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A RAND NOTE

# The Transcaucasus in Transition

1991

Paul B. Henze

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The research described in this report was sponsored by the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy under RAND's National Defense Research Institute, a federally funded research and development center supported by the Office of the Secretary of Defense and the Joint Staff, Contract No. MDA903-90-C-0004.

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Published 1991 by RAND
1700 Main Street, P.O. Box 2138, Santa Monica, CA 90407-2138

# A RAND NOTE

N-3212-USDP

# The Transcaucasus in Transition

Paul B. Henze

Prepared for the
Under Secretary of Defense for Policy


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## PREFACE

The disaffection of Soviet minorities, together with movements supporting genuine autonomy, sovereignty, and in many cases independence for ethnic groups, expanded with surprising speed during the late 1980s and early 1990s. These ethnic problems have deeply affected the Soviet government and communist party and may be expected to persist and intensify.

RAND researchers did pioneering work on ethnic tensions in the Soviet armed forces in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The best of this work was collected in *Ethnic Minorities in the Red Army: Asset or Liability?* edited by Alexander Alexiev and S. Enders Wimbush, Westview Press, Boulder, Colorado, 1988. Current RAND research, while continuing to examine the effect of ethnic tension on the Soviet armed forces, has broadened in scope to include the political, economic, and social dimensions of Soviet ethnic problems.

This Note deals with ethnic unrest in the three Soviet Transcaucasian republics of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia. The research for the Note was conducted in 1990 under the sponsorship of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy by RAND's International Security and Defense Strategy Program. The program is part of the National Defense Research Institute, a federally funded research and development center sponsored by the Office of the Secretary of Defense and the Joint Staff. The author, a RAND resident consultant, has followed ethnic developments in the Soviet Union and China since the 1950s and has published several monographs on the Caucasus. The Note should be of interest to officials dealing with U.S. national security policy and relations with the Soviet Union.

## SUMMARY

The three Soviet Transcaucasian republics of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia experienced growing political and ethnic unrest, as well as increased aspirations for self-determination, in the late 1980s and early 1990s.[1] As the communist system has fallen deeper into crisis throughout the Soviet Union, popular movements have gained strength and varying degrees of power in all three republics, despite bureaucratic communist holdovers in the republic administrations. Popular movements in all three have declared their intention to withdraw from the Soviet Union.

This Note analyzes the political problems and aspirations of the major Transcaucasian ethnic groups.[2] The analysis is based on the author's participation in a conference on Soviet Caucasia at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, in July 1990, on Radio Liberty's weekly *Report on the USSR*, and on the *Central Asia and Caucasus Chronicle*, published by the Society for Central Asian Studies.

### ETHNIC UNREST AND ASPIRATIONS FOR INDEPENDENCE

Each Transcaucasian nationality blames Moscow for exacerbating rivalries between republics, ethnic tension within them, and strains with neighboring areas of the North Caucasus. They allege that:

1. Party conservatives in Moscow are encouraging Transcaucasian communists, eager to maintain their privileges and hold on power, to limit the implementation of *perestroika* and to restrict *glasnost* locally.
2. In the face of growing pressures from popular forces both inside and outside the local parties and governments, conservative communist leaders are colluding to exacerbate rancorous issues to set nationalities against each other so as to maintain control over them.

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[1]A map of the Transcaucasus area appears on p. 2.

[2]Appendix A lists and explains the four levels of ethnic (or national) subdivisions of the USSR: soviet socialist republics (SSRs), autonomous soviet socialist republics (ASSRs), autonomous *oblasts* (regions), and autonomous *okrugs* (districts). Appendix B gives geographic and demographic data on the Transcaucasian nationalities.

3. The USSR Committee of State Security (KGB) is engaging in both small- and large-scale operations to exacerbate ethnic tension and strife.

The bloody Soviet military suppression of the Tbilisi (Georgia) demonstrations in April 1989 and the brutality of the Soviet interventions in Azerbaijan in January 1990 emboldened the activists in these republics to seek some form of independence. In Armenia, Moscow's failure to end the festering tensions in the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (Region) and increasing Azeri (Azerbaijani) assertiveness combined to produce a deep sense of betrayal by the central government, compounded by the devastating earthquake of December 1988. Armenia has even taken steps toward rapprochement with its traditional enemy, Turkey.

No matter how democratic and assertive they may be of their own ethnic rights, however, Georgians adamantly oppose the aspirations of smaller minorities within the Georgian SSR—the Abkhaz, Ajars, and Osetes—for territorial autonomy. Abkhaz agitation to have the administrative subordination of the Abkhaz ASSR shifted from Georgia to the Russian republic (RSFSR) long preceded *perestroika*. The Abkhaz, however, accounted for only 17.3 percent of the Abkhaz ASSR's population in the 1989 census, whereas the Georgians accounted for 46.2 percent, and the Georgians would like to see both the Abkhaz and Ajar ASSRs abolished. They maintain that the Ajar ASSR was an even more artificial creation than the Abkhaz ASSR, as the former was based exclusively on religious rather than ethnic identity.

Most Osetes in the South Osetian Autonomous Oblast (Georgian SSR) would probably prefer that their region be joined to the North Osetian ASSR, which forms part of the RSFSR and has a far larger Osetian population; only the crest of the Caucasus mountains separates them. Georgians strongly oppose the transfer. Serious clashes between Georgians and Osetes in late 1990 resulted in the loss of life.

Armenian-Azeri rancor continues over the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast. The region remains an armed camp in which the Armenian majority and Azeri minority go their separate ways with occasional clashes. In effect, the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh function as part of the Armenian SSR.

The inequities between Nagorno-Karabakh and Nakhichevan have long rankled the Armenians. Nagorno-Karabakh, which is nearly 80 percent Armenian but is located in and belongs to Azerbaijan, is only an autonomous oblast. Nakhichevan, in contrast, which is over 95 percent Azeri but is located in Armenian territory, nevertheless belongs to

Azerbaijan and enjoys the status of an autonomous republic. This disparity demonstrates the illogic of the entire system of Soviet "autonomous" territorial entities.

## TRANSCAUCASIAN RELATIONS WITH IRAN AND TURKEY

The Azeri popular movement largely favors the unification of Iranian Azerbaijan with the Azerbaijan republic and the formation of an independent Azeri Turkish nation. Iranian Azeris also want closer ties, as became evident during January and February 1990, when Azeris on both sides of the border tore down border barriers to facilitate travel in both directions. Neither Soviet nor Iranian authorities have since succeeded in stopping movement across the border. Soviet and Iranian Azeris show no evidence of religious extremism or sympathy for the Iranian clerical regime.

Turkey, rather than Iran, is the country with which the Soviet Azeris most want close relations. The Turkish government has nevertheless hesitated to give direct political support to the Azeri democrats and has avoided any impression of encouraging separatism or aspirations for a closer political relationship with Turkey. Instead, both the Turkish and Azerbaijani governments have stressed the pragmatic, commercial, and technical nature of the closer relations that both have sought.

The Turkish press and Turkish public have strongly supported Azeri positions in respect to Nagorno-Karabakh since the status of the territory became a major issue in 1988. The Turkish government, in contrast, has cautiously avoided statements and actions that could be considered anti-Armenian. Turkey both provided and facilitated delivery of earthquake relief to Armenia in 1988-1989. Some Armenian nationalist leaders now consider Soviet communism and imperialism a more profound threat to Armenian democratic aspirations than anything Turkey would be likely to do unless severely provoked, and they are seeking some *modus vivendi* with Ankara.

## ECONOMIC ISSUES AND INDEPENDENCE

Economic realities may eventually push Transcaucasian nationalists to moderate their desire for complete independence and give serious consideration to forms of continued association among themselves and with other parts of the Soviet Union. According to a Georgian historian who spoke at the London conference in July 1990,

> We need a common Caucasian home—a common economic home—for all Caucasians. Urban development of the Transcaucasian republics shows a pattern characteristic of colonial countries, with a large proportion of the

> population living in capital cities and concentration of dirty industrial production in them. The economies of our republics are not independent. The Caucasian economies need enormous sums of money for restructuring—it cannot at present be borrowed anywhere. The only solution is moral, economic, and ecological cooperation.

Possibilities for future Transcaucasian association suggested at the London conference included the following:

1. A genuine Soviet federation with all existing ethnic units raised to the same level and reassociating voluntarily in a redefined federal structure
2. A completely reorganized Soviet federal structure resembling the United States, with political authority based entirely on geographic, rather than ethnic, principles
3. A Soviet confederation similar to the British Commonwealth, in which independent and sovereign republics would join voluntarily for economic or other advantages that they would define according to their own interests.

## CONCLUSIONS

As developments in 1990 and 1991 have demonstrated, formidable problems loom on the horizon of Transcaucasia. Historical resentments, ethnic rivalries, the inexperience of political leaders, and the likelihood of increasing economic strains all justify doubts about the Transcaucasians' ability to manage the transition to democracy and some form of federation or complete independence. The immediate future, at least, appears to lie increasingly in the Transcaucasians' own hands: The Soviet retreat into conservatism and desperate efforts to preserve the Soviet Union intact deny Moscow the capacity to intervene militarily in the Transcaucasus to force submission.

Volatile Transcaucasian populations would be likely to resort to large-scale violence to resist efforts by the Soviet armed forces or KGB-directed security forces to subdue them. Moscow will probably hesitate to risk provocative actions the outcome of which it might not be able to control, particularly in a region on the edge of the Middle East. For the peoples of the Transcaucasus, this situation provides a remarkable opportunity for assertion of their own interests—and a formidable challenge to define and develop these interests in ways that are not mutually antagonistic.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The Soviet empire is no longer alive—but it is still not entirely dead.[1]

Like the rest of the Soviet empire, the Transcaucasus has reached the end of a historical period. The communist system fell into deep crisis throughout Transcaucasia during 1989, and the crisis intensified and developed additional dimensions in 1990. The imposed Soviet system is eroding rapidly. The inhabitants of the Transcaucasian soviet socialist republics (SSRs)—Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia—are consciously and enthusiastically taking control of their own destinies (see map, Fig. 1).

Genuine popular movements have gained strength and varying degrees of power in all three Transcaucasian republics, and although republican administrations still include holdovers from the past, the contest between communists and popular movements is far from over. Intellectuals and political activists have opened up the history of the Soviet period and are reexamining it. Some are taking a fresh look at the entire period of Russian imperial domination, going back to the beginning of the nineteenth century. A process such as this, once begun, cannot be stemmed.

