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# Unrest in the Caucasus and the Challenge of Nationalism

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A Research Paper

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August 1988

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# Unrest in the Caucasus and the Challenge of Nationalism

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A Research Paper

This paper was prepared by [redacted] Office  
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## Unrest in the Caucasus and the Challenge of Nationalism

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### Summary

Information available  
as of 25 July 1988  
was used in this report.

This year's continuing unrest in the Caucasus is the most extreme example of the nationality tensions that have surfaced under *glasnost*. Soviet difficulty in stabilizing the situation reflects the strength of nationalism, the limits of Moscow's control over its various republics, and divisions within the leadership on the merits of accommodating long-suppressed regional aspirations. The Caucasus unrest has also become a lightning rod for conservative opposition to Gorbachev, whose Politburo critics have tried to exploit the conflagration for political purposes.

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Violent unrest in the Caucasus region has deep roots:

- Enmity between Armenian and Azeri factions has existed for hundreds of years, and the 1920s settlement subordinating Nagorno-Karabakh—Armenia's cultural and religious center—to the Azerbaijan Republic has been a continual, albeit long-muted, source of Armenian frustration and concern.
- Azeri animosity toward the Armenians has been intensified by political, economic, and demographic trends that have adversely affected the political status of Azeris and increased the gap in living standards between Azerbaijan and Armenia. In particular, the rapid expansion of Azerbaijan's young adult population has put enormous strain on the republic's capacity to provide adequate jobs, housing, and education. Azeri frustration has found an outlet in attacks on Armenians.

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While *glasnost* was the catalyst that brought these tensions to the fore, the subsequent train of events can be attributed to Moscow's vacillation on the central issue of reunifying Nagorno-Karabakh with Armenia:

- Moscow's initial failure to discourage Armenian aspirations led Armenian nationalists to press their demands; its subsequent hard line—by dashing heightened expectations—radicalized the movement. Widespread civil disobedience erupted, with control over the protests passing into the hands of more outspoken and uncompromising protest organizers.
- Subsequent Soviet steps—economic and nationalistic concessions to defuse irredentist demands, a strong military presence to discourage violent demonstrations, leadership changes to regain control over republic party activities—were only partly successful.

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- By mid-June, Armenian and Azerbaijan party organizations aligned themselves with their ethnic constituents, when the two republic soviets formally took diametrically opposed positions on the territorial issue.

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Moscow's fence sitting has reflected a division within the Politburo on the issue of how to handle nationality problems generally, and the situation in the Caucasus in particular. The conservatives, led by "Second Secretary" Ligachev and KGB Chief Chebrikov have favored a hard line on nationalistic aspirations, including maintaining the status quo in the Caucasus. They have voiced concern that Gorbachev's reforms could undermine political control in the republics, a view probably shared by many lower-level party leaders.

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Gorbachev probably believes that regime tolerance of greater ethnic diversity and regional autonomy would result in greater commitment of the non-Russian population to his broader programs of economic and political revitalization. He and his reform allies assert that the relative insensitivity of the conservatives has been a major factor heightening ethnic tensions. Ligachev, in particular, may be faulted for insensitivity to ethnic concerns. In addition to taking a hard line in the Caucasus crisis, he reportedly had a hand in replacing the Kazakh party boss with a Russian, a move that led to the Kazakh riots in late 1986.

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In retrospect, Gorbachev may have miscalculated the impact of glasnost. His actions and speeches during the past years suggest he may have been unduly optimistic that diverse interests of national groups can be accommodated and reconciled within the framework of the Soviet unitary state. Glasnost has led to an expanded discussion by minorities of legal, economic, and cultural rights, as well as a greater public discourse on the past "wrongs" perpetrated against them. Since the beginning of the year there have been major nationalist demonstrations in nine of the 15 republics and numerous smaller incidents elsewhere. Gorbachev has now had time to see the aggressively independent form nationalistic aspirations have taken; while he does not want to crush the spirit of these movements, he cannot be confident of the regime's ability to control their direction.

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Despite the protracted tussle within the Politburo over how to handle the situation in the Caucasus, the leadership has now acted decisively in rejecting the demand of Nagorno-Karabakh to secede from Azerbaijan. The Supreme Soviet Presidium on 18 July labeled this proposal both “unconstitutional” and “undesirable.” The regime is using a large-scale military and police presence to reestablish order and has sent a Central Committee representative to Nagorno-Karabakh to put the oblast under Moscow’s de facto direct control, at least temporarily. [ ]

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While instigating this crackdown, Moscow also appears to be groping toward a long-term plan that just might prove acceptable to both sides. This would be some new administrative arrangement whereby Nagorno-Karabakh is not transferred to Armenia but is given some degree of genuine autonomy in Azerbaijan, perhaps accompanied by some measures to give national groups living outside their national “homelands” expanded cultural and economic rights. The party leadership clearly prefers to place changes in Nagorno-Karabakh’s status in the broader context of changes in nationality policy in general. [ ]

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A major problem Gorbachev faces is that working out the details of this plan may take some time—requiring endorsement by a Central Committee plenum and probably approval of constitutional amendments by the Supreme Soviet. With passions at fever pitch, it has been difficult to sell the plan even to those concerned parties who would in calmer times be amenable to compromise. [ ]

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Gorbachev has succeeded for now in bringing the region back to a relatively normal state of affairs, but if order unravels again he will become more vulnerable to conservative criticism and challenges to his leadership. Perhaps more important, a regime failure to maintain control in the Caucasus might embolden nationalists in other republics and raise serious problems for regime stability. Even if Moscow placates the Armenians by making some further concessions, this precedent could also stimulate other already restive minorities to press their demands more aggressively and set the stage for communal violence in Azerbaijan. [ ]

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## Unrest in the Caucasus and the Challenge of Nationalism

### Introduction

Minority resentment has been simmering for decades in the multinational Soviet state, but *glasnost* has permitted it to surface. Massive demonstrations and communal violence in Armenia and Azerbaijan have presented General Secretary Gorbachev with his most explosive test since taking office three years ago. They constitute the largest, most violent, and most protracted unrest in the Soviet Union since Stalin's death—eclipsing Georgian riots in 1956, strikes in Novocherkassk in 1962, and nationalist riots in several Kazakh cities in 1986.

The unrest in the Caucasus is the most extreme example of nationality tensions throughout the USSR that could jeopardize Gorbachev's efforts to revitalize the Soviet system through economic and political reforms. Throughout Soviet history, regime concern to maintain Russian hegemony over non-Russian areas has been a major impediment to the kind of liberalization Gorbachev advocates. Soviet leaders have feared that relaxing censorship—*glasnost*—or opening up the political system at lower levels—“democratization”—would unleash separatist tendencies of disgruntled minorities. Soviet nationality policy was founded on the co-optation and conciliation of national minority elites by Moscow, thus preventing any convergence of elite and popular interests in non-Russian areas. But *glasnost* and “democratization” have created conditions for these two groups to coalesce in a powerful anti-Moscow lobby.

### Armenian-Azeri Enmity in Historical Perspective

Armenian-Azeri animosities go back hundreds of years and are deeply rooted in religious and ethnic tensions. Armenians are fiercely loyal to their Orthodox church—they adopted Christianity in the fourth century, nearly 700 years before the Russians. The Azeris are predominantly Shi'ite Muslims who migrated to the region in the 12th century. The two

groups have lived in close and uneasy proximity to each other ever since, with both groups claiming the contested Nagorno-Karabakh region. Karabakh through the centuries remained semiautonomous under the rule of Armenian princes even when the rest of Armenia was under Persian and Turkish tutelage. Armenians also consider the region a cultural center, and it is the native land of many Azerbaijani writers and composers.

In 1828 the Russian Empire annexed the eastern regions of Armenia—the area of the current Soviet republic—that had been under Persian control since 1639. After centuries of perceived cultural discrimination and economic backwardness, the Christian Armenians remaining under Turkish control looked to Russia's Orthodox czars for protection from the Moslem Turks and Persians throughout the 19th century. Relations with the Turks worsened after the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78 and, at the turn of century, thousands of Armenians fled the pogroms in Turkey. Many accounts contend that Turkey in 1915 deported the entire Armenian population because it feared Armenian collusion with Russia, with which Turkey had been at war since August 1914. Armenians believe that 1.5 million of their countrymen were killed. Many Armenians reportedly fled to the area under Russian control, while others scattered throughout the Middle East, to Europe, or the Americas.

When the Czarist Empire collapsed in 1917, both Armenia and Azerbaijan existed for two years as independent republics. However, their mutual hatred made it easier for the Red Army to establish Soviet hegemony in the Caucasus in 1920, when both republics were incorporated into the USSR. Armenians, in particular, fearful of Turkey and seeing union with Russia as a “lesser evil,” did little to resist incorporation into the USSR.

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The Bolshevik takeover left Azerbaijan in control of Karabakh. But the Armenians regarded it as rightfully theirs both because of ethnic composition (overwhelmingly Armenian) and because of its special place in their national history. At first, Moscow awarded Karabakh to the Armenians, but when Turkey expressed opposition to a large Armenian republic on its borders, Lenin in 1921 agreed to reduce the size of Armenia. In 1923, Stalin shifted Karabakh (renamed Nagorno-Karabakh) and Nakhichevan'—another disputed territory—back to Azerbaijan. Nagorno-Karabakh was given the status of an autonomous oblast (AO) within Azerbaijan. (C NF)

Since that time, irredentist sentiment has periodically surfaced among Armenians. For decades nearly every party meeting and public gathering in Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh has reportedly actively but quietly pressed for reunification of the oblast with Armenia:

- Armenian nationalism started to mount in the mid-1960s after a massive demonstration of the 50th anniversary of the alleged Turkish "massacres." The Yerevan-based underground "National Unification Party," founded in 1966, clandestinely broadcast a radio appeal and passed out leaflets in 1969 calling for the return of Nagorno-Karabakh. The party's leaders were jailed during 1968 and 1969, but apparently were able to circulate nationalist manifestos from prison.

- In the 1970s, there were reportedly frequent clashes between Armenians and Azeris in areas where the borders of the two republics joined, and even some pitched battles between Armenian nationalists and Azeri police. At least 15 advocates of secession were arrested in 1974. When an Azeri accused of murdering an Armenian youth in Nagorno-Karabakh received a light sentence in 1974, Armenians reportedly killed the judge and the accused.

