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DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

THESIS SUMMARY

The Activities of Hungarian Military Experts and Military Attachés in Czechoslovakia Based on Hungarian Sources between 1918 and 1939

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1. Justification of the Topic Selection

The aim of my doctoral dissertation was to examine the activities of Hungarian military intelligence in Czechoslovakia during the interwar period, primarily through the use of archival sources.

By analyzing intelligence documents, it aims to uncover the military policy decisions and other military-related developments that often lay behind the ambiguous statements and actions of contemporary high-level politics and diplomacy. Such an approach may contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the era's military thinking and political decision-making processes, primarily on the Hungarian side, but also in the Czechoslovak context.

I had already engaged with part of this topic in my earlier academic studies—specifically the activities of military attachés and the situation of Hungarians in Upper Hungary—and I have been continuously working on this field ever since. For this reason, it was a clear decision for me to dedicate my doctoral research to this subject.

The significance of my research lies in the fact that the archival sources and scholarly literature on Hungarian intelligence activities in Czechoslovakia during the interwar period have, to date, only addressed this field in fragments. A comprehensive study on this specific aspect of Hungarian intelligence work in Prague has not yet been produced.

I chose to focus on Czechoslovakia because Hungarian intelligence activities directed toward this country remain largely unexplored. Moreover, as a result of major historical developments—such as the Treaty of Trianon, the formation of the Little Entente, and the status of Hungarians in the annexed territories—relations between Hungary and Czechoslovakia during this period were predominantly adversarial.

In my dissertation, I follow a chronological structure to present first the activities of military experts, followed by those of the military attachés. To ensure that these developments can be understood within their proper historical context, I devote a chapter to outlining the establishment, key milestones, and functioning of the Hungarian military attaché service up to the end of the Second World War. While I introduce the activities of individual figures in chronological order, their reports are often presented thematically. Additionally, I consider it essential to include a brief overview of the international environment at the beginning of each major chapter to situate and contextualize the respective periods both temporally and geographically.

2. Research Objectives

The present research has three main hypothesis-based questions:

- My first hypothesis is that the tasks of the Hungarian military attachés and specialised lecturers in Prague did not only include the collection of data on the Czechoslovak army, but also the continuous monitoring of internal social processes and mood in Czechoslovakia?
- In my second hypothesis, I seek to answer the question of whether the Hungarian military attachés in Prague used the local Hungarian population for information gathering, beyond the possibilities they could use because of their official position.
- My third hypothesis is that the Hungarian military attachés in Prague were constantly monitoring Czechoslovak political developments and the Czechoslovak response to international political events, of course with Hungary's interests at the centre.

In the case of my first hypothesis, while following the main line of inquiry—focusing primarily on military-oriented intelligence activities—I seek to explore what kinds of additional information, beyond data on the army, attracted the interest of the military experts and attachés.

My second hypothesis focuses on the attachés, as they were officially appointed to their positions. In addition to their intelligence duties, they were also expected to fulfill tasks related to official representation. I aim to examine the extent to which the local knowledge and familiarity of the Hungarian population in the country was utilized in the work of the attachés.

The interwar period was an intense and dynamic phase in twentieth-century international politics and diplomacy. Czechoslovakia came to play an increasingly significant role in European affairs, particularly from the perspective of the great powers. From Hungary's point of view, special attention was given to Czechoslovakia's international political engagements, particularly in regard to how these might intersect with Hungarian national interests.

My goal is to uncover a lesser-known, yet in my view particularly intriguing, chapter of Hungarian history. I aim to bring to light historical events that have remained largely unknown or accessible only to a narrow audience. By analyzing documents that have not previously been studied in detail, I hope to provide a comprehensive and in-depth picture of the activities of the Hungarian military attaché service in Prague.

3. Research Methodology

Among the scholarly works and authors I have consulted—essential to the subject matter—there are both Hungarian-language and foreign-language sources. It is important to note that, to date, no comprehensive Hungarian-language monograph has been published specifically on the military attaché service in relation to Czechoslovakia. Most Hungarian-language works consist of memoirs written by attachés who served during the period.

I also utilized reports from contemporary newspapers, which were especially useful for tracking the appointments and transfers of attachés. Occasionally, they also reported on significant official events in which the attaché participated.

In my view, archival documents represent one of the most important – if not the single most important – source of this research. The core content of my dissertation, and thereby its structural backbone, is based on archival material. I primarily focused on military attaché reports and documents related to intelligence activities—especially those connected to Prague.

