

The Types of Disputes: Fifty Ways to Leave Your Lover

Border conflicts and territorial disputes between and within Soviet republics fall into one or both of two general categories:

Disputes over historical borders. The confused territorial histories of the republics, seven of which were internationally recognized independent states for a year or more during this century, has led to conflicting claims on territory based on historical precedent. Prominent examples include:

- Belorussia's claim to sections of the current Lithuanian republic--including Vilnius, the current Lithuanian capital--that were added to the territory of the formerly independent Lithuania in 1940 after its incorporation into the USSR.
- The RSFSR's demands for the return of the Crimea, currently an oblast of the Ukraine but before World War II an autonomous republic in the RSFSR.

Historical boundary claims are often complicated by ethnic boundary claims.

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Disputes over ethnic boundaries often complicate historical boundary claims. The ethnically mixed character of the peripheral republics and the often arbitrary drawing of republic borders by central authorities has resulted in substantial pockets of ethnic groups coming under the government of a different ethnic group.

- In some cases, the pockets are made up of ethnic groups that have their own republic elsewhere. Sometimes these pockets have local administrative units--for example, the Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh--but more often they do not--for example, the Russians throughout the union.
- In other cases, smaller ethnic groups are found only within their local administrative units--for example, the Abkhaz in Georgia.
- Some ethnic groups in fact have no administrative unit of their own--for example, the Poles in Lithuania.

Interrepublic Territorial Disputes: No One Get Tense

Thus far, most republic governments--with the glaring exception of Armenia and Azerbaijan--have downplayed the issue of potential claims on both the territories of other republics and on their own territory. Most republic governments are reluctant to antagonize neighboring governments, particularly at a time when interrepublic economic and political ties are flourishing.

- Most republic governments probably believe interrepublic squabbles weaken the collective bargaining position of the republics while they are trying to redefine their relations with Moscow and shape the new union treaty.
- Border disputes have the potential to flare into ethnic conflicts that the republics cannot stop of their own, leaving the republics with the unpalatable choices of losing control in their own territories or requesting undesirable central intervention.

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Some republics are using interrepublic agreements to formalize their lack of irredentist intentions. The Russian republic's recently-signed treaties with the Ukraine and Kazakhstan, for example, recognize the territorial sovereignty of both the signatories. This provision excited debate in the Russian legislature at the time of the ratification of the treaty with the Ukraine; deputies who favored Russia's advancing territorial claims against the Crimea were finally voted down.

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Despite the risks for republic governments in bringing up territorial claims against other republics, however, some republic governments may eventually face serious pressure from militant citizens to advance claims against neighboring regions where members of their own ethnic groups are alleging mistreatment by governments dominated by other ethnic groups. The Central Asian republics, whose borders have less historical weight than many of the European republics and which are riddled with pockets of ethnic groups living outside their home republics, are particularly vulnerable to such a situation. Thus far, Central Asian governments have publicly stated their lack of irredentist claims and have attempted to cooperate over interethnic clashes. During riots in Kirghizia in June 1990 between Kirghiz and the Uzbeks who dominate three oblasts there, for example, the Uzbek government was careful not to extend support to its conationals. Several Uzbek informal groups, however, strongly argued the need to annex the three oblasts in order to protect brother Uzbeks. The Moldovan government is also under pressure from Moldovan nationalists to mount claims against regions of the Ukraine that used to be part of Romania and are primarily inhabited by Moldovans.

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The one interrepublic territorial conflict that is currently being prosecuted, that between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh, is unlikely to be settled in the next few years. Other republic governments have avoided taking sides in the dispute to date, and Moscow's attempts to restore order are unlikely to meet with success. It is possible that eventually the Armenian and Azerbaijan governments will attempt to cooperate in finding a solution, but militant groups on both sides of the border are likely to attempt to sabotage an imposed peace. Only high civilian casualty tolls for both groups have the possibility of providing the impetus for a negotiated settlement that will stick.