Ethnic tensions have been exacerbated by demographic pressures (see inset). During 1923-79 the number of Armenians in the region fell from 94 percent to 76 percent, and the number of Azeris rose to 23 percent (see table 1). Azeris, who have a high birthrate, have moved to Armenian agricultural areas, including

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### ***Demographic Trends Strengthen Ethnic Identity of Azeris and Armenians***

*Azeris are the least migratory of the Soviet Turkic people. In 1979, 86 percent of Azeris lived in Azerbaijan. Demographic shifts in Azerbaijan reflect a general process of consolidation of Soviet minority nationalities in their home republics over the last generation, thus dramatically reducing the extent of ethnic mixing in Soviet republics. Non-Muslim communities in Azerbaijan—particularly Russians and Armenians—have been rapidly shrinking. Between 1959 and 1979, there has been a steady migration of these groups out of Azerbaijan. The percentage of the indigenous population in Azerbaijan has increased dramatically from 68 percent in 1959 to 78 percent in 1979 as a result of high Azeri birthrates and out-migration. This ethnic consolidation has strengthened national feeling among Azeris.*

*A similar consolidation has taken place in Armenia. Armenians leaving Azerbaijan—as well as other regions—are moving into Armenia. The rate of increase of ethnic Armenians in Armenia between 1959 and 1970 has been significantly higher than their general increase in the Soviet Union as a whole: 42.3 percent versus 27.7 percent. Between 1970 and 1979 the corresponding increases were 23.4 percent (in Armenia) and 16.6 percent (in the Soviet Union).*

Nagorno-Karabakh, while Armenians have been migrating to Yerevan and other urban regions. Armenians apparently feared that Azeri immigration would lead to Azeri consolidation of control in Nagorno-Karabakh, a process that went on in Nakhichevan' between 1914 and 1979. Nakhichevan' was 52 percent Armenian in 1914, according to an Armenian samizdat document, and the remaining 48 percent was composed of Kurds, Persians, and Azeris. By 1979 Nakhichevan' was only 1.4 percent Armenian, and the Azeri population had risen to 94 percent. Many Armenians believe these trends reflected a conscious Azeri policy to drive out other nationalities and to force assimilation on those who remained.

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**Table 1**  
**Population by Nationality of Nagorno-Karabakh**  
**AO and Nakhichevan' ASSR**

	1959		1970		1979	
	Population	Percent of Total	Population	Percent of Total	Population	Percent of Total
<b>Nagorno-Karabakh</b>						
Azeris	17,995	13.8	27,179	18.1	37,264	23.0
Armenians	110,053	84.4	121,068	80.5	123,076	75.9
Russians	1,790	1.4	1,310	0.9	1,265	0.8
<b>Nakhichevan'</b>						
Azeris	127,508	90.2	189,679	92.3	229,968	94.0
Armenians	9,519	6.7	5,828	2.9	3,406	1.4
Russians	3,161	2.2	3,919	1.9	3,807	1.6

Note: Percentages do not add to 100 because of a minute distribution of other nationalities in these two areas.

#### Development of the Crisis in the Caucasus

The impact of Gorbachev's reform policies of *glasnost* and *perestroika* was initially felt in discontent over longstanding national and environmental concerns:

- In 1986 a group of 350 Armenian intellectuals sent an open letter to Gorbachev protesting pollution from a chemical plant and "leaks" from a nuclear power plant.
- On 17 October 1987, several republic and local party officials joined about 2,000 environmental demonstrators protesting pollution in Yerevan.
- Public protests apparently stopped further nuclear power expansion in Armenia, according to an official announcement made in December 1987.<sup>1</sup>

At the same time, *glasnost* made it easier to express Armenian irredentist sentiment. A petition reportedly circulating among civil servants in several government offices in Yerevan addressed the problems of traditionally Armenian areas that were currently under Georgian, Turkish, and Azerbaijan control. In 1986, Igor Muradyan, a young economist in Yerevan, formed a committee to promote the reunification of

the Nagorno-Karabakh and Nakhichevan' with Armenia. By August 1987 the group had reportedly gathered 75,000 signatures. On 18 October—one day after the large environmental protest—an estimated 1,000 people in Yerevan protested "incidents" in Nagorno-Karabakh, where Armenians reportedly clashed with the Azerbaijan KGB. According to a Western press account, Muradyan's group met with a low-level official in Moscow in November. In early January 1988, another delegation met with Petr Demichev, First Deputy Chairman of the USSR Supreme Soviet Presidium, who reportedly said he considered their demands "neither anti-Soviet nor nationalistic." A third delegation met with V. Mikhaylov, director of the Central Committee subdepartment for nationality relations, in early February and reportedly received an even warmer reception. Abel Aganbegyan, an Armenian who is a senior Gorbachev economic adviser, told Armenians abroad in late 1987 that the way was being paved for economic and possibly political reunification.

#### Armenian Expectations Build Up

These signals of encouragement from officials in Moscow apparently convinced Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh AO that Moscow was willing to accede

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to their desires, a perception that gave momentum to the movement for reunification with Armenia. Posters and open letters supporting the switch appeared in the Nagorno-Karabakh capital, Stepanakert, on 11 February 1988, and public meetings began on 13 February. On 20 February, 110 Armenian deputies of the Nagorno-Karabakh soviet, in the absence of the 30 Azeri deputies, passed a resolution asking Moscow to redraw the boundaries. Demonstrations demanding union with Armenia were also mounted in Nakhichevan' and Agdam, the region adjacent to Nagorno-Karabakh. [ ]

The Nagorno-Karabakh demand fell on fertile ground in Armenia. In Yerevan, where demonstrations were already growing over the construction of a new chemical plant near the capital, denunciations of "environmental genocide" quickly mingled with claims that "Karabakh is ours." [ ]

#### **The Politburo's Initial Hard Line Backfires**

After news of the escalating unrest reached Moscow, where a Central Committee plenum was in progress, Politburo candidate members Georgiy Razumovskiy and Demichev, with responsibilities for party organizational work and cultural policy respectively, hastily flew to Nagorno-Karabakh on 20 February. They were followed by Politburo candidate members Vladimir Dolgikh and Anatoliy Luk'yanov, responsible for energy and internal security organs respectively, who went to Yerevan on the 23rd. [ ]

The arrival of Razumovskiy and Demichev coincided with the Politburo's adoption on 21 February of a hard line at odds with the earlier positive feedback the Armenians thought they had been given. Perhaps alarmed by the growing ground swell of support in Yerevan for union of Nagorno-Karabakh with Armenia, the Politburo apparently hoped to stem the tide with a firm rejection. Armenian party leader Demirchyan confirmed on Armenian television on 22 February that the Central Committee had issued a resolution turning down the Armenian nationalist demands, saying that a revision of the territorial boundaries in the region would be "contrary to the interests" of both Armenians and Azeris. The official TASS announcement of Moscow's decision, published on 23 February,

criticized disturbances incited by "extremism" and called on Armenian and Azerbaijan republic party organizations to safeguard order. [ ]

Moscow apparently also assumed a personnel shakeup would help. On the same day the Central Committee decree was announced, Azerbaijan party leader Bagirov ordered the removal of Boris Kevorkov, the Nagorno-Karabakh party chief since 1976. [ ]

[ ] the party committee initially balked, voting overwhelmingly for reunion with Armenia and retention of Kevorkov. Razumovskiy, however, overruled the committee and dictated Kevorkov's replacement by Genrikh Pogosyan, another ethnic Armenian but one who Moscow presumably hoped would be more pliable. While temporarily acceding to this pressure, the Nagorno-Karabakh party committee, at a plenum held on 17 March, adopted a resolution again calling for the incorporation of the oblast into Armenia. [ ]

The harsh Central Committee decree, after earlier tolerance, was the spark that ignited widespread communal violence in Nagorno-Karabakh. It apparently led to a de facto general strike in the oblast and to violence there and in neighboring regions. Rumors of casualties and deaths quickly reached Yerevan and were confirmed on Armenian television by Dolgikh on 23 February. A videotape reportedly made by Hare Krishnas at this time shows large crowds in Stepanakert jeering Demichev and local leaders who appealed for calm. [ ]

The Central Committee decree also radicalized the protests in Yerevan. Observers likened the increasingly massive and unprecedented demonstrations there to the Polish Solidarity demonstrations in the Gdansk shipyards in 1980. The size of the crowds in Yerevan grew to close to a million, with the uninhibited influx of thousands from throughout the republic. Emotions ran high, and one prominent representative from Nagorno-Karabakh—the head of its dramatic theater—called for a "national liberation movement." Demonstrators carried banners admonishing that "self-determination is not extremism"—a reference to the Central Committee decree—and that "Karabakh

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is a test of *perestroyka*.” Workers at Armenian television and radio stations reportedly went on strike to protest “unobjective” reporting and ran several programs strongly supporting Nagorno-Karabakh’s demands. They carried an appeal by the head of the Armenian Apostolic Church, Vazgen I, who reported that he had sent a telegram to Gorbachev calling the demands “natural, legal, and constitutional.”

Having initially supported the Politburo’s hard line—at least publicly—party leaders in Armenia appeared to have little authority over the demonstrators. Protest organizers increasingly took charge of events, imposing their own discipline on the demonstrations. The protest resulted in the creation of a skeleton organization in Yerevan—the Karabakh Committee—drawing heavily on those involved in the earlier protests and prominent intellectuals with nationalist views (see appendix A).



Figure 2. Catholicos Vazgen I blesses Armenian worshipers after church services in Yerevan, Armenia’s capital.