Participation in a conference entitled "History and Society in Soviet Caucasia" inspired this Note. The conference took place at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) of the University of London, July 17-19, 1990, under the sponsorship of SOAS and the London-based Society of Central Asian Studies.

The conference was unique among conferences on the Caucasus that I have attended in at least two respects: Citizens of the Transcaucasus made two-thirds of the formal presentations, and Soviet citizens participated in the discussions with an unprecedented degree of freedom and openness. To a remarkable extent, in fact, the Caucasians themselves provided the most incisive analysis and exchanges of views, while Western scholars and specialists more often than not played a secondary role. Soviet Caucasian participants spoke their minds as individuals, with no apparent fear of having to account for their positions on returning home. None appeared to feel constrained to adhere to previously agreed positions.[2]

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[1]Declaration of a Caucasian participant in the Conference on the Transcaucasus at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, July 17, 1990.

[2]The working languages of the conference were Russian and English, though some Caucasian participants also used their own languages with translation into the two principal languages.

**Fig. 1—Map of the Transcaucasus region**

Ten participants came from each Transcaucasian republic. The Armenian and Georgian groups included one woman each. The Azeri group had six women.[3] The only Russian among the Soviet citizens at the conference was a woman section head from the Institute of Ethnography in Moscow. She too participated energetically in discussions and displayed a high degree of understanding for the views of the Caucasians. Several former Soviet citizens now resident in the West also participated.

The following discussion of the problems of the region is based largely, but not exclusively, on conference proceedings; it also reflects informal discussions with participants, other contacts with Soviet visitors and Western travelers to the Soviet Union, and current reporting on developments in the area during the second half of 1990. My analysis draws extensively on Radio Liberty's weekly *Report on the USSR* and the *Central Asia and Caucasus Chronicle*, issued by the Society for Central Asian Studies.

Topics covered in this Note include Transcaucasian attitudes on sovereignty and independence; military issues; relations with Moscow; autonomous ethnic groups; relations with Turkey and Iran; economic considerations; and a look toward the future. Appendixes describe the ethnic subdivisions of the USSR and present geographic and demographic data on Transcaucasia.

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[3]I use the terms Azerbaijani and Azeri interchangeably in this Note, as the people themselves do. The same two terms are also used for the language. It is not uncommon for Azeris to refer to themselves simply as Turks, an earlier practice that is now being revived.

## II. REEXAMINATION OF HISTORY

A Georgian set the tone at the London conference for each nationality's approach to history by declaring: "We had been taught that our history was all cast in concrete—petrified and dead. But it has come back to life. We are finding that exploring it is very exciting." Many speakers devoted their conference presentations to a reexamination of history. Their presentations reflected the processes that are under way in each Transcaucasian ethnic group and apparent in the press and in professional journals.

Because of its direct relevance to their current efforts to assert their sovereignty and establish a legal basis for autonomy and/or independence, Transcaucasians regard the brief period of independence at the end of World War I as the highest priority for historical reexamination.[1] Only completely unreformed communist party *apparatchiki*, a rapidly declining breed, have tried to maintain the hitherto prevailing mythology about how communist power was established in the Transcaucasus.

All supporters of the popular movements take for granted that the incorporation of the Transcaucasus republics into the Soviet Union was accomplished by ruse and force. Both historians and political activists are reexamining past history to demonstrate how this happened. Because these people have little inclination to replace the former dogma with rigid new dogma, the debate about events during the years 1918-1922 is likely to continue. Long suppressed documents and memoirs are being extracted from archives, studied anew, and prepared for publication.

Transcaucasians are also reexamining the complex external factors that came into play at the end of World War I. An Azeri at the conference declared:

> We need to study the foreign policy of independent Azerbaijan. We know very little about the real character of connections with Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, Germany, the Baltic states, and Britain. We need to look into all this and reach our own conclusions.

---

[1]The terms autonomy, sovereignty, and independence are used with great variations in specific meaning—and often with a good deal of vagueness—by Soviet citizens. Attempts to define the specific content of these terms inevitably result—as they did at the London conference—in lengthy discussions and frequently come to no agreed position.

Others downgrade the long-standing Soviet inclination to attribute extraordinary weight to British and Turkish intrigues after World War I. Eager to read Western research on this period, they have high regard for the recent scholarship of such Americans as Ronald Suny and Tadeusz Swietochowski, both of whom attended the London conference. Many are familiar with Yale historian Kazemzadeh's *Struggle for Transcaucasia*, published 40 years ago.[2]

A few historians cited the need to study how the Transcaucasian Federation, which lasted from 1922 until 1936, actually worked.[3] However, each national group of historians is still preoccupied for the most part with its own history in a relatively narrow context. The Azeris regard the loss of their brief independence (1918-1920) as largely the result of Bolshevik manipulation of the Russian and Armenian minorities in Baku. One of their historians commented at the conference:

> The Bolsheviks were interested in creating the illusion of armed revolt. They conspired to annex the sovereign state of Azerbaijan. The fact that the Azerbaijani army was deployed mostly in Karabakh weakened the republic. The sequence of events was one violent episode after another—beginning with the entry of the Red Army and ending with the murder of members of the Azerbaijani parliament. Lenin's attitude toward these actions was frank and hard. Moscow needed Baku and Lenin was determined to take it.

The Armenians attribute the fall of their republic to collusion between the Bolsheviks and Ataturk's Turkey. At the conference, they frequently referred to the territories "lost" to republican Turkey as integral parts of Armenia—without recognizing that these regions had had no Armenian majority population at any time since the Middle Ages.[4] The Georgians see the Soviet establishment of the three autonomous entities within their republic—the Abkhaz and Ajar autonomous soviet socialist republics (ASSRs) and the South Osetian Autonomous Oblast (Region)—as chicanery designed to weaken their position and give Moscow an opportunity to manipulate their minorities against them (see map, p. 2, above).[5]

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[2]Firuz Kazemzadeh, *The Struggle for Transcaucasia, 1917-1921*, Philosophical Library, New York, 1951.

[3]The federation, formed on March 12, 1922, and incorporating the Armenian, Azerbaijan, and Georgian republics, joined the Soviet Union as the Transcaucasus Soviet Federated Socialist Republic on December 30, 1922. It was dissolved with the promulgation of a new USSR constitution on December 5, 1936, and the Armenian, Azerbaijan, and Georgian republics became separate constituent SSRs of the USSR.

[4]See Justin McCarthy, *Muslims and Minorities, The Population of Ottoman Anatolia at the End of the Empire*, New York University Press, 1983.

[5]Appendix A explains the ethnic subdivisions of the USSR; Appendix B presents geographic and demographic data on Transcaucasia.

The reexamination of history involves fundamental reconsideration of nineteenth century developments and political trends. In the case of the Armenians—the Caucasian people most preoccupied with history—the process extends much farther back, to ancient times, as an Armenian historian observed:

> The Armenian *ethnos* is profoundly historically conscious. From the fifth century to modern times there is a tradition of educating the population in history. Armenian historical thought could not tolerate the real condition of the Armenian people during the late Middle Ages. So Armenians sought consolation in their ancient past. Modern Armenian historiography emerged in the latter half of the eighteenth century and adopted a strong ethnocentric position. Great discoveries in the second half of the nineteenth century contradicted traditional Armenian historiography. An antiethnocentric reaction began. Marxism was adopted by Armenian scholars only as a set of terminological formulas—there was no interest in Marxism in Armenia before the Bolshevik revolution. The victory of unitarian vulgar Marxism had extremely negative effects on Armenian historiography. During recent years we have seen a reaction, a process of inversion in history writing. Current ethnic conditions have been projected into the past.

A Georgian historian at the conference criticized the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Georgian political fixation with socialism, as follows:

> The hopes of Georgians that Orthodox Russia would preserve Georgian statehood did not materialize. From the 1860s onward, a new generation fought for the national liberation of Georgia. But the [next generation] became preoccupied with the construction of socialism in the whole world from 1890 onwards. This was a tragedy and it explains the fate of the independent Georgian republic established at the end of World War I. The real task of consolidating Georgian statehood and national independence was not given sufficient priority. Georgian Social Democrats did not have a good knowledge of the history of Georgia.

Some Georgians display the same kind of profound aversion to socialism that is widespread in Eastern Europe.[6] Some Azeris, in contrast, take a much more favorable view of social democracy as a basis for the future political organization of their republic. But they

[6]Like many East Europeans, they make little distinction between socialism and social democracy, and their thinking about these terms is often not entirely clear. Most formerly communist societies, or those in the process of emerging from communism, seem to tend toward a stance that owes a good deal (whether consciously or not) to the ideas of von Mises and von Hayek—i.e., all varieties of socialism have an inherent tendency to evolve toward totalitarianism and intolerance.

define it, as do many democratic Russians, as an approach to politics that is the exact opposite of the communist approach. To them social democracy means political and social pluralism and multiparty democracy combined with a free market. The creation of civil society, an important objective for them, involves concern for social conditions, human rights, and the welfare of underprivileged elements in the population who have been neglected under Soviet rule.

## III. ATTITUDES TOWARD SOVEREIGNTY AND INDEPENDENCE

On the declarative level, no political activists in Transcaucasia want to preserve any features of the Soviet system. Most distrust communist reformers' intentions. They believe that Gorbachev is rapidly falling behind the flow of events, and they criticize *perestroika* as an essentially authoritarian concept. A Georgian in London declared: "The situation in the Soviet Union has not been the rule of law, but the prevalence of antilaw."

The consolidation of elite and mass opinion in favor of national sovereignty and broad autonomy, increasingly to the point of independence, has proceeded rapidly in the Transcaucasus. In each republic, efforts by local communist leaders in league with conservatives in Moscow to delay and manipulate *perestroika* backfired, but in mid-1990 they were still considered a threat to democratic evolution. Some Azeris at the London conference accused the present reformed communist government of their republic of a lack of good faith and efforts to split the democratic opposition. One participant observed:

> There are more than a dozen political parties in Azerbaijan. They are working at cross purposes. The Center [Moscow] is manipulating many of these movements in order to be in a better position to repress them. The communist party in Azerbaijan has learned nothing. Our leadership was put in power by conspiracy. Who elected Mutalibov? A parliament that has no popular mandate. Whom does he really represent? No one knows.

In Georgia, the brutal military suppression of demonstrations in Tbilisi on April 9, 1989, catalyzed the strong movement for sovereignty and independence. The demonstrations, riots, and military intervention of January 1990 played a similar role in Azerbaijan.

In Armenia, the festering tension in the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (Region) and the December 1988 earthquake combined to produce a deep sense of betrayal by Moscow—by Russia, in fact—and an acute feeling of frustration that leaves Armenians in an extraordinarily dour and depressed mood. The Armenian predicament was complicated by the massive inflow of refugees in the wake of riots in Azerbaijan in winter 1989-1990.

