diplomatic answer. While avoiding the disappointing answer of a straightforward “not much,” he cordially explained that until America got more familiar with Hungary, she could not expect much from the US. Therefore, she needed bigger and wider publicity in the US to make ties and spiritual relations between the two countries stronger. For this, he said in several interviews, as a journalist, he would willingly work: “Being not only in the service but also a journalist, I will use the publicity of the American papers in the interest of Hungary. One does read more and more about your country now in our papers, but I will also contribute with my modest pen to increase the publicity on Hungary.”⁴⁵

Like his predecessors, Roosevelt viewed Hungarian attempts at the revision of the Treaty of Trianon critically and with caution. Roosevelt was concerned about the Hungarian military, despite the fact that the Treaty of Trianon introduced strict limits on its size. He was very much aware that Hungary had not accepted the peace treaties “except through force.” He knew that Hungarians looked forward to regaining their lost territories; therefore, he wrote, the suspected “development of Hungary’s military establishment could materially affect the peace of Europe.”⁴⁶ The essence of his opinion concerning revisionism was briefly but explicitly summed up in the introduction which Roosevelt wrote to Horthy’s memoirs in 1956. The program, he says, “to try to restore to Hungary the

⁴⁴ 8 órai újság, September 28, 1933 in Box 5. Series I. Correspondence, *Nicholas Roosevelt Papers*, Syracuse University Library, Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY. Hereafter cited as *Nicholas Roosevelt Papers*.

⁴⁵ 8 órai újság, September 28, 1933. Box 5. Series I. Correspondence, *Nicholas Roosevelt Papers*. See also “Mit remélhet Magyarország Amerikától?” *Pesti Hírlap*, October 12, 1930 in Box 3. Series VII. Correspondence, *Nicholas Roosevelt Papers*. See also “Október [...] az új amerikai követ. Beszélgetés a New York Times szerkesztőségében Nicholas Roosevelttel,” *Az Est*, October 12, 1930 in Box 3, Series VII, *Nicholas Roosevelt Papers*.; Imre Déri, “Roosevelt követ beszél terveiről s Magyarországról,” *Amerikai Magyar Népszava*, September 27, 1930 in Box 3. Series VII, *Nicholas Roosevelt Papers*.; Emil Lengyel, “Old Budapest Goes American,” *New York Herald Tribune*, March 31, 1931, 15 in Box 3. Series VII, *Nicholas Roosevelt Papers*.

⁴⁶ Nicholas Roosevelt to Secretary of War Patrick J. Hurley, January 14, 1931. *The William R. Castle, Jr. Papers*.

boundaries it had had before the Habsburg [E]mpire broke up” was “a policy” which “however commendable to Magyars, ran counter to the nationalist aspirations and fears of non-Magyars, and was doomed to failure.”⁴⁷ His successor, John Flournoy Montgomery, also had a strong opinion about Hungarian revisionism.

Unlike Nicholas Roosevelt, Montgomery became a true admirer of Hungary during his mission in Budapest. This affection, however, did not positively bias his views concerning revisionism. Montgomery, a manufacturer and businessman with extensive interests in the milk condensing and food industry in the US, served as minister to Budapest between 1933 and 1941.⁴⁸ His personal papers and correspondence reveal how much he got to like Horthy’s Hungary. Indulging in the pompous and often ceremonious life of Hungary, he kept close relations with the members of the aristocracy, representatives of other foreign posts in Budapest and, of course, with prominent members of Hungarian political life. His views sometimes reflected the rather limited scope of his Hungarian social and political acquaintances. That notwithstanding, Montgomery sensed how powerful and dangerous a force Trianon was, and how it united all the layers of Hungarian society irrespective of class and social standing.⁴⁹ As mentioned, Montgomery did not want to participate in the unveiling ceremony of the Bandholtz statue.⁵⁰ Despite his favorable attitude toward Horthy’s Hungary, and his sometime more favorable judgment of things Hungarian, he developed a fairly critical opinion of the Hungarian attitude toward revisionism and the policies devised to achieve this goal. Although Montgomery did not consider the

⁴⁷ The draft of Roosevelt’s introduction to the book attached to Nicholas Roosevelt to Robert Speller, the publisher of Horthy’s memoirs, April 25, 1956. In Box 4. Series I. *Nicholas Roosevelt Papers*. See also Miklós Horthy, *Memoirs* (New York: Robert Speller & Sons, 1957).

⁴⁸ *The National Cyclopaedia of American Biography. Current Volume D* (New York: James T. White & Co., 1934), 410–411.