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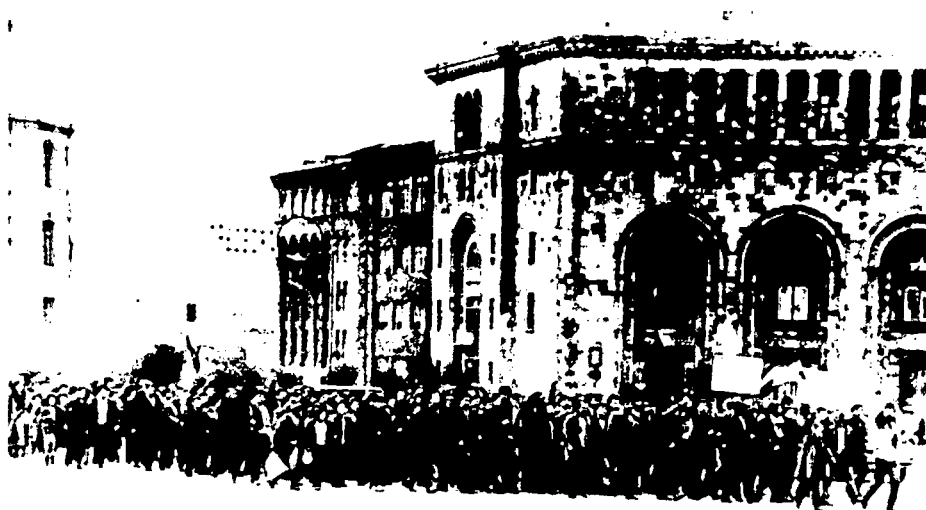
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*Figure 4. Protesting Armenians  
march through Lenin Square in  
Yerevan on 24 February.*

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*Figure 5. Thousands of demonstrators gather in the main square of Kirovakan, an Armenian city north of Yerevan, during a rally on 25 February protesting violence against fellow Armenians in neighboring Azerbaijan.*



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*Figure 6. Igor Muradyan, one of the leaders of the Karabakh Committee, which organized demonstrations in Armenia, speaks to an estimated crowd of a million gathered in Yerevan on 26 February.*



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### Gorbachev's Shift Toward Conciliation Brings Momentary Calm

Realizing its loss of control over the local situation, Moscow began to play for time. The Politburo team immediately accepted the suggestion by one of the protest organizers for a direct meeting with Gorbachev, who clearly wanted to head off developments that could have adverse implications for his reforms. The Armenian envoys who met Gorbachev, writers Zori Balayan and Silva Kaputikyan, said he was well briefed and assured them he wanted a "just solution." He reportedly acknowledged the peaceful nature of the demonstrations and emphasized his personal sympathy with the desire to reunite Nagorno-Karabakh with Armenia, but said the Central Committee would have to decide that issue at a special plenum. He promised to provide a "preliminary response" to the demands on 26 March 1988. [REDACTED]

On their return to Yerevan on 27 February, the Armenian envoys asked the demonstrators for patience. In a radiobroadcast, Kaputikyan called for trust in Gorbachev. "He knows about and understands our problem and wants to resolve it personally," and "we must do our utmost to ensure that no harm" is done to him. She quoted him as saying that the Central Committee had been wrong to describe the demonstrators as "extremists" and unveiled three concessions proposed by Gorbachev: greater guarantees for the Armenian language, the transmission of Armenian television to Nagorno-Karabakh, and the reconstruction of a historically important monastery in the region. These guarantees were subsequently confirmed in a 24 March Politburo decision. In a further effort to lessen tensions, Gorbachev made a public appeal, which was read over Armenian and Azerbaijan media on 26 February. In it, he eschewed the charge of "extremism" and promised a fair hearing once "passions cooled." Armenian party leader Karen Demirchyan also appealed for calm and strongly implied a party commission would be set up to investigate the demands. [REDACTED]

Moscow's strategy worked. The organizing committee agreed to a month's suspension of demonstrations and to make up for the weeklong work stoppage. Although not all demonstrators were enthusiastic about these

calls, by the evening of 27 February organizers had persuaded nearly everyone in Yerevan to return to work. [REDACTED]

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### Communal Violence Erupts in Azerbaijan

Just as Moscow saw the situation stabilizing in Yerevan, events took a dramatic turn for the worse in Azerbaijan. Communal violence that had been simmering there since 20 February burst to the surface on 27 and 28 February, when major riots broke out in Sumgait, an oil center of 220,000, close to Baku. [REDACTED]

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**The Sumgait Riots.** Public disclosure by a top Soviet prosecutor on 27 February on Baku radio that two Azeri youths were killed in a rayon adjoining Nagorno-Karabakh apparently provided the match to ignite the disturbances. Officials later confirmed that the violence in Sumgait was in fact a pogrom directed by the Azeris against the city's 16,000 to 20,000 Armenians. According to TASS, 32 people were killed (26 Armenians and six Azeris) and 197 injured, including more than 100 policemen; rioters committed 12 rapes and more than 100 robberies; 80 were arrested. [REDACTED] in contrast, reported over 500 dead, including several Russians.<sup>2</sup> [REDACTED]

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Armenians contacted in Sumgait and others arriving in Moscow say gangs of Azeris stormed through the city, hunting down and killing Armenians or their Azeri protectors. Small groups broke into apartments and stopped cars, demanding to see the resident's documents. If an Armenian was discovered, he was knifed or worse. In an emotional scene outside Moscow's Armenian church on 8 March, a weeping elderly man told a crowd of 300 Armenians that members of their community in Sumgait and surrounding villages had been taken to safety to large

<sup>2</sup> [REDACTED] a group called the Children of Islam played a key role in organizing the attacks. The existence of many underground organizations connected with the Sufi brotherhood—an extremist fundamentalist sect—makes it plausible that a group like the Children of Islam could have been established, especially given the close connection between nationalism and religion in Azerbaijan. [REDACTED]

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official buildings guarded by troops. Another spoke of pillage, rape, and murder directed against Armenians. According to one widely circulating story, initially coming from an Armenian in Sumgait who talked by phone to a Western press service, a family of seven was killed in the riots. Others reported killings of pregnant women and babies, and flaying people alive. Some of these charges, not reported in Soviet media, have been acknowledged by Soviet officials in interviews with Western reporters. [redacted]

**Background of Azeri Frustrations Over Falling Status.** The rioting in Sumgait was touched off by the upsurge of Armenian protest over Nagorno-Karabakh, but was conditioned by an Azeri sense of victimization that had been building up for some time. While the Azeri population has grown rapidly over the last decade, Moscow investment policy has increasingly concentrated on modernizing enterprises in the European parts of the country rather than in less-developed areas like Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan also experienced declining investments in its oil industry as a result of the priority given to development of the energy sector in western Siberia. Living standards declined in Azerbaijan, and the gap between real per capita consumption in Azerbaijan and Armenia grew. [redacted]

Economic dissatisfaction was further aggravated by dramatic population growth particularly in the age group seeking employment. In the last decade Azerbaijan has experienced a youth bulge (20 percent or more of the population in the 15- to 24-year-old age group), which could not be easily absorbed (see table 2). [redacted]

This problem was compounded by the general lack of labor mobility. Azeri youth, even when well trained, showed little inclination to move to labor-short Slavic regions. According to Soviet media, there are 250,000 people in Azerbaijan who are "not employed in social production"; one-fourth of these live in the city of Baku. These economic problems were particularly [redacted]

**Table 2**  
**Azerbaijan Youth Bulge**

Percent

	Ages 15-24	Ages 15-29
1970	15.5	19.7
1975	21.0	26.4
1980	24.1	31.7
1985	22.2	32.2

noticeable in Sumgait—focal point of the rioting—where many Azeri youth lived in squalid, barracks-like conditions.<sup>4</sup> [redacted]

At the same time, Azerbaijan's political influence in Moscow had dwindled. The career of its native son, Geydar Aliyev—who had been made USSR First Deputy Premier and CPSU full Politburo member in 1982—took a downturn under Gorbachev. He was suddenly retired in October 1987, following sharp media and official charges of widespread corruption in Azerbaijan during his tenure as republic party boss from 1969 to 1982. Aliyev's successor, Bagirov, had also come under fire from Moscow for complacency toward corruption and nepotism. Another native son, Nikolay Baybakov—an ethnic Russian—was removed in 1985 from his post as chairman of the USSR State Planning Committee (Gosplan), where he had great influence on resource allocation. [redacted]

These developments, which contrasted with the continued prominence of Armenians in high political positions, were probably read by Azeris as part of a deliberate attempt to reduce Azerbaijan's political

<sup>4</sup> According to the Soviet media, Sumgait is called Komsomol'sk-on-the-Caspian, the "City of Youth." Housing shortages are acute with more than 10,000 living in "shantytowns" without water, sanitation, or gas. Nearly 18,000 are on waiting lists for apartments, but it could take up to 15 years to get one. Press reporting indicates an annual influx of 10,000 people—mostly young—to Baku and vicinity hoping for higher paying positions and a better way of life, but many end up in menial jobs. [redacted]

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clout. Thus, the Azeris' belief that the Russians were siding with the Armenians, with whom they share religious and cultural ties, was reinforced. [ ]

#### The Regime Tries To Dampen the Fire

The Sumgait riots apparently reinforced already existing concerns in Moscow about giving in to the territorial demands. The leadership, however, continued to temporize on this issue. The Central Committee convened a special conference on 9 March—in keeping with Gorbachev's promise to the demonstrators—and instructed the Secretariat to make recommendations on the dispute. On 18 March, while Gorbachev was returning from Yugoslavia, "Second Secretary" Yegor Ligachev presided at a meeting with Azeri and Armenian intellectuals and separately met a delegation from Nagorno-Karabakh. The Secretariat apparently focused on problems in economics, social, and "spiritual life" without addressing the territorial demand. [ ]

Events in late March, however, made clear that the leadership was moving toward a rejection of Armenian demands for the return of Nagorno-Karabakh. A harsh *Pravda* article on 21 March called the idea of reunification "antisocialist" and inspired by "foreign radio voices." In a clearly orchestrated move, the USSR Supreme Soviet responded on 23 March to calls for law and order from Supreme Soviets in all the other republics. The next day, the Politburo unveiled its package of economic and cultural concessions designed to win over Armenian moderates. It called for increased spending on housing and social infrastructure; provisions for transmission of Armenian television throughout the AO; restoration of historic and cultural sites; and increased investment in industry, agriculture, and road construction; but failed to provide a formal decision on the territorial issue. [ ]

Along with these cultural and economic concessions, the regime took steps to control if not prevent further unrest:

- It disbanded the organizing committees in Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh on 24 March—arresting several protest leaders, notably former political prisoner Paruir Ayrikyan—and banned demonstrations in Armenia and Azerbaijan.

In the face of the large show of force, the activists called off the demonstrations planned for the 26th and called a stay-at-home strike. Their appeal was only partially successful in Yerevan and with the exception of several small demonstrations and a large peaceful march on 24 April, the city remained calm and the workers on the job until mid-May. Meanwhile, in Nagorno-Karabakh a general strike began on 25 March, paralyzing all industry in Stepanakert and the region, but it petered out on 5 April. Thus, by combining a massive display of force with limited concessions, Moscow brought the unrest in Armenia and Azerbaijan under temporary control, but failure to resolve the critical territorial issue virtually guaranteed that ethnic tensions would surface again. [ ]

#### May Demonstrations Lead to an Impasse

The trial of 80 Azeris for the March 1988 killings in Sumgait was the catalyst for the May disturbances. When the first Azeri was convicted on 16 May and sentenced to 15 years hard labor, both sides went to the streets, with 100,000 Armenians turning out in Yerevan to protest that the court had been too lenient, and roughly an equal number of Azeris in Baku protesting that it had been too harsh. Baku's appointment of an Azeri as prosecutor in Nagorno-Karabakh also sparked new strikes and demonstrations there in early May. [ ]

The continued detention of Ayrikyan on 15 May also became a focal point for demonstrations in Yerevan. Communal violence on 11 May in the Armenian town of Ararat, resulting in injuries and the torching of an Azeri home, was a contributing factor in Baku demonstrations. The demonstrations in Baku were also tinged with violence and with the expression of anti-Russian as well as anti-Armenian sentiment. Riots reportedly broke store fronts and burned several cars. Protesting youths carried signs demanding "Death to Armenians and Russians" and called for the deportation of all Armenians, Jews, and Russians from Azerbaijan. [ ]

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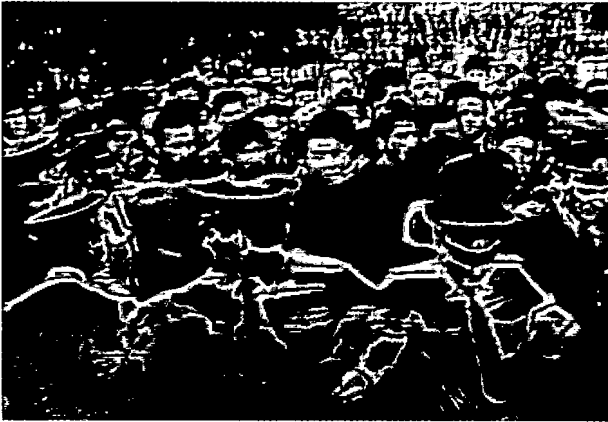


Figure 9. Soviet newscast *Vremya* showed police holding back angry Armenian crowds in mid-May in a resurgence of unrest sparked by new communal violence and the Sumgait trials.