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Intrarepublic Disputes: Let's Get Tense

The attention of many republic governments is further distracted from promoting irredentist claims against others by demands being made on their own territories by smaller ethnic groups. The extraordinary variety of claims makes generalization difficult, but the demands fall into several basic categories:

- Ethnic groups seeking dramatically increased autonomy for the territory they inhabit or control administratively, to the point of a federated relationship with the republic to which their territory currently belongs--for instance, the Gagauz and Russians in Moldova and the Abkhaz and Ossetians in Georgia.
- Ethnic groups seeking separate republic status for the territory they inhabit or control administratively--for instance, the Crimean Tatars in the Russian republic.
- Ethnic groups without administrative control over the territory they inhabit seeking to form a separate administrative unit within the republic--for instance, Poles in Lithuania or some Russians in Estonia.

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- Ethnic groups wishing to reunite the territory they inhabit or control with their coethnic republic--for instance, Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh or some Russians in the Ukraine, Estonia, and Kazakhstan. While only the Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh are supported in their by their coethnic republic, the other groups still are disruptive forces in republic politics. [redacted]

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These demands, which often have both been preceded by and led to interethnic violence, are not likely to subside without some compromise on the part of republic governments. Many are the offshoots of the often arbitrary and discriminatory nationality policies of the Stalin era, which placed some smaller nationalities under the control of historical enemies and assigned others administrative control over disproportionately large chunks of territory. The resultant grievances on the part of both smaller and titular minorities, often fanned by historical enmities, have created in many republics--especially Moldova and Georgia--situations where smaller nationalities allege the impossibility of receiving fair treatment as long as they are under the primary control of the republic governments. Many of the groups seeking sovereignty have said that they would seek to split from the republics to which they currently belong if those republics seek independence from the USSR. [redacted]

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Most republic governments have vigorously opposed smaller ethnic groups' demands for greater sovereignty, both because they fear division of republic territory and because they suspect that the center has had a hand in fanning up demands. As a consequence, several conflicts have already become violent and several more have the potential to flare up. In Georgia and Moldova, republic governments have turned increasingly to authoritarian measures--states of emergency, dissolution of local legislatures, or suspension of elections--in order to quell violence. Such tactics may eventually be used in at least Georgia to effectively silence minority opposition, threatening a transition to democracy in the republic. [redacted]

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The republic government that has shown the most tolerance is Russian republic, where republic president Yel'tsin has taken the public position that autonomous units have the right to complete sovereignty. Although statements by other republic officials suggest that Yel'tsin would not allow autonomous units to declare independence from the Russian republic or to contravene the Russian republic constitution, his forthcoming stance has gone a long way toward defusing potential crises. With the exception of the Crimean Tatars, all of the smaller ethnic groups appear for now to be content with expanded autonomy. (see appendix 2) [redacted]

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Implications for the Center...

In the eyes of central authorities, interrepublic and intrarepublic border conflicts are a mixed blessing. On the one hand, they emphasize to the republics the dangers of striking off on their own and the constructive role that a strong central government can play. Some conflicts have slowed or complicated republic drives for independence drives, and outbreaks of violence have often had the effect of at least temporarily drawing republic governments closer to the center.

- The government of Moldova, for example, requested the introduction of Soviet troops to quell disturbances surrounding the efforts of the Gagauz and local Russians to establish autonomous units.

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- Estonia and Latvia have had to take the interests of local Russians--some of whom are seeking to set up autonomous units--into account when considering independence, a factor that has kept progress toward independence in those two republics behind that in more ethnically homogeneous Lithuania. [REDACTED]

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Moscow probably also calculates that the perception that republic borders are fluid erodes the legitimacy of some republics' claims to independence and gives the center a bargaining chip in talks on secession. Central authorities have warned the Lithuanian government that if the republic attempts to secede, Moscow will demand the return of land ceded by Belorussia to Lithuania after World War II, as well as Klaipeda, the republic's only seaport, which independent Lithuania returned to Germany--to which the region had belonged before World War I--in 1939. [REDACTED]

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On the other hand, the continued threat to the nation's stability and integrity posed by the violence surrounding many of these claims remains a problem for the central government.

- Continued military intervention in such disputes is costly, and the Soviet public is increasingly unwilling to see Slavic troops used to intervene between warring ethnic groups. Even though ethnic groups in Moldova and Georgia have repeatedly requested central intervention to protect their rights--thereby giving the center a perfect pretext to intervene in republics that have indicated their unwillingness to sign a new union treaty--Moscow has refused to send troops.
- Interethnic violence only strengthens the determination of republics that suspect a central hand in disturbances--Georgia, for example--to seek independence.
- More violence would also increase the number of refugees in the USSR, already up to around xxxxx, straining the center's ability--particularly at a time of unionwide economic crisis--to provide aid and lodging to displaced groups.