There is a notable lack of comprehensive scholarly literature on this topic. Most Hungarian-language publications dealing with Prague-based military experts and attachés approach the subject only tangentially or in general terms, which is why I have had to rely heavily on memoirs. In the case of academic studies, the range is broader: several works directly address topics related to my research or examine the Hungarian military attaché service as a whole. Reports concerning the Czechoslovak military are particularly abundant, which reinforces the central importance of archival sources in my dissertation. These archival records form the foundation of my writing. My research is primarily based on contemporary sources, supplemented by more recent academic works that touch on the subject.

The topic of my research is complex and multifaceted, encompassing numerous additional aspects. Due to its international nature, it is essential to understand the broader context of international relations during the period. It would be worthwhile to explore what Czech- and Slovak-language documents may be found in regional archives, which could shed light on how Czechoslovak intelligence viewed the activities of Hungarian military attachés.

From the Hungarian side, further investigation into counterintelligence efforts could provide new insights, particularly regarding how Hungarian services worked to detect, track, and neutralize Czechoslovak spies. In the course of collecting data for my dissertation,

4. Scientific Findings

In my first hypothesis, I posed the question of whether the responsibilities of the Hungarian military attachés and experts in Prague extended beyond gathering information about the Czechoslovak army to include continuous monitoring of internal social developments and public sentiment in Czechoslovakia. I believe I was able to substantiate this through numerous reports. After 1928, the attachés frequently carried out a range of official and representative duties tied to their position, and also undertook trips within the country, including to Hungarian-inhabited areas. Before 1928, the military experts operated covertly and were not in a position to fulfill the kinds of official functions that an accredited attaché would perform.

A clear example supporting this hypothesis is found in documents from 1935, in which the attaché reported almost monthly the nature of his interactions with Czechoslovak officials. These sources help address the hypothesis in terms of their engagement with broader societal processes. Formal dinners, lunches, and national celebrations were events where the military attaché as a member of the embassy staff, he represented not only the Hungarian military but the Hungarian state more broadly. These gatherings also functioned as important meeting points where individuals came together, offering opportunities for the attaché to obtain valuable information through informal conversations.

In my second hypothesis, I posed the question of whether the Hungarian military attachés in Prague, also involved the local Hungarian-speaking population in the process of intelligence gathering. They had access to numerous sources of information, including professional intelligence agents sent from Hungary who were able to infiltrate official bodies, institutions, or workplaces—particularly in sectors such as entertainment or hospitality, where it was commonly known that valuable information could be obtained.

The Hungarian population itself served as a significant source of information for the attachés. Their local knowledge often provided substantial advantages, helping attachés to more easily access desired information. Attachés often travelled through Hungarian-inhabited areas, engaging in conversations with locals and thereby acquiring information. A noteworthy example is Ujszászy's 1935 report, in which he traveled through an area in Upper Hungary. I have demonstrated that the local Hungarian population was indeed involved in intelligence activities—whether through spontaneous verbal exchanges or by maintaining contact with ethnic Hungarians serving in the Czechoslovak army. It is also important to consider the possibility that information provided by the local population did not always reach the attaché

directly, but rather through an embedded or professional intelligence officer who relayed the intelligence to Prague. Some intelligence may have been taken directly reported to the 2nd Department of the General Staff.

In my third hypothesis, I assumed that the Hungarian military attachés in Prague paid particular attention to the evolving Czechoslovak political environment and regularly reported on Czechoslovak reactions to international events. Substantial source material is available to address and confirm this hypothesis. The mere fact that the attachés continuously reported on the activities among the Little Entente states could already serve as sufficient evidence. Several major international events are clearly reflected in the reports. In terms of international relations, special attention was given to Czechoslovakia's ties with Germany, France, and Poland.

The German dimension became particularly pronounced following Hitler's rise to power, with attachés detailing Czechoslovak responses to the new regime. Another important thread was Czechoslovak–Polish relations, which held sensitive importance for Hungary. Any Polish move toward alignment with the Little Entente states was a potential cause for concern in Budapest. The monitoring of French activities was also highly relevant, particularly regarding the French military mission in Czechoslovakia. In addition to bilateral relations, the reports also referenced broader international. Each of these had a Czechoslovak dimension. For these reasons, I consider my third hypothesis to be clearly confirmed.

Intelligence work is a field that operates constantly in the background of everyday life. Most developments in this domain only become known retrospectively. I consider it a significant scholarly achievement to have uncovered and presented Hungarian sources related to intelligence activities during one of the most important and contested periods of twentieth-century Hungarian history. This is especially true in relation with Czechoslovakia, because that was of considerable importance to Hungary due to its geographic proximity, historical ties, and the complex nature of bilateral relations at the time.

My research was able to expand the field with new information concerning the individuals who served as military experts and attachés in Prague. We have a more detailed picture of the Prague-based chapters in the careers of perhaps the two most well-known figures—István Ujszászy and Géza Lakatos. Additional data has come to light regarding the lives and military careers of other experts and attachés active during the period.