**Purging the Republic Party Leaders.** Moscow reacted to the renewal of disorders by simultaneously ousting Armenian First Secretary Demirchyan and his Azerbaijan counterpart, Kyamran Bagirov. On 21 May, republic party plenums in Azerbaijan and Armenia, presided over respectively by Politburo members Ligachev and Aleksandr Yakovlev, removed the two leaders. By replacing both leaders at the same time—giving them honorable retirements for “reasons of health”—and replacing them with natives rather than Russians, the central leadership hoped to appear evenhanded and to avoid a repetition of the December 1986 riots in Kazakhstan after the appointment of a Russian as party boss.

The change in leadership, however, had little impact. A general strike in Stepanakert that began on 23 May continued for three weeks, despite Ligachev’s reported admonition to Azerbaijan party officials to bring a halt to the disturbances by the end of May. Strikers, vowing “to endure until the end,” created food shortages and practically shut down the city, according to the Soviet press. Some 4,000 Azeris fled Stepanakert, fearing for their lives, and Armenian vigilantes patrolled the city against anticipated Azeri attacks.

Meanwhile, in Yerevan, the strike-organizing committee continued to function despite its official ban, and hundreds of thousands of Armenians demonstrated in late May and early June to promote their irridentist demands. Armenian officials tolerated increasingly large demonstrations in Yerevan despite the 24 March ban on public protest. Reportedly a half-million Armenians poured into the streets of Yerevan to honor a three-day strike starting 13 June to bring pressure on the Armenian Supreme Soviet, scheduled to meet that week, to vote in favor of the transfer of Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia.

In Baku, anti-Armenian riots on 10 and 11 June led to the shooting death of an Azeri policeman by an Armenian, and security forces were moved in to seal off the Armenian quarter of the city.

rioters shouted slogans and called the 80 Azeris currently on trial for killing 32 people in Sumgait “heroes.”

**Raising the Ante on the Territorial Issue.** Moscow’s continued fence-sitting on the territorial issue led the Supreme Soviets of both republics—under growing pressure from their populace—to pass resolutions supporting their respective claims on Nagorno-Karabakh:

- The Armenian Supreme Soviet voted unanimously for annexation on 15 June. The new republic leader Suren Arutyunyan, Demirchyan’s successor, addressed the session to support the decision, thus making good on the public promise he made two days earlier to a throng of a half-million Armenian demonstrators that the Supreme Soviet would take “positive” action.
- The Azerbaijan Supreme Soviet responded when it met on 17 June by voting unanimously against the transfer of the Azerbaijan region, calling Armenia’s demand for a change in the status of Nagorno-Karabakh an interference in Azerbaijan affairs. The negative vote confirmed a decision made on 13 June by the republic’s Supreme Soviet Presidium

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and was in line with assurances new party boss Abdul Vezirov, Bagirov's successor, had made to Baku demonstrators on the same day. [ ]

#### **Building to the Presidium's Resolution**

This set the stage for the discussion of nationality issues at the CPSU conference in late June. In his report to the party conference, Gorbachev strongly hinted that no territorial shift would be accepted, indicating that boundary changes were "antidemocratic." He raised the possibility of expanding the oblast's rights within the context of an overall re-appraisal of the constitutional status of "autonomous" regions and the need to show sensitivity to ethnic minorities throughout the USSR. The reaction of Azerbaijan leader Vezirov, in his speech at the conference, indicated a willingness to accept such a redefinition of oblast rights. [ ]

The Armenian populace, however, was deeply disappointed that the conference had failed to endorse the territorial shift. Nationalists in Yerevan called for an immediate open-ended general strike, which closed down most transport and factories. Moreover, several thousand demonstrators crossed a Rubicon of sorts by taking the provocative step of closing down the Yerevan airport for several days in early July. Not surprisingly, given traditional regime sensitivity to maintaining communications and transport for security reasons, 3,000 internal security troops and cadets were called in to reestablish order. They were reportedly met with a hail of rocks and bottles; one Armenian youth was shot and killed by a soldier from Moscow's security forces, and 36 citizens and police were injured in the clash. [ ]

The decision by Nagorno-Karabakh soviet on 12 July to secede from Azerbaijan further fueled tensions. Azerbaijan leaders quickly denounced the act as unconstitutional. Along with increasing violence and ongoing strikes, this action forced Moscow's hand.

On 18 July, the USSR Supreme Soviet Presidium met and for the first time definitively rejected the demand that Nagorno-Karabakh be separated from Azerbaijan. After an unusually heated and frank debate, the oblast's request for incorporation into Armenia was

#### **Creation of New Bodies To Deal With Nationality Issues**

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*Moscow's heightened attention to nationality problems is reflected in changes in party and government organizational structure. Gorbachev indicated in his speech at the party conference on 28 June, that relations between nationalities will be the purview of the Council of Nationalities of the USSR Supreme Soviet, suggesting that this body will hold regular meetings on nationality issues and wield real power in implementing decisions.*

*Additional changes include the following:*

- *Soviet officials have reported that the Central Committee has now established subdepartments—in either the party work or propaganda departments—on nationality issues in Moscow and the republics. The growing role of the Supreme Soviet was again affirmed at the 18 July session; the Council of Nationalities was tasked with organizing a commission to further investigate the Nagorno-Karabakh problem and propose solutions.* 25X1
- *[ ] the Supreme Soviet created its own Nationalities Commission last January. Similar commissions have been set up in Armenia, Azerbaijan, and several other republics.* 25X1
- *The USSR Academy of Sciences has created a new center for nationality problems within the Institute of Ethnography. At a press conference of Soviet ethnographers on 24 March, scholars confirmed that special committees were being set up at government bodies and nongovernmental organizations to ensure the rights of ethnic minorities and adequate representation in all governing bodies and other institutions.* 25X1
- *A demographer told [ ] that the commissions will be similar to the People's Commissariat for Nationality Affairs headed by Stalin in the 1920s; he also reported that "clubs" for specific nationalities may be opened in large cities. Other reports suggest a Ministry of Nationality Affairs might be created.* [ ] 25X1

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“unanimously” turned down as both “unconstitutional” and “undesirable.” In the debate, the representatives of the three affected regions stood fast on their earlier positions. The Nagorno-Karabakh party leader maintained that “secession” was the only solution; the Armenian president said his representatives have no claim on Nagorno-Karabakh but supported its right to join Armenia; and the Azerbaijan president said that Nagorno-Karabakh’s move to secede from Azerbaijan was not justified politically, economically, or legally. Gorbachev attacked the Armenians for their uncompromising stance and said that “the full force of Soviet law” would be used against extremists agitating over the irredentist issue. He implied that corrupt local officials had exploited the situation to divert attention from their shortcomings and said that the failure to act resolutely now would have “far-reaching consequences” that would threaten *perestroika*. Politburo member Lev Zaykov reminded the participants at the session of the inviolability of borders as a sovereign right of every republic, which cannot be changed without its consent. At the same time he called for criminal investigation of those “antirestructuring forces” and “corrupt clans” who played an “inflammatory” role in the unrest. [REDACTED]

While the Presidium closed off the transfer option, it did not close the door to some concessions to the Armenians. Gorbachev acknowledged that there were major problems in Nagorno-Karabakh and criticized the Azeris for their neglect of Armenian grievances.

The Presidium resolution accused the Azeris of failing to guarantee Armenian rights in Nagorno-Karabakh, proposed a Supreme Soviet commission to study the Nagorno-Karabakh problem and to look for a way to normalize the situation, and designated on 25 July a representative from the Central Committee and Supreme Soviet—Arkadiy Volskiy, head of the Secretariat’s Machine-Building Department—to “cooperate” with local officials in working out problems. [REDACTED]

### Unrest Poses Several Sharp Problems

The difficulty in resolving the upheaval in the Caucasus has been compounded by several factors: the leadership’s own division over policy; the continued alignment of Armenian and Azerbaijan party organizations with their populations even after the change in leaders and the growing polarization resulting from earlier communal violence; involvement of foreign supporters on both sides; and concern about spillover of protest into other national republics. [REDACTED]

### Leadership Differences

One of the most serious obstacles to successfully surmounting the crisis has been a cleavage within the leadership over how best to deal with the situation. Both reformers and conservatives are attempting to exploit the issue for their own political ends, as reflected in the sharply differing positions appearing in Soviet media. [REDACTED]

Conservatives, led by ideology secretary Ligachev and KGB chief Chebrikov, have believed from the outset that there should be no change in territorial status. On a broader plane, they have voiced concern that *glasnost* and “democratization” could lead to political instability in the republics, and they are undoubtedly pointing to events in the Caucasus as proof. The development of unrest in the Caucasus has provided them with ammunition in the political struggle over the scope and pace of reform. [REDACTED]

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Figure 13. An injured girl is carried on a stretcher through the crowd of about 100,000 demonstrators and a double row of Soviet riot police in Yerevan in early July.



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Figure 14. Armenians demonstrate with posters—one reading "Karabakh was, is, and will be Armenian!"—in an Armenian cemetery in Moscow on 5 July, after Soviet security troops violently broke up a strike at Yerevan airport.