Thus, while in Georgia and Azerbaijan political thinking developed rapidly and in a relatively straight line toward autonomy and/or independence, the situation in Armenia evolved in a more complex fashion.[1] Armenians have regarded Russia as their protector

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[1]Public opinion polls taken in Baku in February and May 1990, cited by an Azeri

since the early nineteenth century. If they could find an alternative protector now, the deep feeling of betrayal by Moscow would cause Armenians to shift their loyalty. But no alternative has appeared.

Armenians' fear of Turkey has lessened somewhat because Turkey, despite widespread public sentiment in support of Azeris in confrontations with Armenians, has avoided official declarations or steps felt hostile to Armenian aspirations for political self-assertion. This has created the basis for pragmatic understanding with Turkey on issues of trade and communications. Armenia's new president, Levon Ter-Petrosian, spoke of reconciliation with Turkey during his October 1990 visit to the United States.[2] Armenian democrats have hesitated to make direct claims on Turkish territories, where no Armenians now live.

Looking toward the future, Armenians feel profoundly threatened by Azeri assertiveness. Moreover, they are apprehensive about their ability to maintain their position in Georgia, where they still constitute the largest minority element in the population.[3]

As became apparent in summer 1990, the republican governments of Georgia and Azerbaijan, despite delaying tactics by communists and some Moscow-loyal officials, continue to face heavy nationalist pressure to proceed steadily to consolidate sovereignty. Clearly, popular support for independence would not only remain strong but would grow.

Armenia did not lag far behind the other two republics. The election in early August 1990 of the young historian Levon Ter-Petrosian to the presidency, his qualified response to Gorbachev's call for disarming popular militias, and Gorbachev's acquiescence in Ter-Petrosian's plan for asserting his own control over them brought Armenia ahead of Azerbaijan.

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political scientist, produced 59 percent for outright secession from the USSR in February and 60 percent in May. In contrast, those against secession totaled 10 percent in February and 12 percent in May.

[2]See "Anxious Armenia Looks to Turkey," *Washington Times*, October 4, 1990.

[3]Armenians in Georgia are concentrated in Tbilisi, just as they were concentrated in Baku in Azerbaijan. Armenians have, over a considerable period, become concerned about their position in Georgia: Their numbers declined from 448,000 in 1979, when they accounted for 12.5 percent of the republic's population, to 436,615 in 1989, slightly less than 11 percent of the total. See Appendix B for additional statistics on the ethnic composition of all the Transcaucasian republics.

## IV. MILITARY ISSUES

The reaction of the Georgians and many other Soviet citizens as well to the brutal suppression of the Tbilisi demonstrations in April 1989 shook the highest levels of the Soviet military establishment and generated a strong reaction among the local population of Georgia. Azeri resentment of brutality by the military forces that intervened in Azerbaijan in January 1990 equaled that of the Georgians. Far from provoking fear of further military intervention, however, Soviet military actions emboldened Caucasians. They know that the military actions fueled sharp and divisive debate among Soviet officers at all levels, a strong disinclination among military commanders to let their forces be employed for domestic political purposes, and massive public aversion to the use of draftees to contain civil unrest.

Armenians, who have not been directly threatened, show little fear of Soviet military intervention and have gone farthest of the three peoples to organize to defend themselves. Azeris maintain that more than 100,000 Armenian popular militia are deployed along their common border. Azeris have organized units to defend themselves against Armenians, and Armenians to defend themselves against Azeris. The Georgians, though in smaller numbers than Armenians or Azeris, have organized against the Osetes.

Since 1989 Moscow journalists and occasional government officials have been comparing the situation in the Transcaucasus with that in Afghanistan and characterizing the region as "our Lebanon." Such comparisons reveal the degree to which the Soviet leadership is perceived as having lost leverage over the region. Gorbachev's mid-August 1990 extension of his deadline for disarming local militia demonstrated a need to make concessions to maintain the impression of continued exercise of governmental power.

Moscow's efforts to enforce order in any Transcaucasian republic by attempting to disarm local units will generate even stronger backing for armed resistance among the indigenous population. More young men will rally to resist direct Soviet military intervention. Both the aversion of senior Soviet army officers to accept the political risks of intervention and the reluctance of Russian draftees to die for the sake of suppressing ethnic clashes in which they do not see a clear interest make it increasingly unlikely that Gorbachev or anyone else in Moscow can risk ordering military intervention to stem Transcaucasian movements toward autonomy and independence.

Local militias continue to increase their holdings of arms and equipment by various means of procurement, including theft from regular military units and depots in the region. Most will continue to be able to defy Moscow's and/or local authorities' efforts to take their arms from them. The republican governments have not yet brought these irregular military formations under centralized command, even though they might appear mutually supportive.

Some local militias have already shown tendencies toward becoming mercenary bands preying on the population and engaging in smuggling and other irregular activity. A substantial potential exists for the development of strain between some of these units and local authorities or republican governments. As Gorbachev attempts to stem the movement toward sovereignty and independence in the Transcaucasian republics, a degree of mutual interest between Moscow and local authorities for restricting the freedom of action of indigenous informal military formations is conceivable, though not yet evident.

The Transcaucasus is a region of major Soviet military bases and troop deployments designated for use against Turkey and Iran and for intervention in the Persian Gulf region. Civil unrest in the Transcaucasus and the prospect of further erosion of Moscow's control reduces the value of these installations and will necessitate, sooner rather than later, a major reevaluation of the overall Soviet military position in the region.[1]

The Soviets have shown little evidence, however, of revising their Transcaucasus military deployments, and local popular leaders show little interest in this problem. Most Transcaucasian leaders, if they have thought about the problem at all, reject the strategic military and political conceptions that have heretofore prevailed in Moscow. In one important respect, however—the case of southern (Iranian) Azerbaijan, discussed below—these policies raise the specter of a serious confrontation with a neighboring country.

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[1]The victory of the U.S.-led coalition against Iraq should give additional impetus to this process.

## V. ETHNIC UNREST

### IS MOSCOW FOMENTING ETHNIC TENSION?

Each Transcaucasian nationality blames Moscow for exacerbating rivalries between republics, ethnic tension within them, and strains with neighboring areas of the North Caucasus. These allegations revolve around three kinds of activity:

1. Conservatives in the central party *apparat* allegedly encouraged indigenous communists, eager to maintain their privileges and hold on power, to limit the implementation of *perestroika* and restrict *glasnost*. Some are still fighting rearguard actions.
2. In face of growing pressures from popular forces both inside and outside the local parties and governments, conservative communist leaders colluded to exacerbate rancorous issues to set peoples against each other so as to maintain control over them. Many Azeris and some Armenians argue that Nagorno-Karabakh would never have turned into a major area of confrontation if conservative communist party leaders in Armenia and Azerbaijan had not thought they were serving Moscow's interests by permitting confrontation to develop.
3. The USSR Committree of State Security (KGB) is accused of engaging in both small- and large-scale operations to exacerbate ethnic tension and strife. Its activities often have no clear long-term goal, many Transcaucasians maintain, and in some instances result from the fact that local KGB operatives enjoy wide autonomy and little supervision from Moscow. Specific motivation often involves maintaining privileges for discredited elites and prolonging waning KGB influence and leverage.

Whatever truth these allegations may contain, they are widely believed by large numbers of serious and influential people. The fact that they enjoy credibility demonstrates the extent to which the communist party and its major supporting institutions, including the KGB, are irretrievably discredited in the eyes of the population. Party conservatives evidently have not been able to to maintain a significant hold on portions of the rural population in the Transcaucasus, as they have in some other parts of the USSR and in

countries as different and far apart as Bulgaria and Mongolia. In the latter two countries, communists were able to hold their own in elections by combining intimidation with manipulation of politically isolated rural voters.

## AUTONOMOUS ENTITIES WITHIN THE TRANSCAUCASIAN REPUBLICS

No matter how democratic and assertive they may be of their own ethnic rights, Georgians have adamantly opposed the aspirations of minorities within the Georgian republic to maintain their territorial autonomy, let alone strengthen it. These Georgian minorities include the Abkhaz, the Ajars, and the Osetes.

Abkhaz agitation to have the administrative subordination of their autonomous republic shifted from Georgia to the RSFSR long preceded *perestroika*. The Abkhaz, a distinct indigenous nationality at least as ancient as the Georgians, accounted for only 17.3 percent of the Abkhaz ASSR's population in the 1989 census, which confirmed that they have been losing ground to the Georgians, who accounted for 46.2 percent.[1] Russian and Armenian groups in Abkhazia are almost as large as the Abkhaz.

Georgian democrats are as adamant in opposing Abkhaz aspirations as conservative Georgian communist party *apparatchiki* have been. They claim that the agitation for separation from Georgia does not represent the feelings of the Abkhaz majority, but only those of the corrupt Abkhaz communist officials who control the government of the autonomous republic and fear the loss of their privileges.

In the Georgian view, Moscow established the three autonomous territorial entities inside the Georgian SSR in 1921 and 1922 as part of a program to prevent the reassertion of Georgian nationalist aspirations. Georgians maintain that the Ajar ASSR was an even more artificial creation than the Abkhaz ASSR, as the former was based exclusively on religious rather than ethnic identity. The Ajars, an ancient Georgian subgroup that converted to Islam during the period of Ottoman rule, are for all practical purposes identical to the Laz, who inhabit the northeastern coastal region of Turkey.

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[1]The Abkhaz are now predominantly Orthodox Christians, though a minority, perhaps as high as 30 percent, may remain Sunni Muslims. The Abkhaz population was estimated at 150,000 in the midnineteenth century. After the defeat of Shamil in 1859 and the Circassians in the 1860s, at least half of the Abkhaz joined the enormous flood of Circassians and other North Caucasians who emigrated to the Ottoman Empire to avoid submission to the conquering Russians. Those who emigrated were all Muslims. They have been absorbed into the population of Turkey and other countries which formed part of the Ottoman Empire. Only 57,000 Abkhaz were counted in the 1926 Soviet census. See Alexandre Bennigsen and S. Enders Wimbush, *Muslims of the Soviet Empire*, C. Hurst & Co., London, 1985, pp. 213-216; also Paul B. Henze, *The North Caucasus: Russia's Long Struggle to Subdue the Circassians*, RAND, P-7666, August 1990.