⁴⁹ Frank, ed., *Roosevelt követe Budapesten*, 11–65. See also Montgomery’s comments on golf, traveling, cuisine, viticulture, social life in Hungary in Box 1, Budapest Diplomatic Corps Exchanges, 1933–1937, *The John F. Montgomery Papers*. MS 353. Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University. Hereafter cited as *The John F. Montgomery Papers*.

⁵⁰ On the Bandholtz statue also see Box 4, Vol. VII. Personal Correspondence, 1933–37, Part I, *The John F. Montgomery Papers*.

Habsburg Empire a “political monstrosity”⁵¹ and understood the grief of the Hungarians over its dismemberment, he did not allow himself to be misled by Hungarian revisionist aspirations. He grew even more critical of Hungarian revisionism when Hungary sought to restore her former boundaries by force within the framework of the ever-strengthening German alliance.⁵² And while in his *Hungary, The Unwilling Satellite* Montgomery readily tried to save Hungary’s reputation and depict her ultimate accession to the Axis powers as one of force and “unwilling” expediency, at the same time he passed rather ominous comments concerning revisionism and its dangers:

The revisionism I found in Hungary was a curious myth rather than a clear program. National disasters are just as conducive to psychological derangements as national triumphs. The main symptom in both cases is the growth of legends. In Hungary, people spoke with religious fervor of the restoration of the thousand-year-old realm, quite oblivious to the fact that in King Stephen’s time, Hungary did not have the frontiers which she lost in 1919. [...] As time went on and I gained the confidence of my Magyar friends, I discovered that many responsible Magyars were by no means in favor of a revisionist policy. On the contrary, they considered it a serious handicap, because it had become a national obsession. [...] They also knew that revisionism was a dangerous toy and that Hungary was utterly unprepared for war. [...] To the politicians, revisionism was a godsend, but more responsible men thought it dangerous.⁵³

Throughout the interwar period the US strictly adhered to the policy of (political) non-entanglement. Providing support for the revision of the Treaty of Trianon was never a viable option despite Hungary’s conviction, hope and illusions to the contrary. It was a well-known fact that the US did not become a member of the League of Nations, nor did she ratify its Covenant. Hungarians also attached much hope to the fact

⁵¹ Montgomery to Robert D. Coe, December 4, 1939. Box 3, Foreign Service Personnel Exchanges, 1938–1939, Part I. Vol. 5. *The John F. Montgomery Papers*: “Personally I am not of the opinion that the Austrian-Hungarian Empire was a political monstrosity. Everything I have learnt since I have been here convinces me to the contrary.”

⁵² Messerschmidt to Montgomery, November 20, 1934 and March 5, 1936, Box 2, Foreign Service Personnel Exchange, 1933–37, Part 1. Vol. 3, *The John F. Montgomery Papers*. See also Montgomery’s correspondence with the State Department. Roll #1 M1206 RG 59, NARA.

⁵³ John Flournoy Montgomery, *Hungary. The Unwilling Satellite* (New York: The Devin-Adair Company, 1947), 52–55. See also Frank, ed., *Roosevelt követe Budapestén*, 48–49.

that following a long congressional debate in 1928 the US became a signatory to the Kellogg-Briand Pact: “The great importance of this international document,” says the *Budapesti Hírlap*,

is not because of its elimination of war- for the possibility of war still exists-but the fact that the Government of the United States, which has hitherto stood aloof from European politics, considers that the moment has come to lead Europe, not merely financially, but by applying the fresh and untainted Anglo-Saxon standard of morals to the corrupted political atmosphere of the old world.⁵⁴

Overestimating the significance of the pact with regard to Hungary, the article concluded that “America should take the golden pen and with it bring about order in Europe through treaty revision. In that case there would be no necessity of war. Without treaty revision peace will remain a vision.”⁵⁵ The Kellogg-Briand Pact was meant to become a powerful non-aggression treaty. Yet, by not assuming military and political responsibility under collective security, the US turned the pact into a somewhat ineffective multilateral treaty outlawing war. It did not become an effective means of conflict resolution.

In conclusion, Hungarian revisionist expectations toward the US were built on false hopes and illusions. America’s relations to Hungary in general and treaty revision in particular were defined by the official American policy of political isolation toward Europe. The Western European Desk of the Department of State, and its head, William R. Castle, Jr., as well as the official American representatives of the US to Hungary consistently represented such a policy.

⁵⁴ Wright’s Memorandum on Hungarian Affairs in August to Secretary of State. September 8, 1928. Roll 10 M708, RG 59 NARA.

⁵⁵ Wright’s Memorandum on Hungarian Affairs in August to Secretary of State. September 8, 1928. Roll 10 M708, RG 59 NARA.