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Ligachev appears to have taken advantage of the first wave of demonstrations to launch an attack on Gorbachev's reform agenda:

- [ ] Ligachev's calculation that the unrest had weakened Gorbachev politically was the impetus for his support of the scathing critique by Nina Andreyeva of *perestroyka* that appeared in *Sovetskaya Rossiya* on 13 March.<sup>5</sup>
- Circumstantial evidence points to Ligachev's sponsorship of the Politburo's initial hard line on Armenian demands in February. [ ] he played a key role in formulating the Central Committee resolution that characterized Armenian claims as "extremist." He chaired the Secretariat investigation mandated by the 9 March conference that resulted in a decision essentially to ignore the Armenian territorial demands. He allegedly has been close to Viktor Afanasyev, Chief Editor of *Pravda*, which also took a hard line on the unrest in March and blamed the West for interference. Reportedly, Ligachev was the only Politburo member to oppose the frank television documentary on recent troubles in Nagorno-Karabakh, Sumgait, and Armenia—aired in late April—which had a mildly pro-Armenian tone.
- Moreover, when Ligachev visited Baku to install Vezirov on 21 May, he reportedly promised the Azerbaijan Central Committee that the oblast would remain subordinated to Azerbaijan—two months before the Supreme Soviet endorsed this position. [ ] he may have presided over a Secretariat meeting in early June that again rejected demands to shift the region.

<sup>5</sup> On 14 March, *Sovetskaya Rossiya* published an article by a Leningrad academic, Nina Andreyeva, sharply critical of restructuring and excesses in *glasnost*. [ ]

[ ] her letter initially went to Ligachev, who turned it over to a supporter on the newspaper who then expanded it. The response came in the form of a *Pravda* editorial on 5 April—reportedly dictated by Gorbachev and Yakovlev—which attacked the Andreyeva letter as a "manifesto of the antirestructuring forces."

[ ] the *Sovetskaya Rossiya* editors and possibly Ligachev were reprimanded by the Politburo. Some reports claim Gorbachev threatened to resign, isolating Ligachev. Others claim Ligachev had supporters, including Politburo members Chebrikov, Andrey Gromyko, Mikhail Solomentsev, Vitaliy Vorotnikov, and Vladimir Shcherbitskiy. [ ]

- Ligachev on several occasions has charged the West with trying to stir up nationality problems in the USSR, and has implied that foreign intelligence centers rather than indigenous problems were to blame for ethnic unrest in the USSR. [ ]

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KGB Chief Chebrikov lined up with Ligachev. In a tough speech in April, he warned against Western security service instigation of nationalist problems in the USSR, a theme he has stressed for some time and one that in effect delegitimizes the expression of nationality grievances by labeling them a manifestation of imperialist subversion. While acknowledging that the socioeconomic situation has to be improved to resolve nationality tension, he revived the "extremist" imagery of the initial Central Committee decision in his allusions to the Armenians and dismissed the idea of territorial shifts as "antisocial." [ ]

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The concerns of Ligachev and Chebrikov are not isolated. They apparently reflect the attitudes of a large segment of the political elite:

- [ ] noted that what may be good about *glasnost* for the Russian Republic may have completely different results among non-Russians. [ ] some Central Committee members view *glasnost* as an open invitation for nationalist unrest throughout the USSR and Eastern Europe.
- Ukrainian party boss Shcherbitskiy said that regional party bosses in his republic were calling him to demand a crackdown.

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Gorbachev and his allies can respond to conservative accusations that his policies fueled the unrest with the countercharge that the relative insensitivity of the

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conservatives has been a major factor in heightening ethnic tensions. [ ] Ligachev was behind the appointment of a Russian as Kazakh party boss, the action that touched off the December 1986 riots there. Since he evidently was also behind the initial hardline approach to the Armenian demands, which exacerbated the crisis, he could again be faulted for miscalculations. [ ]

Despite his decision to go along with rejection of the transfer option, considerable evidence indicates that Gorbachev has sympathized with Armenian demands more than most of his colleagues:

- He has consistently avoided impugning the motives of the Armenian demonstrators, even at the 19 July USSR Supreme Soviet Presidium meeting. On 15 March, during his visit to Yugoslavia, Gorbachev publicly underscored that the demonstrations had not questioned Soviet power or socialism, in apparent contrast to Chebrikov's subsequently expressed view. The Armenian Supreme Soviet Presidium chairman, in fact, quoted this at the July meeting.
- On other occasions Gorbachev has said that the developments in Nagorno-Karabakh are primarily the result of historic neglect of previous leaderships who for decades ignored problems in ethnic relations and allowed them to pile up. Ligachev and Chebrikov have essentially blamed "foreign devils" for nationality disturbances.<sup>6</sup>
- During talks [ ] [ ] Gorbachev said not only that he believed the Armenian demands to be just but also that opponents of his reforms were exploiting Armenian grievances to discredit him. He went so far as to accuse the conservatives of engineering the unrest in Azerbaijan, including using "common criminals to carry out a pogrom" and "violent demonstrations."

<sup>6</sup> Gorbachev has not been entirely consistent, however. In talks with Willy Brandt on 4 April as reported in *Pravda*, he complained that "certain Western circles are trying to meddle in our internal affairs, to aggravate problems from outside, and to engage in provocation." [ ]

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### **Leadership Sparring Reflected in the Media**

*Leadership differences were reflected in the differing lines taken by Soviet newspapers in reporting developments in the Caucasus. From the outset there were strong indications that reporting on the crisis was a sensitive political issue. Yakovlev's reported muzzling of Moscow News on the Caucasus unrest in late February may have been intended to prevent the liberal journals from providing ammunition to conservatives already primed for a crackdown. By late March, however, with the Andreyeva controversy acting as a catalyst, a number of central newspapers published sharply differing analyses of events in the Caucasus. Pravda took a particularly conservative line, like that of Ligachev and Chebrikov, warning on 21 March that the crisis was the work of "self-proclaimed" protest leaders who were egged on by "Western radio voices." It accused them of "intolerable" civil disobedience that has "a clear antisocialist tinge." In contrast to Pravda's hard line, Komsomolskaya pravda and Izvestiya reported a more balanced view, highlighting the historic neglect of nationalities issues and inequities and official unresponsiveness to social and economic problems in Nagorno-Karabakh. Reflecting a position closer to Gorbachev's, Izvestiya explicitly dismissed the assertion that foreign interference played a major role in the agitation and showed understanding of the resentment felt by Armenians.* [ ]

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The fluctuations in regime policy toward the Armenians over the past five months have probably reflected the shifting balance of forces within the Politburo during this period. The initial hard line, for example,

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may have reflected Gorbachev's reluctance to risk a second defeat in the wake of his loss of momentum the previous fall over the Yel'tsin affair. As conflict within the leadership mounted in March and April to the level of open polemics (with the publication of the Ligachev-sponsored *Sovetskaya Rossiya* article and the Gorbachev-sponsored *Pravda* rebuke), signs began to emerge that each faction within the leadership acted to protect the demonstrators whose demands it supported. [ ]

Rumors that the leadership is divided over the Caucasus issue became widespread in the period, leading protesters on both sides to dig in their heels. [ ]

[ ] Baku rioters in May shouted slogans against Gorbachev and his wife, and that during the riots on 10 and 11 June pictures of Iranian leader Khomeini and Ligachev appeared in the crowd and some demonstrators called for Ligachev to replace Gorbachev. In late May, demonstrators in Armenia publicly urged that Ligachev be removed. Thus, the Caucasus unrest evidently became deeply enmeshed in leadership politics in Moscow, making the outcome of the conflict more difficult to predict and potentially more destabilizing politically. [ ]

Although the leadership has now reached agreement on the basic issue of Nagorno-Karabakh's administrative subordination, other issues remain contentious:

- Conservatives like Shcherbitskiy and even Gorbachev allies and political centrists like Lev Zaykov opposed further moves to upgrade Nagorno-Karabakh and made no reference to more concessions.
- Gorbachev and reform advocates, like Primakov, appear intent on pushing the idea of upgrading Nagorno-Karabakh to an autonomous republic within Azerbaijan and trying to minimize the amount of force used to contain the unrest. This was indicated by the comments of Minister of Internal Affairs Vlasov, a Gorbachev protege, who played down the need for force by saying that no special security measures on Nagorno-Karabakh will be taken if the law is not violated there.

- Given these different orientations and the unpredictable nature of events in the region, it appears certain that debate on the specific situation in Nagorno-Karabakh and on the broader nationality issue will remain on the Politburo's agenda. [ ]

#### Complicity of Armenian and Azeri Officials

A second, but no less serious, problem is the partisanship of the party organizations not only of Nagorno-Karabakh and Sumgait, but also of the Armenian and Azerbaijan Republics. The crisis revealed a major Achilles' heel for Gorbachev: his failure to get tight control over local party organizations in the hinterlands. When Gorbachev needed their assistance most, he found he could not rely on either Baku or Yerevan leaders to cool the passions of the population. The replacement of the two republic first secretaries in May did not initially result in greater obedience to Moscow. The two new leaders aligned themselves with their respective populations, championing their demands. [ ]

Complicity in promoting the grievances of their popular constituency has been most blatant on the part of the Nagorno-Karabakh officials, who have defied Moscow's wishes on more than one occasion during the crisis. Like his predecessor, oblast party chief Pogosyan, who was appointed in late February, has openly sided with the Armenian populace in the dispute. [ ] the Azerbaijan plenum in May discussed removing Pogosyan—but could not find a "suitable replacement" (that is, no one who would carry out the bidding of the Azerbaijan leadership against the interest of the Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh). [ ]

Several officials in Sumgait were fired under circumstances that suggested complacency toward, if not active involvement in, the events that led to the slaughter of Armenians there. The head of the Sumgait party was expelled from the party for "nonparty behavior" in failing to prevent the riots. The chief of police and the city's mayor were also fired. In July, an

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Azerbaijan newspaper reported the retirement of the Deputy Minister of Interior and the transfer of the ministry's staff department head, presumably because of their mishandling of the ethnic clashes in the republic. [ ]

At the republic level, even before unrest in the Caucasus began in February, both Demirchyan and Bagirov were in political trouble (see appendix C). The demonstrations in Armenia gave rise to suspicions in Moscow that Demirchyan was encouraging the protests in hopes they would provide him with an insurance policy against removal. As a 21 March *Pravda* article ominously noted, the issue of ceding Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia previously arose "when Armenian leaders found it advantageous to distract the public's attention from a mass of unresolved economic and social issues and from the unsuitable working style and methods of the party organization." Gorbachev and others again leveled this accusation against both parties at the USSR Supreme Soviet Presidium meeting in July. [ ]

Strong circumstantial evidence also indicated the Armenian leadership's complicity from the outset:

- The huge demonstrations in Yerevan required extensive logistics to assemble, control, and disperse such massive crowds, and the relative orderliness of the protesters suggests at least some involvement on the part of local Armenian officials in staging them.
- The police did not deny the demonstrators access to the city and several reports suggest some even participated in the demonstrations. Arutyunyan even promised demonstrators in June that police who harassed them would be punished.
- [ ] before the February demonstrations the organizers met with senior party officials who tacitly supported the demonstrations. The Yerevan first secretary, who was replaced by a more hardline official in July, apparently supported the demand for the return of Nagorno-Karabakh.