A Georgian ethnographer who gave a paper on Ajaria at the London conference argued that Islam has for all practical purposes died out in the region, that the people who inhabit Ajaria maintain no links with other Islamic peoples in the Caucasus, and that if Ajars have any current religious leanings, they are toward Georgian Orthodoxy. He reported that 5,000 young people in Batumi, the Ajar capital, professed conversion to Orthodoxy when a Georgian cathedral was recently opened and reconsecrated in Batumi. In his view, the desire to maintain Ajaria as an autonomous republic centers, as it does in Abkhazia, in the corrupt conservative communist party officials who dominate the republic.[2]

No one claims that the Osetes of the South Osetian Autonomous Oblast differ from the Osetes who live in the North Osetian ASSR, which forms part of the RSFSR and has a far larger Osetian population. The boundary between the two areas is the crest of the Caucasus mountains. Probably a majority of South Osetes would like for their region to join the North Osetian ASSR, as would the leadership of the latter. The extent to which this movement represents the desires of Osetian party officials and whether their attitudes are reflected among the population of both areas is difficult to determine. Georgians strongly oppose the loss of territory the transfer would entail.[3]

While Georgian problems with Abkhaz, Ajars, and Osetes remain obscure to the outer world and to most other Soviet peoples as well, Armenian-Azeri rancor over the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast has been well publicized as an intractable issue that Moscow's intervention has failed to solve. Nothing that has occurred recently provides any reason to believe that a solution is in sight.

Nagorno-Karabakh remains an armed camp in which the Armenian majority and Azeri minority are sharply divided and go their separate ways with occasional clashes. In effect, the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh function as part of the Armenian SSR. Both sides, but especially the Azeri democrats, recognize to some extent that persistent tension over the area diverts attention from more important issues of democratic political evolution and creation of the basis for national independence.

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[2]We in the West do not know how distinctive the Ajars feel from other Georgians. In both Ajaria and Abkhazia, only an in-depth academic survey or an objectively administered plebiscite could measure the true feelings of the population.

[3]The situation in South Osetia worsened during winter 1990-1991, with serious clashes between Georgians and Osetes in Tskhinvali, the capital, and loss of life. See Elizabeth Fuller, "South Osetia: Analysis of a Permanent Crisis," *Report on the USSR*, RFE/RL Research Institute, Munich, Vol. 3/7, February 1991, pp. 20-22. Clashes continued into the early months of 1991, with loss of life on all sides and no solution in sight. See *Washington Post*, March 20, 1991.

The inequities between Nagorno-Karabakh and Nakhichevan have long rankled the Armenians. Nagorno-Karabakh, the population of which is nearly 80 percent Armenian, is only an autonomous oblast and belongs to Azerbaijan, while Nakhichevan, which is surrounded by Armenian territory except for its boundary with Iran, enjoys the status of an autonomous republic and also belongs to Azerbaijan. This disparity demonstrates the illogic of the entire system of Soviet "autonomous" territorial entities.[4]

The four-level system of ethnic autonomy—SSR, ASSR, autonomous oblast, and national okrug (district)—that has prevailed in the USSR since the 1920s has few defenders. The problem is how to modify or replace it. An Azeri political scientist declared:

> There are no common principles that can be applied to the entire Soviet Union on ethnic issues. Why do some groups have autonomous formations at different levels while others do not have them at all? Talk of abolishing the differences in levels of autonomy is only a cosmetic attempt at repairing the Stalinist system. Every union republic should have the right to determine its own position. After self-determination of union republics is settled, the issue of local autonomy will be easier to solve. Unfortunately, Karabakh has created a psychological barrier. It is a *cul-de-sac*. No republic wants a new autonomous formation on its territory because it fears that in the future it will make demands for separation or independence.

Nakhichevan is the only Transcaucasian autonomous territory that has not caused ethnic strain in its parent republic, Azerbaijan. It is the home territory of long-standing Azeri strong man and Brezhnev protege, Geidar Aliev who, as a supporter of autonomy for Azerbaijan, stood for election to the new republican Supreme Soviet in September 1990 and gained 95 percent of the vote in Nakhichevan. The inhabitants of Nakhichevan, which has a long border with Iran, were in the forefront of the popular initiative to destroy guard towers and barbed wire barriers on the Iranian border in January 1990. They are 95.9 percent Azeri. Moscow's authority in the region remains tenuous.

Lesser territorial issues also plague the Transcaucasian republics. Georgians claim border regions of western Azerbaijan, and Azeris claim sections of eastern Georgia that have a large Azeri minority. Some Azeris claim the southernmost portion of Armenia, along the Iranian border, to give Azerbaijan a direct link with Nakhichevan. Kurds living in this region have advanced a claim for separate administrative status. Armenia, by far the smallest and geographically least well endowed of the Transcaucasian republics, is even more sensitive than the others about the loss of territory. Kurds have been leaving Armenia and moving to Azerbaijan.

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[4]Many such disparities are discussed in my companion Note, *The Russian Republic: Ethnic Dynamics and Dilemmas*, RAND, N-3219-USDP, forthcoming.

## VI. RELATIONS WITH IRAN AND TURKEY

### AZERI RAPPROCHEMENT WITH IRANIAN AZERBAIJAN

The Azeri popular movement largely favors the unification of Iranian Azerbaijan with the Azerbaijan republic and the formation of an independent Azeri Turkish nation. Consensus is lacking on how or how rapidly this should occur, but northern Azeris established much closer relations with southerners during 1990. These relations take place at all levels of society—they are by no means only an intellectual or political phenomenon.

Southern Azeris are eager for closer ties, as became evident during January and February 1990, when Azeris on both sides of the border cooperated to tear down border barriers to facilitate travel in both directions. Neither the Soviet authorities nor the Iranians have since succeeded in stopping movement across the border. Northerners argue adamantly and persuasively that religious extremism plays no role in the desires of both groups of Azeris to come closer together and unite. They maintain that a prime motivation among southerners for closer ties is the desire to escape from Iranian clerical rule.

One sees little evidence of sympathy among Soviet Azeris for religious extremism or for the Iranian clerical regime. A February 1990 poll on attitudes cited by one of the London conference participants produced the following results: 76 percent of respondents favored freedom of conscience; 47 percent favored studying Islamic culture; only 3.8 percent favored the creation of an Islamic state. Approximately the same number favored banning Islam entirely. Leaders of the Azeri democratic movement are deeply concerned about misrepresentation of their position by the Western press. One of the London conference participants declared, e.g.:

> In the West the notion of antagonism between the *Muslim* Azerbaijanis and *Christian* Armenians has become widespread. This model is favored by some reactionaries at home who are trying to use it to delay the democratic movement within the republic. This also suits some circles in Armenia who want to advance the idea of an alliance with the West. The former conservative leaders of Azerbaijan liked this formulation, for it helped them suppress democratic nationalist aspirations. This kind of thing feeds on Western fears of the spread of Muslim fundamentalism. What is really happening? The real image of Azerbaijan is obscured. It is overtaken by images of Lebanese guerrillas—rabid extremists.... In the 1990s the main problem is going to be southern Azerbaijan. There is serious discrimination against Azerbaijanis in Iran. Both parts of Azerbaijan should be joined to form a free and independent state. Iranian leadership is, of course, against this

conception. Meetings in Iran reported in the Soviet press have been reported in the West as pro-Khomeini. This shows how incompetent the media can be when they report complex intercommunal situations. The roots which underpin the contemporary situation in Azerbaijan go back into history and they are still alive.

## AZERI ORIENTATION TOWARD TURKEY

Turkey is the country with which Azeris most want close relations. Interest in Turkey rests on ties that developed before the Bolshevik revolution and were never entirely severed; most of the leaders of the independent Azerbaijan republic found refuge in Turkey and a sizable Azeri exile community has continued to exist there.

The Azeri language, though written Cyrillic since the 1940s, is mutually intelligible with Anatolian Turkish. A strong movement among Azeris in favor of return to the Latin alphabet appears to be on the verge of succeeding. From radio and television, and from an increasing flow of publications from Turkey, Azeris have become familiar with most of the purely Turkish roots and phrases used in Turkey and prefer them to the Russianisms that until recently they were encouraged to adopt.

The Azeris admire the Turks as a kindred people who have modernized successfully, learned to practice democracy, made a success of the free-market system, and are well on their way to acceptance as a European country. Most Azeris consider these realistic goals for themselves. The overwhelming majority of their population, Azeri popular movement leaders insist, regard Islamic culture as a shared bond with the Turkish republic but, like most Turks, have little interest in Muslim sectarianism. Thus, the fact that Turkey is largely Sunni while they are mostly Shia seems to have very little effect on the attitudes of most young Azeris toward Turkey.

The Turks reciprocate the warm Azeri feelings for Turkey. The Turks expressed their feelings in widespread demonstrations in support of the Azerbaijan movement for self-determination after the events of January 1990. Semra Ozal, wife of the Turkish president and an ardent champion of women's rights in her own country, was invited to Baku by the Azerbaijan women's organization in July 1990 and received an enthusiastic welcome. A seasoned Turkish writer who accompanied her reported the week-long visit as "the most intense emotional experience of my life."[1]

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[1]Private letter to the author.

The Turkish government has nevertheless been cautious about direct political support for Azerbaijani democrats and has avoided any impression of encouraging separatism or aspirations for a closer political relationship with Turkey. Instead, both the Turkish and Azerbaijani governments have stressed the pragmatic, commercial, and technical nature of the closer relations that both have sought.

Azeri Prime Minister Hasanov visited Turkey in the third week of September 1990 and met both government officials and Turkish businessmen. The two sides signed a protocol on expanding trade and technical cooperation, improving communications and land traffic through Nakhichevan, and opening a Turkish consulate in Baku and an Azerbaijani consulate in Trabzon.[2] Travel has increased in both directions. Trabzon-Baku air service began in April 1991. The pace of academic and journalistic exchanges has accelerated, and Azerbaijanis are visiting Turkey in steadily increasing numbers. Joint economic ventures are being developed and arrangements for regular export of Turkish publications have recently been agreed upon.

## TURKEY AND ARMENIA AND GEORGIA

The Turkish press and Turkish public have strongly supported Azeri positions in respect to Nagorno-Karabakh since the status of the territory became a major issue in 1988. The Turkish government (in contrast to much of the Turkish press) has been cautious, however, and avoided statements and actions that could be considered anti-Armenian. Turkey both provided and facilitated the delivery of earthquake relief to Armenia in 1988-1989.

Officially, Turkey has shown little sensitivity about references to allegations of Armenian genocide during the final period of the Ottoman Empire which Armenian nationalist leaders make from time to time. Turkish discretion has had the beneficial effect of encouraging Armenian democrats to evaluate their present situation more realistically. From the late 1960s onward, Moscow used a wide variety of clandestine methods to encourage Armenian propaganda, political action, and terrorism against Turkey. These efforts have left deep impressions in the collective conscience of both Turks and Armenians.

