

25X1

25X1

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

20 December 1990

Republic-level Territorial Conflicts In the USSR



25X1

Summary

Territorial disputes based on past borders or on ethnic factors are surfacing in all fifteen republics of the USSR as ethnic balkanization accelerates and the center's ability to maintain discipline erodes. While most republic governments have soft-pedalled ethnic disputes over boundaries, intractable disputes--such as the status of Nagorno-Karabakh--and demands by ethnic groups such as the Russians and Gagauz in Moldova for sovereignty over the territory they inhabit are likely by ethnic groups such as the Russians and Gagauz in Moldova for sovereignty over the territory they inhabit are likely to persist. In the eyes of central authorities, such disputes serve to emphasize the republics the dangerous of striking off on their own, efforts by minority groups to establish their own; administrative units or to break away from republics have slowed or complicated independence drives in some republics. On the other hand, violence accompanying such disputes could require additional costly military intervention and could also increase the number of refugees in the USSR. The possibility that republics will involve themselves in international border issues probably also is unsettling to Moscow. The consequences of border disputes--such as possible appeals for refugee aid--are likely to be more important to the United States than the conflicts themselves, although the United States will probably be asked to acknowledge Lithuania's current borders.



25X1
25X1

_____ 

25X1

This memorandum was prepared by  the Office of Soviet Analysis. Information available as of 20 December 1990 was used in its preparation. Comments and questions are welcome and may be directed to Chief, Internal Politics Division 

25X1

25X1

SOV M ##-#####

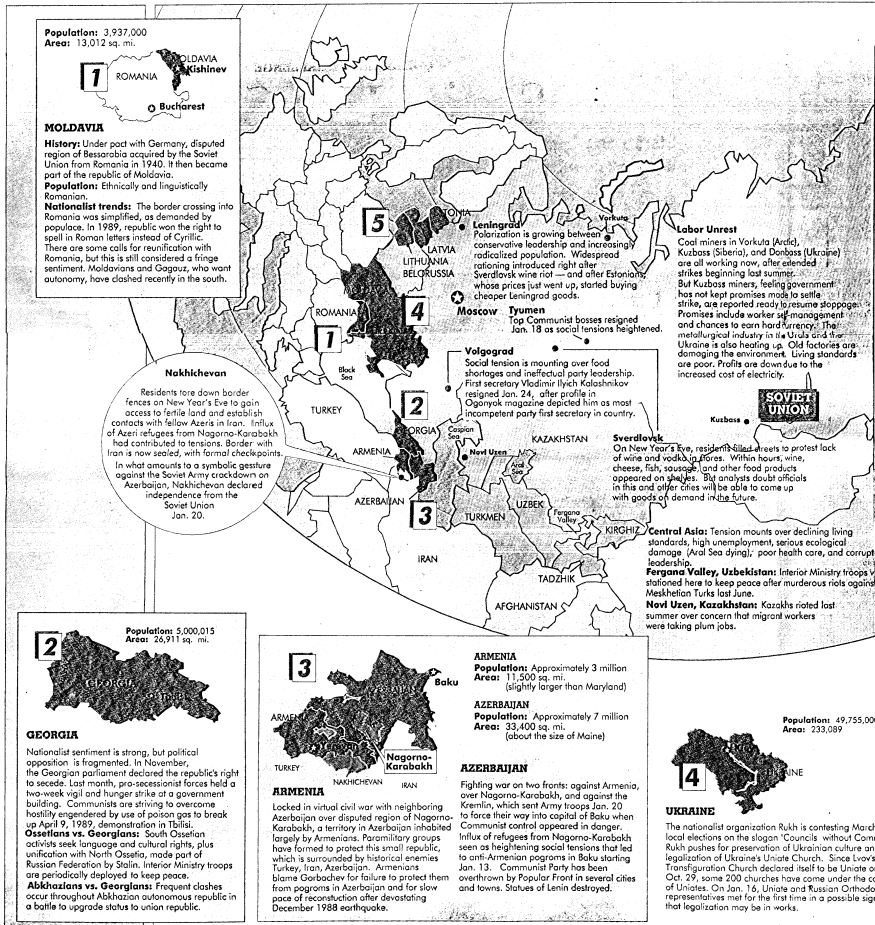


25X1



CONFIDENTIAL

25X1



GORBACHEV'S CHALLENGE

Soviet Hot Spots

Ethnic unrest and popular dissatisfaction over a declining economy continue to spell trouble for Moscow — Baltic republics to the west call for independence, Armenia and Azerbaijan to the south fight over rival claims to territory, and the threat of disruptive strikes looms

By Linda Feldmann
Staff writer of The Christian Science Monitor
MOSCOW

FOR Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, crisis has overlapped crisis in the first weeks of 1990. On Dec. 31, the Axioms of the autonomous republic of Nagorno-Karabakh began tearing down border fences with Iran — an act unprecedented in Soviet history. Local chapters of the Azerbaijan Popular Front deposed Communist leaders in several cities. By mid-January, long-brewing tensions between Armenia and the neighboring republic of Armenia escalated to a point of virtual civil war, after Azeris killed dozens of Armenians in Baku, Azerbaijan's capital, and sent thousands fleeing.