- At least tacit approval would also have been required for using republic media to support the irredentist claims, particularly giving Armenian Patriarch Vazgen I the opportunity to endorse the demands.

- Finally, the Armenian party sanctioned the 15 June republic Supreme Soviet session at which Nagorno-Karabakh's demand for incorporation was approved. [ ]

At the same time, Azerbaijan party leader Bagirov ran into trouble for failing to check Azeri nationalism and anti-Armenian violence. Bagirov strongly supported Moscow's initial position, rejecting the removal of the autonomous oblast from the Azerbaijan Republic, but republic media, and apparently Bagirov, continued to reject any compromise over Armenian demands even after Moscow backed off and announced the organization of an investigation into the issues by the Secretariat. Subsequently, in the wake of the Sumgait riots he was criticized by Moscow for his improper attention to minority affairs, which contributed to the events. Speaking at a news conference on the eve of the party conference, a specialist on ethnic groups in the Soviet Union, Vyacheslav Mikhailov, publicly blamed Aliyev and Bagirov for "errors" leading to the Nagorno-Karabakh crisis. [ ]

Irredentist demands have apparently activated latent Azeri nationalism throughout the party. [ ]

[ ] An unofficial Leningrad journal published an official document describing a telegram sent by 250 members of the Azerbaijan Academy of Sciences to Armenian academician Ambartsumyan opposing the territorial readjustment. The cable alleged that "for the third time in 100 years Armenians are ringleaders of cruel clashes between brotherly nationalities." [ ]

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[ ] Azeri authorities privately acknowledged local leadership involvement in organizing the demonstrations, saying that the Azeri people can shout as loud as the Armenians for what they want. [ ]

Moscow's alarm at the inability or unwillingness of the republic party bosses to rein in nationalist demonstrators increased the central leadership's desire to remove both Demichyan and Bagirov, while simultaneously increasing their fear of the potential repercussions of doing so. When renewed unrest finally caused Moscow to act on 21 May, the attendance of a Politburo member at the Yerevan plenum called to remove Demirchyan suggests that resistance was expected from the republic party cadres. Similarly, the attendance of Ligachev in Baku suggests a perceived need to head off trouble there. Nevertheless, events since the installation of Arutyunyan and Vezirov clearly indicate they have also aligned themselves with their populations, complicating Moscow's efforts to resolve the crisis. [ ]

#### **Involvement of Foreign Actors**

The recent unrest appears to have made Soviet officials more fearful about the role of foreign actors in the Nagorno-Karabakh problem. Of the approximately 5.5 million people in the world today who speak Armenian, about 60 percent live outside the Soviet Armenian republic, about 1.4 million elsewhere in the USSR, and 2 million abroad. So far, Armenian emigres—most of whom see Turkey much more than Russia as the historic oppressor of their nation—have not been actively involved in pushing for change in the Soviet system or in Soviet policies. Moscow worries that diaspora attitudes could turn sharply critical of the USSR and that Armenians in the United States, particularly, could grow into a powerful anti-Soviet pressure group. Soviet officials are wary of the large concentration of Armenians in California and New York, states with large electoral votes that have been closely contested in previous presidential elections.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> The United States hosts at least 600,000 Armenians. About 90 percent of America's Soviet Armenian immigrants came to California. Los Angeles—with 100,000—has the largest community of Armenians outside Yerevan. The New York City region has about 70,000 Armenians, mostly from Lebanon and Iran. [ ]

#### ***The View From Turkey***

*Although the Turkish Government has not explicitly sided with Azerbaijan, Turkey's fear of resurgent Armenian nationalism makes Ankara sympathetic to Baku. When the crisis broke in February, Turkish Government spokesmen indicated publicly that international agreements entitle Ankara to a voice in the crisis, an apparent reference to the 1921 treaty between the USSR and Turkey that led to the shift of Nagorno-Karabakh and Nakhichevan' to Azerbaijan.*

*Turkey no doubt especially feared that transferring Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia would whet Armenian appetites and lead to increased pressure to change the status of Nakhichevan' and to acquire former Armenian regions in Turkey. Turkish officials probably also noted that some Armenian expansionist demands for a "Greater Armenia" were based on historic claims rather than on the ethnic composition of the affected territories. Thus, some Armenians have demanded the return of Nakhichevan', even though Azeris now greatly outnumber Armenians in this region. Using such historical criteria could give Armenians a claim even on some border parts of Turkey where only 50,000 Armenians now live.*

*Nevertheless, the Turkish "factor" appears to have played a very limited role in the unfolding of events and in Soviet calculations of how to deal with the situation in the Caucasus.*

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The shock waves from Iran's 1979 revolution do not appear to have resonated much in Azerbaijan, perhaps because the Soviet republic enjoys a higher standard of living than does Iran. Soviet Shi'a Azeris have been cut off from their great religious centers in Iraq and Iran since 1928, and there is little evidence that Ayatollah Khomeini has developed a sizable following in Soviet Azerbaijan. Azerbaijanis can pick up Iranian television, but, according to some reporting, they seldom watch it because it is "all prayer or war."

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Soviet concern over US attitudes is balanced in part by Moscow's concern over possible Iranian involvement. Ancient links tie the Shi'as of Azerbaijan to Iran. The Shi'as make up an estimated 70 to 75 percent of the population of Soviet Azerbaijan, as compared with the Sunnis, who make up 25 to 30 percent. In southwestern Azerbaijan (Nakhichevan') and along the Iranian border, the percentage of Shi'as is higher. In addition to this religious affiliation, which makes them potentially vulnerable to Iranian blandishments, Soviet Azeris have close family and ethnic ties to the Iranian Azeris across the border. Between 4.5 to 6 million Azeris are located in northwestern Iran.

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\* To a much lesser degree, Moscow may be concerned that foreign Armenian terrorist groups like the Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia (ASALA) could turn against Soviet targets—although we have no evidence that this is the case. Hitherto, the USSR has figured very little in ASALA's blending of armed struggle with Marxist ideology; the dominant faction of ASALA considers Soviet Armenia as liberated territory and the group concentrates its attacks exclusively on Turkish officials. In fact, ASALA eventually would like to see the "Armenian provinces" now located in Turkey and possibly Iraq reattach themselves to the Soviet Armenian core. Furthermore, ASALA is now in a quiet phase, and its leader was assassinated on 28 April. Nevertheless, ASALA in early April did send a moderately worded appeal to Gorbachev supporting the reunification of Karabakh with Armenia, while characteristically stressing that Armenia is an integral part of the USSR and seeks only to rectify the border, not to pursue claims against Moscow.

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### Implications for Other Soviet Nationalities

Concern about a domino effect is a key factor in Moscow's handling of the crisis in the Caucasus. Throughout the USSR, Gorbachev's encouragement of freer expression and greater political initiative from below has clashed with his effort to reassert central control over regional party organizations that gained considerable autonomy during the Brezhnev years. Elites in various republics, emboldened by *glasnost* and resentful of interference from Moscow, have begun to support popular aspirations on various issues and have resisted cadre changes that they see as benefiting the center at the expense of the republics:

- The violent riots in Alma-Ata in December 1986, when Moscow replaced the Kazakh party boss with an ethnic Russian, reflected the same convergence of native popular and elite grievances that has taken place in the Caucasus.
- In the Baltic area, where anti-Russian and anti-Soviet feelings run high, citizen activists have openly denounced the USSR's forced incorporation of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia during World War II. They are pressing for political liberalization, greater cultural and economic autonomy, and strict limits on the migration of Russians to their republics. In Estonia, and to a lesser extent in the other republics, the reform wing of the republic Communist Party is supporting these popular demands.
- Irredentist demands are at the heart of public agitation by a number of national groups. Tatar demands for the restoration of their homeland in the Crimea, from which the Tatars were deported by Stalin during the 1940s, has dogged the regime since large Tatar demonstrations in Moscow a year ago.

According to one report, consideration being given to allowing displaced Volga Germans to return to their old homeland was put on hold when the current unrest in the Caucasus took on alarming proportions. There are potential border and autonomy disputes between Georgia and the Abkhaz ASSR, the Uzbek and

Turkmen Republics, and throughout the Caucasus, where all the ethnic groups have competing claims. Unconfirmed reports claim the expelled Muslim Meshket group has been striking for the right to return to its former homeland in Soviet Georgia. There are also disputed areas along the Ukrainian and Belorussian border, where the predominantly Ukrainian population of Brest Oblast has reportedly appealed to Gorbachev to be reunited with the Ukraine, citing Belorussian linguistic and cultural discrimination.

The Soviet leadership realizes that satisfying Armenian demands could open Pandora's box. All factions within the Politburo recognize that failure to enforce central discipline on important issues would lead to a revolution in relations between Moscow and the republics, with the latter gaining a degree of autonomy they have not enjoyed since the 1920s.

At the same time, Gorbachev would like to avoid sending a signal to non-Russian elites and populations that Moscow will turn a deaf ear to all of their grievances. He is seeking a broader foundation for his rule than merely the support of the Russian heartland. He apparently believes that Moscow no longer has the resources to govern through the exercise of raw force, and that it is consequently essential to address the interests of different national groups as a means of bringing about a rapprochement between Moscow and the non-Russian majority in the country.

### Outlook

Despite his more flexible attitude toward nationality issues, Gorbachev has strong political incentive to prevent a renewal of the pattern of protest and counterprotest in the Caucasus. The regime has weathered the immediate crisis, but any major new flareup of violence could heighten conservative fears of political instability. Moreover, while the conflict so far has been between Armenians and Azeris, tilting too far either to the Azeri side or to the Armenian side could cause protest to assume an antiregime character.