Some Armenian nationalist leaders, exemplified by Paruir Hayrikyan, recognized the futility of continuing on this course.[3] They considered Soviet communism and imperialism

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[2]*Turkish Daily News*, Ankara, September 19, 1990.

[3]Tried and jailed for anti-Soviet nationalist agitation, Hayrikyan was exiled to Ethiopia in 1987, from where he made his way to the United States. After being elected a

a more profound threat to Armenian democratic aspirations than anything Turkey would be likely to do unless severely provoked and sought some *modus vivendi* with Ankara.

Conciliation with Turkey became the official position of the Armenian democratic government when Levon Ter-Petrosian was elected president in August 1990. During a visit to the United States that October, Ter-Petrosian explained his position at some length:

> The most important factor for the future of the independent Armenian state is not having the protector in distant Moscow, but normalizing relations with its immediate neighbors, including Turkey. I believe that normal relations would benefit all concerned parties. By establishing relations with neighboring Turkey, it can build up its trade and achieve access to sea routes through the Black Sea and to modern highways leading to Europe and the Middle East. Normalized relations could also benefit Turkey, offering it new markets and a chance to atone for the mass slaughter of the Armenians during World War I.[4]

As yet, one sees little evidence that Armenian emigre attitudes or Turkish public opinion have developed to the point where a comprehensive agreement would be possible. The current state of public opinion on this issue in Armenia is not easy to determine. The issue represents an important medium-term challenge for both Armenians and Turks.

If Armenian democratic nationalists could reconcile themselves to letting history remain history and if Turks could develop a constructive relationship with an autonomous or independent Armenia, prospects for the reduction of Caucasian ethnic tension on a broad front would advance. This kind of evolution could encourage rapprochement between Armenians and Azeris.

The possibility of a Turkish relationship with an independent Georgia seems simple in comparison. Though Georgians are well aware that much of their colorful medieval history took place in Tao-Klarjeti, a region now constituting the northeastern provinces of the Turkish republic and ruled by Turks for several hundred years, Georgian nationalists have avoided making territorial claims.[5] These would bring to mind the demands Stalin made against Turkey in 1945.

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member of the Armenian parliament in September 1990, Hayrikyan returned to Armenia at the end of the year.

[4]*Washington Times*, October 4, 1990.

[5]The region contains several historic castles and medieval Georgian churches—Parhal, Haho, Ishan, and Vank—which are well preserved because they were turned into mosques centuries ago as the Georgian-speaking population (which always remained in the region) converted to Islam and became Turkified.

Meskhetian Turks, whom Stalin deported from Georgia, have not become an issue between Georgia and Turkey, but the potential for tension exists if large numbers of Meskhetians attempt to return from Central Asia to Georgia.[6] Georgians do not favor their return, and only 1,200 are said to have come back. Some have gone to Azerbaijan[7] and the North Caucasus.

Some Meskhetians remain in Central Asia, but many were evacuated following riots in Uzbekistan in summer 1989 and are living as refugees in European Russia. Their situation remains to be resolved. Some have proposed emigrating to Turkey, which would undoubtedly welcome them. A mass movement would strain Turkey's capacity for absorption, however, in view of the large numbers of Turks from Bulgaria who have gone to Turkey during the past three years.

Local trade between northeastern Turkey and Georgia has expanded rapidly since the border was opened in 1989, with large numbers of Georgians coming by car to purchase consumer goods in the bustling market districts of Artvin, Rize, and Trabzon. In all, 160,000 Soviet citizens are reported to have crossed overland into Turkey on tourist visas in 1990.

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[6]Meskhetian Turks are included in the general category, "Turks," in the 1989 Soviet census. Their numbers more than doubled from 92,689 to 207,369 between 1979 and 1989. The largest number, 106,240, were listed in Uzbekistan as of January 1989. Neither natural growth nor immigration (of which there was none) can account for this increase, which must be the result of reclassification of people who were previously counted under some other category. The same occurred with another Turkic group, the Crimean Tatars, who doubled between 1979 and 1989 from 132,272 to 268,739. During the same period the tiny Turkish minority in Georgia increased from only 917 to 1,372.

[7]One London conference participant said that 50,000 Meskhetians had now arrived in Azerbaijan. This movement must have occurred following the riots in Uzbekistan in summer 1989 for the 1989 census (see Tables 3 and 5 in Appendix B) showed a total of only 19,077 "Turks" in the entire Transcaucasus. The 50,000 figure was affirmed by Azeri ethnohistorian Rauf Husseinov during a visit to Washington, D.C., in March 1991. He also reported that some Meskhetians have been settled in the NKAO.

## VII. ECONOMIC CONSIDERATIONS

As they move toward greater political and cultural autonomy, which they are in the process of taking for themselves, and their ultimate goal of independence, Transcaucasian peoples must give serious attention to economic matters. Complaints of popular front leaders parallel those heard from all parts of the Soviet Union: exploitation by the center, all-union ministries operating independently of local authorities, distorting economic priorities and damaging the environment; and patterns of economic relations that have discouraged regional cooperation and mutually beneficial local exchanges of resources and skills.

Azeris speak of deprivation over a period of more than a century of the wealth that the Russian and Soviet empires have realized from their petroleum resources. They are acutely conscious of the role that their republic still plays in the training of petroleum specialists and in the manufacture and servicing of equipment used in petroleum exploration and extraction throughout the Soviet Union. A large diaspora of Azeri engineers and technicians work in all the major oilfields of the USSR. This Azeri technical diaspora is said to reflect the sense of assertive nationalism that has developed so rapidly in Azerbaijan.[1]

All Transcaucasian democratic nationalists talk of the advantages of a free market, foreign investment, joint ventures, and broadened links to the outer world, but their economic thinking does not seem to have advanced beyond concepts that are popular among reformers in the USSR as a whole. Peasants in the Transcaucasus have always taken pride in their ability, even with the disincentives of the Soviet system, to produce high-quality agricultural products and find ways of profiting from them.

Controls have clearly eroded in recent years to the benefit of local informal entrepreneurs. Transcaucasian economies have suffered considerable dislocation, however, especially that of Armenia, which has had to cope with the double burden of massive earthquake damage and transport blockades.

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[1]Some measure of the importance of Azeris in the Soviet petroleum industry can be gained from 1989 census data for areas of major oil and natural gas development during the 1980s. Azeris in the mid-Siberian Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug (District) increased over ten times, from 1,263 in 1979 to 12,846 in 1989. In the far northern Yamal-Nenets Autonomous Okrug, the proportional increase was even greater, from 308 in 1979 to 3,418 in 1989.

Armenia is also intensely concerned about environmental pollution.[2] The overuse of pesticides and fertilizers and problems caused by the disposal of industrial waste, including the effects of contamination from mining and nuclear power generation, were arousing concern even before the advent of *glasnost*.

Armenia's most serious socioeconomic challenge is the absorption of more than 300,000 refugees from Azerbaijan. These are mostly people who had lived in cities for several generations, but most of them had to be placed in rural settlements abandoned by Azeris who fled to Azerbaijan. (The Transcaucasus as a whole is said to have more than 600,000 refugees.)

Most Armenian refugees are having difficulty adjusting to rural life, and many do not fit in well with the local Armenian population. Many have been unable to find jobs that utilize their talents and experience. In Azerbaijan, they had little contact with the Armenian church and the cultural traditions it fosters. As a result, even their language is sometimes inadequate for daily needs in Armenia, and their knowledge of Armenian customs and traditions is deficient. Many refugee children were not educated in Armenian schools and speak better Russian than Armenian. Tension has developed between refugees and local populations already under strain from coping with earthquake victims. It is an unhappy situation for which no early or comprehensive solution is in sight.

The fact that the SOAS conference in London included no presentations on economic matters as such attests to the distance that the Transcaucasian popular democratic leaders still have to travel to overcome basic socioeconomic problems. Their attention has been concentrated on political issues. But concern about politics must lead sooner or later to economics.

Transcaucasians do not seem to fear an economic blockade by Moscow after the failure of the early 1990 blockade of Lithuania (they are all following developments in the Baltics attentively and emissaries are exchanged frequently in both directions). They appear increasingly to recognize the economic advantages—perhaps even necessity—of maintaining links with other parts of the Soviet Union. The Transcaucasian republics would not be in a better position than most other parts of the Soviet Union to enter the international market, nor do they have any special advantages for attracting foreign investment.

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[2]See John Tedstrom, "Armenia: An Energy Profile," in *Report on the USSR*, RFE/RL Research Institute, Munich, Vol. 3/8, February 22, 1991.

Armenians anticipate a continued flow of resources from Armenian communities abroad. For Georgians, such expectations are out of the question, and Azeris can expect only modest interest in investment from Turks and Arabs. Most Azeri democratic leaders would find it distasteful to make the kind of religious concessions that would make them attractive for conservative Arab largesse in any significant amount.

Economic realities may eventually push Transcaucasian nationalists to moderate their desire for complete independence and give serious consideration to forms of continued association among themselves and with other parts of the Soviet Union. A Georgian historian in London gave a provocative summary of the problem.

> We need a common Caucasian home—a common economic home—for all Caucasians. Urban development of the Transcaucasian republics shows a pattern characteristic of colonial countries, with a large proportion of the population living in capital cities and concentration of dirty industrial production in them. The economies of our republics are not independent. The Caucasian economies need enormous sums of money for restructuring—it cannot at present be borrowed anywhere. The only solution is moral, economic, and ecological cooperation. There must be a common Caucasian ecological house.

A morning at the SOAS conference devoted to a group discussion on autonomy and the future organization of the Soviet Union provided lively and heated debate. The Russian participant from the Institute of Ethnography in Moscow outlined three basic concepts:

1. An enhanced and genuine federation with all existing ethnic units raised to the same level and reassociating voluntarily in a redefined federal structure
2. A completely reorganized federal structure resembling the United States, with political authority based entirely on geographic, rather than ethnic, principles
3. A confederation along the lines of the British Commonwealth, in which independent and sovereign republics would join voluntarily for economic or other advantages that they would define according to their own interests.

## VIII. CONCLUSION: A NEW CONCEPT OF ETHNIC HARMONY?[1]

The problem with all schemes for the reorganization of the Soviet Union is how to achieve it before the system collapses. The difficulty is especially acute in the Transcaucasus, where the ethnic structure that has prevailed for 70 years (based in part on the previous territorial organization of the Russian empire and reinforced by the brief experience of independence during the years 1918-1921) has created such a deep sense of ethnic entitlement to territory that democratically inclined leaders are at a loss to find a way to overcome it.