Moscow also undoubtedly fears that republics may become involved in international border conflicts (see annex). [REDACTED]

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...And For the United States

The consequences of republic border conflicts are likely to be of greater significance to the United States than the precise disputes themselves. Increased violence stemming from such conflicts may lead the groups involved or possibly even the center to request aid for refugees. The confusion produced by interethnic conflicts in republics such as Georgia and Moldova may complicate their attempts to establish local democracies. The potential for interethnic conflict in Estonia and Latvia will be an important factor in the speed of those republics' drive to establish full independence. [REDACTED]

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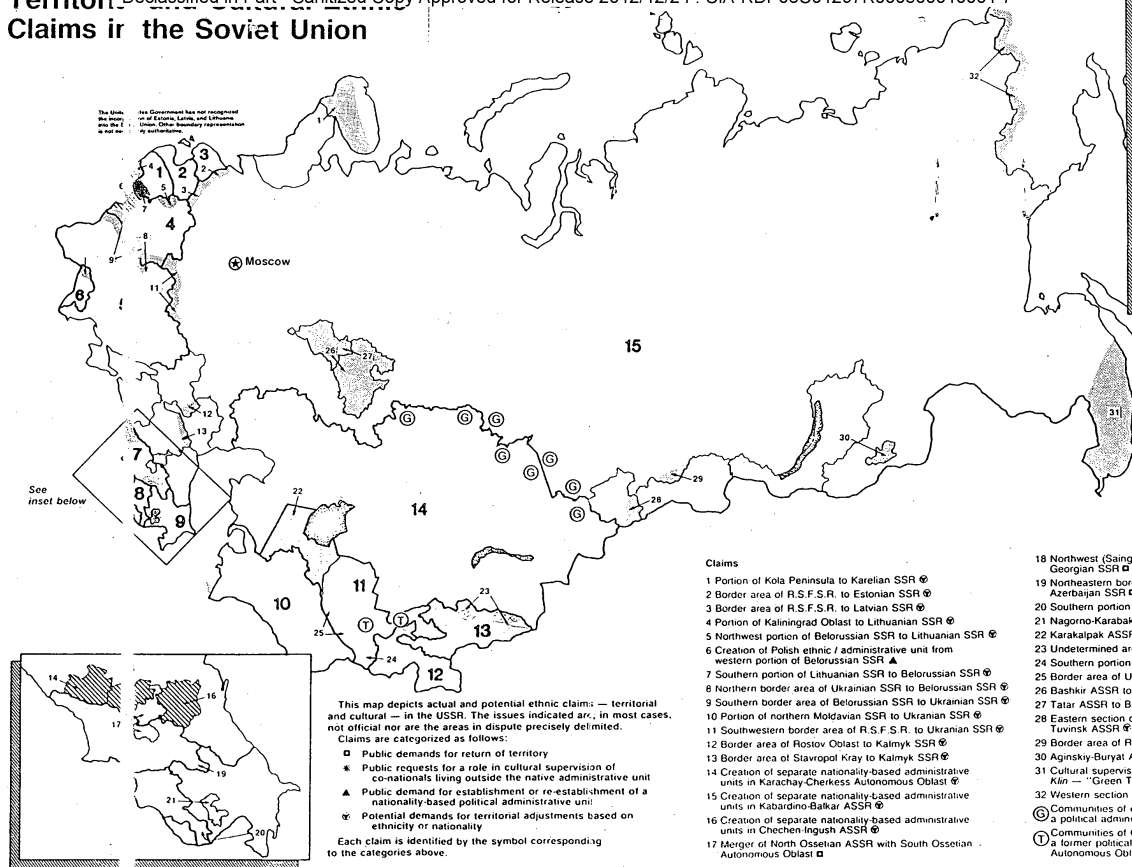
The precise border of greatest concern to the United States is likely to be the Lithuanian-Belorussian border. The United States and the West European states are likely to receive appeals from the Baltic states to recognize Lithuania's current borders as those governing the territory of a newly independent Lithuanian state. [REDACTED]