Whatever else he does, Gorbachev must maintain firm limits on protest activity if he is to cope successfully with the situation. Whether or not he gets agreement for more political concessions for the Armenians in the coming months, he must stiffen security measures and flex muscle in breaking up demonstrations. Evidence already points to a crackdown on party officials and protest organizers accused of complicity in the six-month unrest. The Armenian party removed at least one rayon and two city first secretaries and expelled other officials. The regime has also prosecuted strike and demonstration organizers. [ ]

Gorbachev's actions and speeches over the past year, however, suggest that he may have what the Marxists refer to as a "false consciousness"—that he is unduly optimistic that diverse interests of national groups can be accommodated and reconciled. If this is true, it is possible that he will badly miscalculate in managing the crisis. [ ]

Nevertheless, the leadership appears to be groping toward a long-term compromise that just might work. This would be some new administrative arrangement whereby Nagorno-Karabakh is not transferred to Armenia but is either given some degree of genuine autonomy in Azerbaijan and, perhaps for the time being, is run de facto by Moscow's representative. This approach could be accompanied by some measures to give national groups living outside their national "homelands"—like Armenians or Azeris in Georgia—expanded cultural and economic rights. The party leadership clearly prefers to place changes in Nagorno-Karabakh's status in the broader context of changes in nationality policy generally (see appendix D). [ ]

Working out the details of such a plan will take some time—requiring endorsement by a Central Committee plenum and probably approval of constitutional amendments by the USSR Supreme Soviet. Gorbachev has been faced with the problem of trying to sell a compromise when passions in the Caucasus were at fever pitch and concerned parties, who might in calmer times be amenable to compromise, have been unwilling to back down. [ ]

The ongoing crisis in the Caucasus is symptomatic of the problems of managing change in an authoritarian political system. Gorbachev faces the classic dilemma of a centrally controlled system: to have progress he must allow more freedom, but allowing more freedom threatens his power (see appendix E). He needs to balance the need to maintain Moscow's political authority over the periphery with the necessity of liberalizing the political process. The General Secretary will find it difficult to balance these goals in a way that will minimize damage to his domestic reform program. [ ]

The plenum on nationality policy, which Gorbachev has promised would be held early next year, will provide the most solid indications on whether Moscow will develop a workable strategy for defusing the explosive nationality problem. In the meantime, if Gorbachev fails to maintain a relatively normal state of affairs in the Caucasus, he will become more vulnerable to conservative criticism and challenges to his leadership. Perhaps more important, a regime failure to maintain control in the Caucasus might embolden nationalists in other republics and raise serious problems for regime stability. [ ]

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## Appendix A

### Leaders of the Armenian Demonstrations

At its height, the Yerevan organizing committee (or Karabakh Committee) was composed of more than 1,000 people, representing grassroots organizations in all the Armenian cities, the university, and enterprises, with an executive body of about 100 people led by members of the Writers Union, environmentalists, scientists, and other notables. Although formally banned on 25 March, it has continued to operate quietly. The National Union for Self-Determination was the more radical arm of the organization and,

[redacted] led the movement. [redacted]

Nagorno-Karabakh also had an organizing committee (named KRUNK, which means "crane," a symbol of homesickness). Although a decree of the Azerbaijan Supreme Soviet on 25 March officially disbanded KRUNK and its members were asked to sign a statement that they would not engage in further activity, reports in the Soviet press indicate this group, too, has continued to exist, mounting strikes and demonstrations almost without interruption since May. *Komsomolskaya pravda* of 23 June said that the KRUNK organization was headed by an 11-member council and included 47 top local party officials, media representatives, and intellectuals.

Even before 26 March, the violence apparently had broken down the unity in the Yerevan organization committee, where two factions—those who seek to maximize the pressure on Moscow and those who believe the political complexities demand a more moderate stance—took shape. [redacted]

[redacted] the several grassroots committees of artists and intellectuals disbanded in early March to avoid "being trapped by the extremists." [redacted]

Leaders of the two groups include:

- *Igor Muradyan*. An Armenian engineer from Nagorno-Karabakh, Muradyan reportedly led the committee prior to the recent unrest and continues to play an influential role. TASS viciously attacked him on 21 March for trying to get "foreign backing" and for calling for a "mass hunger strike." He led the petitions drive from May 1987 to early February 1988, but has reportedly maintained a distance from dissidents and the underground nationalist movement.
- *Viktor Ambartsumyan*. President of the Armenian Academy of Sciences since 1947 and a well-known astrophysicist, 80-year-old Ambartsumyan functioned informally as the head of the Yerevan organizing committee. [redacted] Speaking before the Supreme Soviet Presidium in Moscow on 18 July, he passionately defended the Armenian principal demand. [redacted]
- *Silva Kaputikyan*. A noted Armenian poet who writes occasionally for *Literaturnaya gazeta*, Kaputikyan was the honorary president of the committee. She was one of the two Armenian delegates whom Gorbachev received. In a hard-hitting article in early February before the unrest, she criticized Moscow for placing the Armenian nuclear plant in a seismic zone, attributed demonstrations in Armenia to environmental pollution, and criticized the lack of *glasnost* in the periphery. She has taken a flexible stance on the Nagorno-Karabakh demands since she returned from Moscow on 26 February and was a delegate to the 19th Party Conference in June.
- *Zoriy Balayan*. An Armenian journalist and environmentalist and a regular contributor to *Literaturnaya gazeta*, he was one of the most active members

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of the organizing committee and the other delegate who met with Gorbachev in February. His writing emphasizes the destruction of Armenian ecology, the devastating effect of industrial pollution on the Armenian people, and the destruction of Armenian village life. He shares Kaputikyan's advocacy of moderate measures and reportedly tried to stop the national protest as early as 24 February.

- *Paruir Ayrikyan*. He is a former dissident who headed the secessionist National Unification Party in 1968. A militant nationalist, he was arrested for human rights and nationalist activities in 1974 and released only in February 1987. As head of the Union of National Self-Determination, Ayrikyan was arrested again on 24 March 1988 and charged with "spreading false news slandering the Soviet social and state regime." He was in KGB custody from the time of his arrest until 20 July, when a Supreme Soviet Presidium decree stripped him of his citizenship and expelled him from the country.
- *Sarukhanyan*. A theater director in Stepanakert, he was the organizer of the demonstrations [redacted] and the first to bring the news to Yerevan of violence against the Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh on 23 February.
- *Kuryan Nakhapetyan*. An Armenian writer living in Moscow, he heads the Moscow arm of the Karabakh committee. He favors a moderate approach to the territorial dispute, calling for an end to violence and socioeconomic redress in Nagorno-Karabakh, but not insisting on reunification.
- *Gamlet Grigoryan*. A leader of KRUNK, he was labeled an "extremist" by *Izvestiya*. Grigoryan said in *Izvestiya* on 29 March that "the problem raised by the people of Karabakh is still with us today, and . . . the millions of rubles allocated by our government do not fully remove it"—meaning that he was not prepared to accept mere economic concessions as a solution. [redacted]

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## Appendix C

Demirchyan and Bagirov:  
Targets of Moscow's Criticism

Long before the outbreak of unrest, there were indications that Demirchyan and Bagirov were among those republic leaders vulnerable to Moscow's wrath as Gorbachev moved to root out corruption among regional and local party elites and reverse the erosion of the center's authority to the periphery. While this effort has been particularly evident with respect to the Central Asian republics, other republic leaders, including Demirchyan and Bagirov, have felt Moscow's wrath. [REDACTED]

As early as 1986 it was clear that Gorbachev had targeted Demirchyan for removal:

- In October 1986, *Pravda* published a strong denunciation of the Armenian leadership and implicitly of Demirchyan for "significant omissions in ideological work" and for tolerating "bribery, speculation, embezzlement, and abuse of official positions."

- *Pravda* and *Izvestiya* both harshly criticized Demirchyan's speech to an Armenian plenum in December 1987. They also reported that a rayon first secretary—apparently supported by party representatives from Moscow—called for Demirchyan to be removed and asked the CPSU Central Committee to launch an investigation of the Armenian party.

Azerbaijan party leader Bagirov has also been criticized by Moscow previously. Central press criticism in late 1987 accused him of tolerating corruption in the republic and blamed him for failure to eradicate bribe-taking and nepotism among the cadres. During the June 1987 visit to Armenia by Central Committee secretary Aleksandra Biryukova, Bagirov was criticized for shortcomings in the republic's economic development. [REDACTED]

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## Appendix D

### Moscow's Options

#### Conservative Options

***Sticking With the Status Quo.*** In theory, one option is to hold fast, honoring the concessions to the Armenians that have already been announced but yielding no further ground. Several speakers at the 19 July Supreme Soviet Presidium meeting advocated just such a course. This approach has the obvious advantage of pacifying Azerbaijan, where the potential for communal violence is especially high, and of sending a sign to restive national groups all over the USSR that Moscow has not lost its will to respond forcefully in putting down protest activity.

From Moscow's perspective, however, there are compelling arguments against an attempt to hold firm. The Armenian movement to reclaim Nagorno-Karabakh has gained enormous momentum. Rejecting further concessions would require Moscow to use an "iron fist," employing repression at a level that would not only detract seriously from Gorbachev's attempt to build a new basis of popular legitimacy for the regime, but also necessitate deploying an occupation army for an indefinite period.

#### Reformist Solutions

***Making Further Economic Concessions.*** A variant would be to grant further economic concessions to the Armenians. Moscow could give Nagorno-Karabakh greater financial independence and close the chemical plant in Stepanakert, which the Armenians claim was forced on them by the Azeri administration. In November 1987, Aganbegyan gave credence to the idea that Nagorno-Karabakh would be separated economically from Azerbaijan and linked to Armenia, which might satisfy some of the moderate Armenians as a first step on the road to eventual reunification.

Some concessions on environmental issues in Armenia may have already been made. Armenian officials have said that an aluminum plant, a nuclear reactor, and a rubber plant in the republic either have been closed or may be closed because of ecological concerns.

In the past, Moscow has sometimes responded to territorial demands with a package of economic concessions. For example, when the population in the Abkhaz ASSR in Georgia demanded to be transferred to the Russian Republic in May 1978, Moscow granted major cultural and economic concessions while not changing Abkhazia's administrative subordination.

The basic disadvantage of trying to buy off the Armenians in this way is that most Armenians are not likely to accept any solution that sidesteps the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh's political status. The Nagorno-Karabakh party chief has said that the region would be unable to solve its social and economic problems until it was reassigned to Armenian control. One of the protest leaders told *Izvestiya* on 29 March that Moscow's millions of rubles would not remove the problems in Nagorno-Karabakh.

***Enhancing Autonomy of Nagorno-Karabakh Within Azerbaijan.*** Recently, there has been some discussion at the Supreme Soviet session about making the region an autonomous republic.<sup>10</sup> Demichev acknowledged this option was still being discussed following the Supreme Soviet Presidium meeting, and *Pravda* editor Viktor Afanasyev has publicly indicated it was "very possible" that the autonomous region will become an autonomous republic.

Another option may be running the region from Moscow as a temporary expedient. The representative of the Central Committee and the Supreme Soviet—now in Nagorno-Karabakh—could provide the necessary mechanism. There is evidence that Armenians may be willing to accept placing

<sup>10</sup> There are 16 autonomous republics (ASSRs) in the Russian Republic, two in Georgia, one (Nakhichevan') in Azerbaijan, and one in the Uzbek SSR. Both the USSR and republic constitutions vaguely state that an autonomous republic "independently decides questions outside the boundaries of the laws of the USSR and a union republic that relate to its jurisdiction."