The process of concentration of each major Transcaucasian nationality in "its own" territory has been intensifying since World War II. The 1989 census demonstrates how this process accelerated the past decade (see Appendix tables B-2 and B-3). Slowly but steadily, Slavs have been moving out of the Transcaucasian republics, and the most recent evidence indicates an acceleration of out-migration (see Table B-4). Slavic out-migration would be greater than it is if Russians had more attractive prospects for resettlement in their own republic.

The Transcaucasian minority groups that have increased are almost all Muslims, e.g., Kurds, Turks, and in much greater total numbers, peoples from Dagestan immediately to the north of Azerbaijan.[2] Though the question of religious tension has been distorted in the Western media, this factor, which has many subtle facets, contributes to fears among Georgians and Armenians of being demographically overwhelmed in the twenty-first century. Thus, even consideration of minor and logical adjustments in boundaries between republics provokes intense and irrational opposition. *Glasnost* and more open political life have made facing these issues more rather than less difficult.

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[1]The old concept of *druzhba narodov* (friendship of peoples) has been widely discredited in the Soviet Union because so much lip service was paid to it while, like so many other features of the communist system, it was so blatantly ignored in practice. The term is probably so discredited that resort to the principle that ethnic groups should live together in harmony requires a new slogan.

[2]The relationship between the ethnic and political dynamics of the North Caucasus and the Transcaucasian republics are examined in Paul B. Henze, "The Russian Republic: Ethnic Dynamics and Dilemmas," RAND, N-3219-USDP, forthcoming. See also my forthcoming article, "The Demography of the Caucasus According to 1989 Soviet Census Data" in *Central Asian Survey*.

The London conference did not, however, end in pessimism. The final formal session, devoted to summing up three days of discussions, produced something like a consensus that all Transcaucasian peoples must cooperate to secure independence from Moscow and find their way into a new framework of relations with each other and with whatever new structure emerges from the collapsing Soviet Union.

The concept of *dobrososedstvo* (good neighborliness)—peoples living together with respect, if not friendship, for each other—was advanced as a possible solution. American specialist Ronald Suny challenged Caucasians to approach their future creatively:

> The questions that need to be faced by the Caucasian peoples, preferably collectively, are: What is their future regional course of action? They need one another. If autonomy is possible, to what degree? Will the Caucasian peoples have learned the lessons of 1918-1921? Where do leaders come from and how are they produced? Has the Soviet system produced the leaders necessary to lead autonomous or independent states? During the 70 years of Soviet rule, the process of concentration of ethnic groups within each republic has continued. How can the three Transcaucasian peoples live in a rational—if not friendly—relationship with each other?

Caucasian intellectuals and political activists who came to London in July 1990 clearly enjoyed the opportunity (which they almost never have had at home) to meet each other under nonprovocative circumstances, to test each other's attitudes, and exchange views and information. From this point of view alone, the conference served a uniquely constructive purpose. At the concluding banquet, the Georgian toastmaster led participants in toasts to friendship, understanding, cooperation, closer future contacts, and resolution of differences within the framework of democracy, the rule of law, and respect for human rights.

As developments during the remainder of 1990 and the first months of 1991 have demonstrated, formidable problems loom on the horizon. Historical resentments, ethnic rivalries, the inexperience of political leaders, and the likelihood of increasing economic strains all justify doubts about the Caucasians' ability to manage the transition process in which they are enmeshed. Like the peoples of the Balkans, whom they resemble in many respects, Caucasians occupy a strategic transitional region, where the interests of many outside powers converge. External influences (including that of Russia), however, may well turn out to be a secondary factor in determining their future. The immediate future, at least, appears to lie increasingly in their own hands.

Retreat into conservatism and desperate efforts to preserve the Soviet Union intact do not give Moscow the capacity to intervene militarily in the Caucasus to force submission. Armed intervention in both Georgia and Azerbaijan has proved extremely counterproductive. Intervention in the Nagorno-Karabakh has contributed nothing toward a settlement there.

Volatile Caucasian populations would be likely to resort to violence on a large scale to resist efforts by the Soviet armed forces or KGB-directed security forces to subdue them. Moscow will probably hesitate to risk provocative actions the outcome of which it might not be able to control in a region on the edge of the Middle East. For the peoples of the Transcaucasus, this situation provides a remarkable opportunity for assertion of their own interests—and a formidable challenge to define and develop these interests in ways that are not mutually antagonistic.

## Appendix A

## ETHNIC TERRITORIAL SUBDIVISIONS OF THE USSR[1]

### THE FIFTEEN UNION REPUBLICS

The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) consists of 15 union republics—called soviet socialist republics (SSRs)—representing the 15 major ethnic groups that form the union. Table A.1 lists each union republic and its capital, founding date, and date of incorporation into the USSR.

The major *administrative* subdivision of the larger union republics is the *oblast*, or region. The RSFSR, by far the largest union republic, in addition to oblasts contains still larger administrative subdivisions, called the *kray*, or territory. Five union republics—the RSFSR, Azerbaijan, Georgian, Tajik, and Uzbek—also contain *ethnic* subdivisions.

Ethnic minorities that do not rate a union republic may be represented by one of three lower levels of ethnic subdivision: an autonomous soviet socialist republic (ASSR), an autonomous oblast (AObl), or an autonomous *okrug*, or district (AOkr). These were designed to give recognition to smaller, less politically (or economically) developed ethnic groups.

As the Soviet Union evolved, the "autonomy" of these entities proved largely fictional in the political sense, though in various ways local oligarchies often managed to obtain considerable economic and cultural autonomy for them. Under Stalin, several ethnic subdivisions, including the Crimean ASSR and the Volga-German ASSR, were abolished as punishment for perceived disloyalty during World War II. Karelia, which began as a "labor commune" in 1920, became the Karelian ASSR in 1923, the Karelo-Finnish SSR in 1940, and the Karelian ASSR again in 1956. Numerous other ethnic minorities receive no special recognition, for example, the Gagauz in Moldavia, who have recently been agitating for separate status.

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[1]Based on *SSSR Administrativno-territorial'noye deleniye soyuznykh respublik* (USSR: Administrative and Territorial Subdivisions of the Union Republics), *Izvestiya* Publishers, Moscow, 1963; *Directory of Soviet Officials: Republic Organizations*, Central Intelligence Agency, Directorate of Intelligence, LDA 88-15256, November 1988; and *Natsional'nyy sostav naseleniya* (National Composition of the Population), Part 2, USSR State Committee on Statistics, Informatsionno-izdatel'skiy tsentr, Moscow, 1989.

Table A.1

UNION REPUBLICS OF THE USSR

| Union Republic | Capital | Founded | Joined USSR |
|---|---|---|---|
| Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic (RSFSR) | Moscow | 11-07-17 | 12-30-22 |
| Armenian SSR | Erevan | 11-29-20 | 12-30-22[a] |
| Azerbaijan SSR | Baku | 04-28-20 | 12-30-22[a] |
| Belorussian SSR | Minsk | 01-01-19 | 12-30-22 |
| Estonian SSR | Tallin | 07-21-40 | 08-06-40 |
| Georgian SSR | Tbilisi | 02-25-21 | 12-30-22[a] |
| Kazakh SSR | Alma-Ata | 08-26 20[b] | 12-05-36 |
| Kirgiz SSR | Frunze | 10-14-24[c] | 12-05-36 |
| Latvian SSR | Riga | 07-21-40 | 08-05-40 |
| Lithuanian SSR | Vilnius | 07-21-40 | 08-03-40 |
| Moldavian SSR | Kishinev | 10-12-24[d] | 08-02-40 |
| Tajik SSR | Dushanbe | 10-14-24[e] | 12-05-29 |
| Turkmen SSR | Ashkhabad | 10-27-24 | 10-27-24 |
| Ukrainian SSR | Kiev | 12-25-17 | 12-30-22 |
| Uzbek SSR | Tashkent | 10-27-24 | 10-27-24 |

[a]Joined the Transcaucasus Soviet Federated Socialist Republic (TSFSR) 03-12-22; joined the USSR 12-30-22 as part of the TSFSR; became a union republic of the USSR 12-05-36, when the TSFSR was abolished.

[b]The Kazakh ASSR, originally the Kirgiz ASSR, was established 08-26-20; it became a union republic 12-05-36.

[c]Founded 10-14-24 as the Kara-Kirgiz Autonomous Oblast; became the Kirgiz ASSR 02-01-26 and the Kirgiz SSR 12-05-36.

[d]Founded as Moldavian ASSR 10-12-24; became a union republic 08-02-40.

[e]Founded as Tajik ASSR 10-14-24; became a union republic 10-16-29 and joined the USSR 12-05-29.

## THE TWENTY AUTONOMOUS REPUBLICS

The RSFSR contains 16 ASSRs; the Azerbaijan SSR, 1; the Georgian SSR, 2; and the Uzbek SSR, 1, as shown in Table A.2. All ASSRs except the Nakhichevan are administered by the union republic in which they are located. The Nakhichevan ASSR, an almost entirely Azeri enclave, is surrounded by the Armenian SSR but is governed by the Azerbaijan SSR.

Table A.2

AUTONOMOUS SOVIET SOCIALIST REPUBLICS OF THE USSR

| ASSR | Center | Subordination | Founded |
|---|---|---|---|
| Abkhaz | Sukhumi | Georgian SSR | 03-04-21 |
| Ajar | Batumi | Georgian SSR | 06-16-21 |
| Bashkir | Ufa | RSFSR | 03-23-19 |
| Buryat | Ulan-Ude | RSFSR | 05-30-23 |
| Chechen-Ingush | Groznyy | RSFSR | 01-15-34[a] |
| Chuvash | Cheboksary | RSFSR | 06-24-20[b] |
| Dagestan | Makhachkala | RSFSR | 01-20-21 |
| Kabardin-Balkar | Nalchik | RSFSR | 09-01-21 |
| Kalmyk | Elista | RSFSR | 11-04-20[c] |
| Karakalpak | Nukus | Uzbek SSR | 02-16-25[d] |
| Karelian | Petrozavodsk | RSFSR | 06-08-20[e] |
| Komi | Syktyvkar | RSFSR | 08-22-21[f] |
| Mari | Yoshkar-Ola | RSFSR | 11-04-20[g] |
| Mordov | Saransk | RSFSR | 01-10-30[h] |
| Nakhichevan | Nakhichevan | Azerbaijan SSR | 02-09-24 |
| North Osetian | Vladikavkaz | RSFSR | 07-07-24[i] |
| Tatar | Kazan | RSFSR | 05-27-20 |
| Tuva | Kyzyl | RSFSR | 10-13-44[j] |
| Udmurt | Izhevsk | RSFSR | 11-04-20[k] |
| Yakut | Yakutsk | RSFSR | 04-27-22 |

[a]Chechen AObl founded 11-30-22; Ingush AObl, 07-07-24; combined into Chechen-Ingush AObl 01-15-34; became ASSR 12-05-36; ASSR abolished 03-07-44; restored 01-09-57.

