

Consequences of the 'Secret Speech'

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Anne Applebaum's reluctance to celebrate Nikita Khrushchev's speech denouncing Joseph Stalin and Stalinism 50 years ago was justified ["Happy Anniversary, Nikita Khrushchev," op-ed, Feb. 22]. The reforms ushered in by that speech were hardly as broad as some suppose and, as Ms. Applebaum noted, Khrushchev participated in the Stalinist terror he was denouncing.

One consequence of the "secret speech" that Ms. Applebaum didn't mention was the destabilizing impact it had on Soviet-dominated Central and Eastern Europe. The situation in Hungary and elsewhere in the region already was unstable when news of the speech burst upon the scene. While several factors resulted in this ferment, including resentment of the Soviet occupation after the Red Army evacuated Austria in 1955, the speech helped pull the rug out from under Hungary's detested Stalinist leadership.

The same year as the speech, Hungarians rose up against overwhelming odds to free themselves from Soviet domination and to reestablish democracy. While the United States was preoccupied with elections and the West was divided over the Suez Canal crisis, Khrushchev dispatched his tanks to Hungary to suppress the revolution, earning himself the nickname "Butcher of Budapest."

The 50th anniversary of that revolution and its contribution to the demise of Soviet rule in Central and Eastern Europe ought to be celebrated throughout this year.

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