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[redacted]

Nagorno-Karabakh under Moscow, at least as a temporary measure. On 21 June the Nagorno-Karabakh soviet called for a transfer of the region to the USSR, pending a more permanent solution. At a 30 June press conference in Moscow, the Armenian delegation to the CPSU conference agreed that a compromise was necessary and proposed that jurisdiction over Karabakh should be transferred from Azerbaijan directly to Moscow or the RSFSR government. Pogosyan also specifically advocated such a solution before the meeting, and it was endorsed by Armenian party boss Arutyunyan and Academy of Sciences President Ambartsumyan on 19 July. Such a system might also allow Moscow to crack down on the unrest in Nagorno-Karabakh, so it should not necessarily be viewed as a simple concession to the Armenians.

[redacted]

**Extraterritorial Native Cultural Institutions.** The concept of extraterritorial cultural institutions for non-Russian nationalities is now being discussed at high levels. In his conference speech on 28 June and again on 19 July, Gorbachev expressed concern for the many ethnic minorities living outside the boundaries of their national territory and indicated that their plight—along with the examination of the powers now exercised by union and autonomous republics—will be examined.

[redacted]

The status of the 160,000 Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh is not unique. Almost 30 million non-Russians living outside their national republics have no access to minority language education or cultural institutions. Experts such as Gorbachev's economic adviser Leonid Abalkin and the director of the Institute of Ethnography of the USSR Academy of Sciences Yulian Bromlei have argued for some time that demands of nonindigenous national groups should be satisfied in the realm of language, cultural, and everyday life.<sup>11</sup>

[redacted]

<sup>11</sup> At present there are small minorities in the Soviet Union that enjoy an authentic extraterritorial cultural autonomy. This is the case of the Uygurs and Dungsans—originally from China—and the Assyrians and Muslim Kurds from the Ottoman Empire and Iran. Each has a national press and a network of schools teaching the national language. The Soviet press indicates that there has been significant effort in recent months to improve similar limitations on the use of native language, cultural facilities, and economic development for the Ingilois—a small Georgian minority living on the border of Azerbaijan—and for the large Ukrainian population living in the Soviet Far East known as Zelenyy Klin—the area includes Primorskiy Kray, Khabarovsk Kray, and Amur Oblast—which has been under intense pressure of Russification since the 1920s.

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### Radical Solutions

**Giving In on the Territorial Issue.** While the Supreme Soviet session appeared to finally and definitively rule this out, there are a handful of historic precedents for redrawing administrative boundaries in the Soviet Union. In 1954 the Crimea was taken from the Russian Republic and incorporated into the Ukraine, and a large area of the Kazakh SSR was transferred to the Uzbek Republic in 1963 for economic purposes, but subsequently transferred back.

[redacted]

Nevertheless, the outright incorporation of the province into Armenia is the least attractive option for Moscow because of the danger of contagion and the fact that caving in to Armenian territorial demands would be completely unacceptable to Azerbaijan.

[redacted]

The conservatives would be particularly adamant in opposing such a change. For Ligachev, in addition to concern about stirring up expectations among other aggrieved national groups, yielding to the Armenians would be perceived as a major personal setback after his commitment in Baku in late May to the existing boundaries.

[redacted]

[redacted]

**Reconfiguration of Nagorno-Karabakh.** If all else fails, another possibility would be to split the Nagorno-Karabakh region between the two republics, transferring areas with predominantly Armenian population to Armenia, and leaving predominantly Azeri areas in Azerbaijan. This possibility has not yet been raised by any of the parties involved in the territorial dispute, but there is historical precedent for such a reconfiguration of the oblast. Nagorno-Karabakh was much larger between 1923 and 1930 and at one point was contiguous to Armenia. This solution would be difficult to implement, however, because in some areas the population is so mixed that no redrawing of the map would be satisfactory to everyone. Most speakers at the Supreme Soviet session, in fact, explicitly rejected this sort of an approach.

[redacted]

## Appendix E

### Restless Nationalities: Catalogue of Ethnic Tensions in a Multinational State

#### Central Asia

Under Brezhnev, Soviet Muslims quietly but steadily wrested control over many aspects of their lives from Russians. There is a strong trend toward "nativization"—the acquisition of authority by Central Asians. Uzbeks, for example, reportedly still revere their former leader Sharaf Rashidov—now vilified by Moscow for corruption—as someone who stood up for his republic. Islamic fundamentalism and nationalism from neighboring Iran and Afghanistan—while not widely popular—have had some resonance. A wide network of unofficial clerics operates from the thousands of underground mosques that dot the countryside in Central Asia.

#### Kazakh SSR

The Kazakh SSR is the most dramatic example of the negative local reaction to Gorbachev's attempt to wrest power and break up the development of local "mafias." When Moscow sacked the republic's Kazakh party boss, Dinmukhamed Kunayev, and replaced him with Gennadiy Kolbin, an ethnic Russian, hundreds of students rioted in Alma-Ata and other Kazakh cities.<sup>12</sup> The violent response—despite the fact that the republic has slightly more ethnic Russians than Kazakhs—underscores the native resentment of Russification. Tension reportedly remains high.

#### The Baltic Republics

A number of unprecedented manifestations of nationalist sentiment have erupted in this region under Gorbachev. Nationalist activists are pressing for more political and economic autonomy, for freedom of religion, for a cleaner environment, and some are even demanding independence. An independent political

party emerged in Estonia in February 1988, whose platform calls for the rejection of the "fiction" that Estonia "voluntarily" joined the Soviet Union and for separate representation in the United Nations. In June 1987 in Riga, Latvia's capital, thousands protested the deportations of the nation's political leadership and intelligentsia by the Soviets after incorporation into the USSR. In August 1987 demonstrators in Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania denounced the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact that paved the way for the forcible incorporation of the Baltic republics into the Soviet Union. Since then, activists have held demonstrations to mark their independence day and to commemorate the mass deportation in 1949 of those who resisted collectivization.

This spring, at a plenary meeting of creative unions, Estonian intellectuals formulated extensive proposals for greater autonomy for the republic and received endorsement from a newly created People's Front—a broad coalition of intellectuals, party officials, and unofficial groups—who sent a delegation with a reform platform to the 19th All-Union Party Conference in June. The platform included the proposal that self-management and self-financing be extended to union republics and other regions. The republic legislature was asked to show initiative in changing laws to guarantee economic and cultural independence in Estonia. Since then, Latvia and Lithuania have formed similar People's Fronts, ostensibly within the framework of the Communist Party but verging on becoming real opposition parties. TASS reported that on 9 July 100,000 Lithuanians gathered in Vilnius under the leadership of the "Lithuanian Movement for Restructuring" to press their proposals for greater autonomy and to express support for Nagorno-Karabakh's right to self-determination.

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**Crimean Tatars**

Since Stalin exiled the Crimean Tatars for allegedly collaborating with Nazi Germany, they have been seeking to return to their homeland. Emboldened by *glasnost*, hundreds of Crimean Tatars demonstrated in the center of Moscow for several weeks in the summer of 1987 until the militia forcibly sent them back to Central Asia. A government commission formed in July 1987 to investigate their demands has allowed some Tatars to return to their Crimean homeland, but the Tatar activists continue to demonstrate. In March, Soviet media announced approval for some Tatars to individually apply and return, but just to those areas of the Crimean Oblast and Krasnodar Kray where significant numbers of Tatars already reside. The Armenian irredentist demands have sparked a new round of demonstrations by the Tatars in Moscow, the Uzbek SSR, the North Caucasus, and on the Crimean Peninsula. [ ]

**Ukraine, Belorussia, and Moldavia**

Perhaps the most worrisome is the prospect that nationalism will flare up in the Ukraine, the largest and the most traditionally independent of the Soviet minority republics. Although nationalist aspirations have not been manifested to the degree observed in the Baltic republics, there are signs of increased activism since Gorbachev came to power. Resentful of the suppression of their language, their history, and the Ukrainian Orthodox and Catholic Churches, Ukrainian intellectuals are pushing for improvement in the cultural sphere. Writers are pushing to make Ukrainian the "official" language in the republic—just as the native languages in Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan are guaranteed by their respective constitutions—and to make its study compulsory in Ukrainian schools, but party officials have rejected both proposals. Ukrainian nationalists have also appealed for legalization of the Ukrainian Catholic Church, which was liquidated by the Soviet authorities in 1946, but which has continued its underground existence. Many unofficial groups have sprung up in the Ukraine. New groups called the Association of Independent Creative Intelligentsia in L'vov and the Ukrainian Culture and Ecology Club are debating

Stalin's brutal collectivization drive and the engineered famine in 1932-33 that left millions dead. On the second anniversary of the Chernobyl' accident, an informal group organized a large antinuclear rally in Kiev, which was broken up by police who arrested about 20 participants. During June and July 1988, even larger demonstrations took place in western Ukraine. Participants demanded greater political, cultural, and religious freedom and criticized Ukrainian leaders. Such large demonstrations—up to 50,000 people—have not been seen since just after World War II and show a growing antinuclear and nationalist sentiment in the Ukraine. [ ]

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In Belorussia, intellectuals are also pressing for linguistic and cultural autonomy and organizing unofficial groups to review past repression under Stalin. Increased activity in support of nationality concerns have also come to the forefront in Moldavia, a sign of the seriousness of ethnic tension there. At the Moldavian Central Committee plenum in late 1987, party boss Semen Grossu attacked unofficial groups and religious sects, accusing them of promoting disorder, while the head of the republic's Interior Ministry focused on "foreign subversion." Various ethnic groups within the republic have begun to voice demands, reflecting their rising sense of national self-awareness. [ ]

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**Georgia**

Nationalist feelings in Georgia remain strong. Some 200 to 300 persons have reportedly joined a new extremely "anti-Soviet" nationalist organization. There has been longstanding resentment among Georgians over Russification, and intellectuals are pressing for a fuller account of Georgian history and for more textbooks published in the Georgian language. Many Georgians are displeased with Gorbachev's de-Stalinization campaign that some considered anti-Georgian. Concern for the environment is also on the rise. Last fall, Georgians collected 75,000 signatures for petitions against the construction of a Transcaucasus railroad, which they say will hurt the region's ecology.

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Georgians fear that the railroad will also "open up" the Georgian republic to Russian influence. The Georgian Supreme Soviet recently adopted stiff regulations on public demonstrations, meetings, and marches, apparently to head off planned demonstrations. [redacted] there was considerable nervousness over the potential for ethnic clashes between national minorities in Georgia, and officials reacted promptly to demonstrations in the Yugo-Osetin AO over a typhoid outbreak by firing the local party boss. Georgian leaders also face territorial problems similar to Nagorno-Karabakh. There were rumors that the Akhalkalaki region in Georgia—populated by Armenians—and the Abkhaz ASSR have attempted to separate from Georgia.


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