And when the Kremlin feared that Azerbaijan's nationalist Popular Front was set to take control of Baku, it sent thousands of troops to reassert Soviet power. Now Azerbaijan's parliament is talking of secession. As civil war loomed in the Transcaucasus, the Soviet leader and other Politburo members were on a mission to the rebellious Baltic republic of Lithuania, which is in the midst of its own bloodless revolution to reestablish its prewar nationhood. Mr. Gorbachev's visit, sparked by the Lithuanian Communist Party's decision in December to break away from Moscow's control, failed to dampen the Lithuanians' enthusiasm. All around the Soviet Union, local leaders are losing their authority. In the last two weeks, six regional party bosses have been forced to resign. In all three Baltic republics, pro-independence movements look set to take control of local councils in elections to be held in the next two months. The Soviet leader also faces long-simmering dissatisfaction over the declining standard of living. When popular discontent over food and alcohol shortages has reached a boiling point — such as in Sverdlovsk on New Year's Eve — people have taken to the streets. Labor unrest threatens to reappear, as workers claim that government promises made to negotiate an end to last year's dramatic coal strikes have not been fulfilled. The issue of official privilege has also ignited passions. For example, there's the tale of the regional executive committee official in Chernogov, Ukraine, whose traffic mishap Jan. 6 led to his firing and expulsion from the party. It seems the townspeople who gathered at Valery Zaitka's accident discovered meat and other rarities in the trunk of his car. The angry crowd dragged the car to the front of the regional party committee building and held a spontaneous demonstration. For the people, this was the final outrage. Soon thereafter, a string of party officials, including the first secretary, were fired. Some analysts suggest that angry masses demanding reform are exactly what Gorbachev needs to push perestroika (restructuring) along. And that the ouster of local Communist Party officials left over from "the years of stagnation" (Leonid Brezhnev's rule) is no great loss. But as Gorbachev heads into a key meeting of the party Central Committee Feb. 3 and 6, the question remains whether he'll be able to contain the surge in popular aspirations released by his own reform policies.

Central Asia: Tension mounts over declining living standards, high unemployment, serious ecological damage (Aral Sea drying), poor health care, and corrupt leadership.
Fergana Valley, Uzbekistan: Interior Ministry troops were stationed here to keep peace after murderous riots against Meshketian Turks last June.
Novi Uzen, Kazakhstan: Kazakhs rioted last summer over concern that migrant workers were taking plum jobs.

ESTONIA
History: Independent nation from 1918 to 1940. Hitler-Stalin Pact of August 1939 led to annexation by the Soviet Union.
Population: 80 percent Estonian, 30 percent Russian, 10 percent other.
Drive for independence: Parliament is expected soon to eliminate Communist Party's constitutional guarantee on power, thus formally recognizing the existing multiparty system. Some 20 different political parties are active, including three social democratic movements, which are gaining popularity.
Drive for independence: Estonia expected to be first to introduce its own currency. Residency requirements for voting thought discriminatory by non-Estonian population led to strikes last year.

LATVIA
History: Independent nation from 1918 to 1940. Hitler-Stalin Pact of August 1939 led to annexation by the Soviet Union.
Population: 52 percent Latvian, 48 percent Soviet and other.
Drive for independence: Last month parliament canceled the Communist Party's leading role. The Popular Front, a progressive multi-ethnic coalition, won a majority of seats in December elections to local councils. The front is actively working toward an independent Latvia.

LITHUANIA
History: Independent nation from 1918 to 1940. Hitler-Stalin Pact of August 1939 led to annexation by Soviet Union.
Population: 80 percent Lithuanian, 10 percent Russian, 7 percent Polish.
Drive for independence: Gorbachev's recent visit to republic failed to dampen the desire of a sizable majority to reestablish statehood, following the decision by the republic's Communist Party to declare independence from Communist Party of Soviet Union. During the visit, 300,000 people rallied peacefully. Moscow's plan for a "free on secession" is seen largely as a device to hinder the independence drive.

Graphics by Shirley Horn - Staff