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 Claims in the Soviet Union



- REPUBLICS**
- 1 Lithuanian SSR
 - 2 Latvian SSR
 - 3 Estonian SSR
 - 4 Belorussian SSR
 - 5 Moldavian SSR
 - 6 Moldavian SSR
 - 7 Georgian SSR
 - 8 Armenian SSR
 - 9 Azerbaijan SSR
 - 10 Turkmen SSR
 - 11 Uzbek SSR
 - 12 Tajik SSR
 - 13 Kirghiz SSR
 - 14 Kazakh SSR
 - 15 Russian SFSR

This map depicts actual and potential ethnic claims — territorial and cultural — in the USSR. The issues indicated are, in most cases, not official nor are the areas in dispute precisely delimited. Claims are categorized as follows:

- Public demands for return of territory
- ★ Public requests for a role in cultural supervision of co-nationals living outside the native administrative unit
- ▲ Public demand for establishment or re-establishment of a nationality-based political administrative unit
- ⊕ Potential demands for territorial adjustments based on ethnicity or nationality

Each claim is identified by the symbol corresponding to the categories above.

- Claims**
- 1 Portion of Kola Peninsula to Karelian SSR ⊕
 - 2 Border area of R.S.F.S.R. to Estonian SSR ⊕
 - 3 Border area of R.S.F.S.R. to Latvian SSR ⊕
 - 4 Portion of Kaliningrad Oblast to Lithuanian SSR ⊕
 - 5 Northwest portion of Belorussian SSR to Lithuanian SSR ⊕
 - 6 Creation of Polish ethnic / administrative unit from western portion of Belorussian SSR ▲
 - 7 Southern portion of Lithuanian SSR to Belorussian SSR ⊕
 - 8 Northern border area of Ukrainian SSR to Belorussian SSR ⊕
 - 9 Southern border area of Belorussian SSR to Ukrainian SSR ⊕
 - 10 Portion of northern Moldavian SSR to Ukrainian SSR ⊕
 - 11 Southwestern border area of R.S.F.S.R. to Ukrainian SSR ⊕
 - 12 Border area of Rostov Oblast to Kalmyk SSR ⊕
 - 13 Border area of Stavropol Kray to Kalmyk SSR ⊕
 - 14 Creation of separate nationality-based administrative units in Karachay-Cherkess Autonomous Oblast ⊕
 - 15 Creation of separate nationality-based administrative units in Kabardino-Balkar ASSR ⊕
 - 16 Creation of separate nationality-based administrative units in Chechen-Ingush ASSR ⊕
 - 17 Merger of North Ossetian ASSR with South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast ⊕
 - 18 Northwest (Saingilo) portion of Azerbaijan SSR to Georgian SSR ⊕
 - 19 Northeastern border area of Georgian SSR to Azerbaijan SSR ⊕
 - 20 Southern portion of Armenian SSR to Azerbaijan SSR ⊕
 - 21 Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast to Armenian SSR ⊕
 - 22 Karakalpak ASSR to Kazakh SSR ⊕
 - 23 Undetermined area in Kirghiz SSR to Kazakh SSR ⊕
 - 24 Southern portion of Uzbek SSR to Turkmen SSR ⊕
 - 25 Border area of Uzbek SSR to Turkmen SSR ⊕
 - 26 Bashkir ASSR to Tatar ASSR ⊕
 - 27 Tatar ASSR to Bashkir ASSR ⊕
 - 28 Eastern section of Gorno-Altay Autonomous Oblast to Tuvin ASSR ⊕
 - 29 Border area of R.S.F.S.R. to Tuvin ASSR ⊕
 - 30 Aginskii-Buryat Autonomous Oblast to Buryat ASSR ★
 - 31 Cultural supervision of southeastern R.S.F.S.R. (Zeleniy Klyt — "Green Triangle") by Ukrainian SSR ★
 - 32 Western section of Magadan Oblast to Yakutsk ASSR ⊕
 - ⊕ Communities of ethnic Germans seeking to reestablish a political administrative unit ▲
 - ⊕ Communities of Crimean Tatars seeking to reestablish a former political administrative unit (Crimean Tatar Autonomous Oblast, abolished in 1944) ▲