[b]Chuvash AObl established 06-24-20; raised to ASSR 04-21-25.

[c]Kalmyk AObl formed 11-04-20; became ASSR 10-20-35; abolished 12-27-43; restored as AObl 01-09-57; raised to ASSR 07-29-58.

[d]Karakalpak AObl formed 02-16-25; became ASSR 03-20-32; incorporated into Uzbek SSR 12-05-36.

[e]Karelian labor commune founded 06-08-20; became ASSR 7-25-23; Karelo-Finnish SSR formed 03-31-40; became Karelian ASSR 07-16-56.

[f]Komi AObl formed 08-22-21; became ASSR 12-05-36.

[g]Mari AObl founded 11-04-20; became ASSR 12-05-36.

[h]Mordov AObl founded 01-10-30; became ASSR 12-20-34.

[i]North-Osetian AObl founded 07-07-24; became ASSR 12-05-36.

[j]Tuva AObl founded 10-13-44; became ASSR 10-10-61.

[k]Udmurt AObl founded 11-04-20; became ASSR 12-28-34.

### THE EIGHT AUTONOMOUS OBLASTS

Autonomous oblasts, found in the RSFSR, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Tajikistan, are subordinated to krays in the RSFSR and to the union republic in the other three cases (see Table A.3). The Nagorno-Karabakh AObl, the population of which is nearly 80 percent Armenian, is located in and governed by the Azerbaijan SSR. Following the bloody fighting between the Armenians and Azeris in 1988, however, the USSR took over the administration of the Nagorno-Karabakh AObl from January 12 to November 28, 1989.

### THE TEN AUTONOMOUS OKRUGS

Finally, small national groups in the RSFSR may be represented by autonomous (formerly national) okrugs, all of which are administered by an RSFSR kray or oblast. The ten national okrugs are listed in Table A.4.

Table A.3

AUTONOMOUS OBLASTS OF THE USSR

| Autonomous Oblast | *Center* | *Subordination* | *Founded* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Adygey | Maykop | Krasnodar Kray | 07-27-22 |
| Gorno-Altay | Gorno-Altaysk | Altay Kray | 06-01-22 |
| Gorno-Badakhshan | Khorog | Tajik SSR | 01-02-25 |
| Jewish | Birobijan | Khabarovsk Kray | 05-07-34 |
| Karachay-Cherkes | Cherkessk | Stavropol Kray | 04-30-28 |
| Khakas | Abakan | Krasnoyarsk Kray | 10-20-30 |
| Nagorno-Karabakh | Stepanakert | Azerbaijan SSR | 07-07-23 |
| South Osetian | Tskhinvali | Georgian SSR | 04-20-22 |

Table A.4

AUTONOMOUS OKRUGS OF THE USSR

| Autonomous Okrug | Center | Subordination | Founded |
|---|---|---|---|
| Aga Buryat | Aginskoye | Chita Oblast | 09-26-37 |
| Chukchi | Anadyr | Magadan Oblast | 12-10-30 |
| Evenki | Tura | Krasnoyarsk Kray | 12-10-30 |
| Khanty-Mansi | Khanty-Mansiysk | Tyumen Oblast | 12-10-30 |
| Komi-Perm | Kudymkar | Perm Oblast | 02-26-25 |
| Koryak | Palana | Kamchatka Oblast | 12-10-30 |
| Nenets | Naryan-Mar | Arkhangelsk Oblast | 07-15-29 |
| Taymyr (Dolgan-Nenets) | Dudinka | Krasnoyarsk Kray | 12-10-30 |
| Ust-Orda Buryat | Ust-Ordynskiy | Irkutsk Oblast | 09-26-37 |
| Yamal-Nenets | Salekhard | Tyumen Oblast | 12-10-30 |

## Appendix B

## GEOGRAPHIC AND DEMOGRAPHIC DATA ON TRANSCAUCASIA[1]

Table B.1

AREA AND POPULATION DENSITY OF TRANSCAUCASIAN REPUBLICS AND ETHNIC SUBDIVISIONS

| | Area (sq mi) | 1989 Population | Population Density |
|---|---|---|---|
| Armenian SSR | 11,490 | 3,304,353 | 288 |
| Azerbaijan SSR, including | 33,430 | 7,019,739 | 210 |
| Nakhichevan ASSR | 2,120 | 293,875 | 139 |
| Nagorno-Karabakh AObl | 1,700 | 189,029 | 111 |
| Georgian SSR, including | 26,900 | 5,395,841 | 201 |
| Abkhaz ASSR | 3,320 | 524,161 | 158 |
| Ajar ASSR | 1,160 | 392,432 | 338 |
| South Osetian AObl | 1,505 | 98,527 | 65 |
| All Transcaucasus | 71,820 | 15,719,933 | 219 |

NOTE: The Transcaucasus accounts for less than 1 percent of the area and 5.5 percent of the population of the USSR. Transcaucasia's importance stems from its strategic location and the traditional political vigor of its inhabitants. Its population densities show only small disparities. Armenia has the highest ratio of people to land, and the effect of this comparative population density is increased by the fact that most of Armenia is plateau and mountain and the proportion of cultivable land is smaller than in the other two republics. Armenia's population density is exceeded only by that of Ajaria. Mountainous South Osetia is the most thinly populated Transcaucasian entity, though no less so than many of the mountain regions of Georgia, from which a steady outflow of people has occurred in recent years. The capital contains the major population concentration in each republic.

[1]The population data in Tables B.1-B.10 were extracted and/or calculated from the official results of the 1989 USSR census, as published in *Natsional'nyy sostav naseleniya* (National Composition of the Population), Part 2, the USSR State Committee on Statistics, Informatsionno-izdatel'skiy tsentr, Moscow, 1989.

Table B.2

POPULATION DYNAMICS OF THE TRANSCAUCASIAN REPUBLICS, 1979-1989

| | Population 1979 | Population 1989 | Growth (%) | As % of 1989 USSR Population |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Armenian SSR | 3,037,259 | 3,304,353 | 8.8 | 1.16 |
| Azerbaijan SSR | 6,026,515 | 7,019,739 | 16.5 | 2.46 |
| Georgian SSR | 4,993,182 | 5,395,841 | 8.1 | 1.89 |
| Total | 14,056,956 | 15,719,933 | 11.8 | 5.5 |

| | Titular Nationality in Republic | | | As % of Republic Population | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Population 1979 | Population 1989 | Growth (%) | 1979 | 1989 |
| Armenian SSR | 2,724,975 | 3,081,920 | 13.1 | 65.6 | 66.6 |
| Azerbaijan SSR | 4,708,832 | 5,800,994 | 23.2 | 86.0 | 85.4 |
| Georgian SSR | 3,433,011 | 3,789,385 | 10.4 | 96.1 | 95.1 |

NOTE: Between 1979 and 1989, the population of Transcaucasia as a whole increased at a rate almost three percentage points faster (11.8 percent) than that of the USSR as a whole (9 percent). Armenia and Georgia had rates of increase almost two percentage points higher than that of the RSFSR (7 percent). Azerbaijan's population grew twice as fast. Armenians and Georgians had growth rates well above the unionwide Russian average (5.6 percent), and Azeris increased almost four times as fast as Russians, though they rank relatively low among Soviet Muslim Turkic peoples—e.g., Kirgiz (32.2 percent), Uzbeks (34 percent) Turkmen (34 percent), and Tajiks (45.5 percent). The proportion of the titular nationality in each Transcaucasian republic, by far the highest for Georgians, remained essentially unchanged.

Table B.3

MINORITY ETHNIC POPULATION TRENDS IN TRANSCAUCASIA

| Ethnic Group[a] | Population 1979 | Population 1989 | Growth (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Armenian SSR | | | |
| Azerbaijanis* | 160,841 | 84,860 | -48 |
| Kurds* | 50,822 | 56,028 | 10 |
| Assyrians | 6,183 | 5,963 | -3 |
| Greeks | 5,653 | 4,650 | -17 |
| Georgians | 1,314 | 1,364 | 3 |
| Azerbaijan SSR | | | |
| Armenians | 475,486 | 390,495 | -17 |
| in Nagorno-Karabakh | 123,076 | 145,450 | 18 |
| in Nakhichevan | 3,406 | 1,858 | -47 |
| Lezgins* | 158,057 | 171,395 | 8 |
| Avars* | 35,991 | 44,072 | 22 |
| Jews | 33,248 | 25,190 | -24 |
| Tatars* | 31,204 | 28,019 | -10 |
| Tats | 8,848 | 10,239 | 15 |
| Tsakhurs* | 8,546 | 13,318 | 55 |
| Turks* | 7,926 | 17,705 | 123 |
| Udins | 5,841 | 6,125 | 4 |
| Kurds* | 5,676 | 12,221 | 115 |
| Mountain Jews | 2,123 | 5,484 | 158 |
| Georgian SSR | | | |
| Armenians | 448,000 | 436,615 | -2 |
| Azerbaijanis* | 255,678 | 307,424 | 20 |
| Osetes | 160,497 | 164,009 | 2 |
| Greeks | 95,105 | 100,304 | 5 |
| Abkhaz | 85,285 | 93,275 | 9 |
| Kurds* | 25,688 | 33,327 | 29 |
| Jews | 20,107 | 10,302 | -48 |
| Georgian Jews | 7,974 | 14,314 | 79 |
| Assyrians | 5,286 | 6,205 | 17 |

[a]An asterisk following the group name identifies Muslim nationalities. In addition, the Tats, Osetes, and Abkhaz include some Muslims.

NOTE: Although the table does not reflect the massive refugee movements of winter 1989-1990, it shows that Armenians and Azeris had already left each other's republics in large numbers by the time the 1989 census was taken. Armenians in Georgia were also showing a slight tendency to decline. Armenians increased only in Nagorno-Karabakh, where they form the majority of the population. The Azeri minority in Georgia increased at almost as high a rate as the Azeri population of Azerbaijan itself. Almost all Muslim minorities and the small Caucasian Jewish groups increased dramatically between 1979 and 1989. The increase among some

Dagestani nationalities (e.g., Avars and Tsakhurs) in Azerbaijan may be due in part to migration. Migration may also explain the increase of Kurds in Georgia, who may have come there from Armenia. The extraordinary increase among Caucasian Jews apparently is attributable to reclassification of people who in the earlier census had been classified simply as "Jews," a category which showed a sharp decline during the decade.

Table B.4

SLAVS IN TRANSCAUCASIA

| | Population 1979 | Population 1989 | Growth (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Armenian SSR | | | |
| Russians | 70,336 | 51,553 | -26.7 |
| Ukrainians | 8,900 | 8,341 | -6.3 |
| Belorussians | 1,183 | 1,059 | -10.5 |
| Total Slavs | 80,419 | 60,953 | -24.0 |
| Azerbaijan SSR | | | |
| Russians | 475,255 | 392,303 | -17.5 |
| Ukrainians | 26,402 | 32,344 | 22.5 |
| Belorussians | 4,782 | 7,833 | 63.8 |
| Total Slavs | 506,439 | 432,480 | -14.6 |
| Georgian SSR | | | |
| Russians | 371,608 | 338,645 | -8.9 |
| Ukrainians | 45,036 | 51,472 | 14.3 |
| Belorussians | 5,702 | 8,338 | 46.2 |
| Total Slavs | 422,346 | 398,455 | -5.7 |
| Total Population of Transcaucasia | 14,056,956 | 15,719,933 | 11.8 |
| Total Slavs in Transcaucasia | 1,009,204 | 891,888 | -11.6 |
| Slavs as % of Total Population in | | | |
| Armenian SSR | 2.65 | 1.84 | |
| Azerbaijan SSR | 8.40 | 6.16 | |
| Georgian SSR | 8.46 | 7.38 | |
| All Transcaucasia | 7.18 | 5.67 | |

NOTE: The Slavic decline in the Transcaucasus is due to lower birthrates and, more significantly, out-migration. In Armenia, all three Slavic groups—Russians, Ukrainians, and Belorussians—declined. Azerbaijan and Georgia demonstrate a curious phenomenon: a decline in the number of Russians in part offset by a sharp increase in the much smaller Ukrainian and Belorussian groups. Ukrainians and Belorussians are unlikely to have been entering while Russians have been leaving. More likely, the situation is the same as that in many other non-Slavic areas of the USSR, including the RSFSR: individuals reclassify themselves as Ukrainians and Belorussians in preference to retaining Russian identity.

Table B.5

DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS AMONG MAJORITY AND SIGNIFICANT MINORITY POPULATIONS OF TRANSCAUCASIA (TC)

| Ethnic Group[a] | Population 1979 | Population 1989 | Growth (%) | % in TC 1989 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Total in USSR, Including Transcaucasia | | | | |
| Armenians | 4,151,241 | 4,627,227 | 11.5 | 84.5 |
| Azerbaijanis* | 5,477,330 | 6,791,106 | 24.0 | 91.2 |
| Georgians | 3,570,504 | 3,983,115 | 11.6 | 95.5 |
| Kurds* | 115,858 | 152,952 | 32.0 | 66.4 |
| Osetes | 541,893 | 597,802 | 10.3 | 27.8 |
| Jews | 1,761,724 | 1,376,910 | -21.8 | 2.6 |
| Georgian Jews | 8,455 | 16,123 | 90.7 | 88.8 |
| Mountain Jews | 9,389 | 19,516 | 107.9 | 28.4 |
| Tats | 22,441 | 30,817 | 37.3 | 33.3 |
| Assyrians | 25,170 | 26,289 | 4.4 | 48.7 |
| Greeks | 343,809 | 357,975 | 4.1 | 29.5 |
| Turks* | 92,689 | 207,369 | 123.7 | 9.2 |
| Avars* | 482,844 | 604,202 | 25.1 | 8.0 |
| Lezgins* | 382,611 | 466,833 | 22.0 | 36.9 |
| Total in Transcaucasia | | | | |
| Armenians | 3,648,821 | 3,909,030 | 7.1 | |
| Azerbaijanis* | 5,125,351 | 6,193,278 | 20.8 | |
| Georgians | 3,445,737 | 3,804,735 | 10.4 | |
| Kurds* | 82,186 | 101,576 | 23.6 | |
| Osetes | 160,763 | 164,400 | 2.3 | |
| Jews | 54,308 | 36,168 | -33.4 | |
| Georgian Jews | 7,974 | 14,314 | 179.5 | |
| Mountain Jews | 2,163 | 5,484 | 156.0 | |
| Tats | 8,848 | 10,239 | 15.7 | |
| Assyrians | 12,461 | 12,814 | 2.8 | |
| Greeks | 101,406 | 105,537 | 4.1 | |
| Turks* | 8,843 | 19,077 | 115.7 | |
| Avars* | 39,671 | 48,293 | 21.7 | |
| Lezgins* | 158,882 | 172,210 | 8.4 | |

[a]An asterisk following the group name identifies Muslim nationalities. In addition, the Tats, Osetes, and Abkhaz include some Muslims.

NOTE: Trends in the Transcaucasus matched trends among the same nationalities in

the USSR as a whole: All groups increased, but the increase was much more marked among Muslims than among Christians. The dramatic increases among the small Caucasian Jewish groups are probably attributable in large part to their differentiating themselves from the European Jewish community in the USSR, which experienced a sharp decline, primarily through emigration.

Table B.6

ETHNIC COMPOSITION OF THE ABKHAZ ASSR

| | 1979 | 1989 | Growth (%) | As % of Total in 1989 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Total population | 486,082 | 524,161 | 7.8 | |
| Abkhaz | 83,097 | 90,713 | 9.2 | 17.3 |
| Georgians | 213,322 | 242,304 | 13.6 | 46.2 |
| Armenians | 73,350 | 76,524 | 4.3 | 14.6 |
| Russians | 79.730 | 74,416 | -6.7 | 14.2 |
| Ukrainians | 10,257 | 11,470 | 11.8 | 2.2 |
| Belorussians | 1,311 | 2.037 | 55.4 | .4 |
| All Slavs | 91,296 | 87,923 | -3.7 | 16.8 |

NOTE: Of the four nationalities that make up the majority of the population of the Abkhaz ASSR, Georgians showed the highest rate of increase and Russians declined. Limited Ukrainian and Belorussian increases partially offset the Russian decline.

Table B.7

ETHNIC COMPOSITION OF THE AJAR ASSR

| | 1979 | 1989 | Growth (%) | As % of Total in 1989 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Total | 354,224 | 392,432 | 10.8 | |
| Georgians | 283,872 | 324,806 | 14.4 | 82.8 |
| Russians | 34,544 | 30.042 | -13.0 | 7.7 |
| Armenians | 16,101 | 15,849 | -1.6 | 4.0 |
| Greeks | 7,072 | 7,379 | 4.3 | 1.9 |
| Ukrainians | 5,402 | 5,943 | 10.0 | 1.5 |
| Belorussians | 481 | 712 | 48.0 | .2 |
| All Slavs | 40,427 | 36,697 | -9.2 | 9.4 |

NOTE: Census data do not reveal how many people who regard themselves as Ajars inhabit the Ajar ASSR, as all were classified as Georgians, whether Muslim or Christian. Armenians declined slightly and Russians markedly during the decade.

Table B.8

ETHNIC COMPOSITION OF THE SOUTH OSETIAN AUTONOMOUS OBLAST

| | 1979 | 1989 | Growth (%) | As % of Total in 1989 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Total | 97,988 | 98,527 | .6 | |
| Osetes | 65,077 | 65,195 | .2 | 66.2 |
| Georgians | 28,187 | 28,544 | 1.3 | 29.0 |
| Russians | 2,046 | 2,128 | 4.0 | 2.2 |
| Ukrainians | 524 | 472 | -9.9 | .5 |
| Belorussians | 52 | 95 | 82.7 | .1 |
| All Slavs | 2,622 | 2,695 | 3.0 | 2.7 |

NOTE: South Osetia experienced almost no population growth during the decade. Migration to the North Osetian ASSR may have reduced the effect of natural growth. Most Transcaucasian mountain regions, in contrast to the North Caucasus, are thought to have continued to lose population through out-migration during the decade.

Table B.9

ETHNIC COMPOSITION OF THE NAKHICHEVAN ASSR

| | 1979 | 1989 | Growth (%) | As % of Total in 1989 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Total | 240,459 | 293,875 | 22.2 | |
| Azeri | 229,968 | 281,807 | 22.5 | 95.5 |
| Armenians | 3,406 | 1,858 | -45.4 | .6 |
| Kurds | 1,696 | 3,127 | 84.4 | 1.1 |
| Russians | 3,807 | 3,782 | -.7 | 1.3 |
| Ukrainians | 942 | 1,906 | 102.3 | .6 |
| Belorussians | 94 | 450 | 378.7 | .2 |
| All Slavs | 4,843 | 6,138 | 26.7 | 2.1 |

NOTE: The basic Azeri population of Nakhichevan increased at almost the same rate in Nakhichevan as in Azerbaijan as a whole during the decade. The already small Armenian population fell by almost half, while the number of Kurds almost doubled. Nakhichevan is an exception to the trend of Slavic population decrease in the Transcaucasus, but the slight Slavic increase may be attributable to the augmentation of Slavic security forces in this Iranian border region. The sharp increases in Ukrainians and Belorussians may reveal a desire among Slavs in the region not to identify themselves as Russians.

Table B.10

ETHNIC COMPOSITION OF THE NAGORNO-KARABAKH AUTONOMOUS OBLAST

| | 1979 | 1989 | Growth (%) | As % of Total in 1989 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Total | 162,181 | 189,029 | 16.6 | |
| Armenians | 123,076 | 145,450 | 18.2 | 76.9 |
| Azeris | 37,264 | 40,632 | 10.9 | 21.5 |
| Russians | 1,265 | 1,922 | 51.9 | 1.0 |
| Ukrainians | 140 | 416 | 197.1 | |
| Belorussians | 37 | 79 | 113.5 | |
| All Slavs | 1,442 | 2,417 | 67.6 | 1.3 |

NOTE: Already a region of high tension at the time of the 1989 census, the Nagorno-Karabakh AObl experienced an increase among all ethnic components of its population during the decade. The dominant Armenians increased at the highest rate. The comparatively low rate of increase among the Azeris is attributable to out-migration. The expansion of security and administrative personnel may explain the Slavic increases; the increase in Ukrainians and Belorussians may have resulted from the same factors noted in the discussion of Nakhichevan, above.