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Anti-Communist Resistance Potential in the USSR and Eastern Europe

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ANTI-COMMUNIST RESISTANCE POTENTIAL IN THE USSR AND EASTERN EUROPE

THE PROBLEM

To estimate anti-Communist resistance potential in the USSR and Eastern Europe in peacetime and war.

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

The following terminology is used in this estimate and in the annex:

Dissidence—a state of mind involving discontent or disaffection with the ruling regime.

Resistance—dissidence translated into action.

Organized resistance—resistance which is carried out by a group of individuals who have accepted a common purpose, agreed upon leadership, and worked out a communications system.

The Eastern European countries considered in this estimate are: Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary, Poland, and Romania. A survey of each and of certain areas of the USSR is contained in an annex, which has been noted but not approved by the USIB.

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DISCUSSION

1. When we last reviewed this problem, two years after the Hungarian revolution, we concluded that organized resistance in both Eastern Europe and the USSR was negligible, though dissidence was widespread. We feel that this conclusion remains valid; in fact, changes within the past few years have generally been in the direction of greater stability for the Communist regimes in Eastern Europe. Public manifestations of dissidence have emerged with greater clarity, particularly among intellectuals and youth, and particularly in those countries where the regimes have adopted more permissive policies. Yet the likelihood of resistance seems nevertheless to have decreased.

Eastern Europe

2. So far as Eastern Europe is concerned there are several important reasons for this paradox. The reputation of local security forces plus bitter memories of the repression of the Berlin rising of 1953 and the Hungarian revolution of 1956 are important inhibitions against organizing any resistance. The continuing presence of Soviet forces in East Germany, Hungary, Poland, and the nearby USSR suggests to any who might be tempted the probable fate of an uprising. If there once was a widespread hope for Western liberation, this too has receded. Over the past decade important segments of the population have become resigned to their lot, while others have acquired a stake in the existing social and economic order. Almost every East European country has adopted more liberal internal policies and played up to national sentiments. This latter tendency in particular has made the regime seem less like the puppet of an alien power, and has thus eroded a major cause of popular antipathy.

3. The potential for organized resistance has been greatly reduced over the past few years, but there is still discontent of varying proportions in Eastern Europe. Indeed, discontent may have increased as the progressive relaxation of travel controls and information policies has permitted the Eastern Europeans to become more aware of superior living conditions in the West. Much of the dissidence arises from economic discontent or from long standing ethnic and social grievances, rather than from ideological causes. Passive resistance among the peasantry to governmental controls over agriculture is proverbial. National minority groups are a continuing problem, despite 20 years of Communist consolidation. Thus, dissidence is not so much anti-Communist as it is anti-regime and anti-Soviet.

4. Over the past several years the most pronounced cases of dissidence, and even of resistance, centered on attempts to effect changes in the policies or the leadership of the incumbent regimes. Yet these efforts remained basically within the context of the Communist system. The manifestations of discontent have ranged from intra-party factionalism in Czechoslovakia and East Germany (e.g., the Apel and Havemann cases) to one instance of a military putsch discovered

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in the spring of 1965 in Bulgaria. But any movement, even though not specifically anti-Communist, which is directed against a Communist regime, will of necessity have some anti-Communist implications.

5. Added to these more or less chronic sources of disaffection is a widespread intellectual ferment. Even in this area the effectiveness, strength, and character of the intellectual opposition vary greatly and are difficult to define. In Czechoslovakia intellectuals have conducted a bold campaign and forced changes in policy. In Hungary a greater degree of permissiveness has actually improved the regime's stability. Intellectual dissidence is no great problem as yet in Romania or Bulgaria, and the East German party retains tight controls. In Poland the problem is growing and is proving extremely difficult to handle. In general, however, intellectual discontent is neither overtly anti-Communist nor directed toward the overthrow of the regimes.

6. Intellectual dissidence at this stage seems to be more reformist than revolutionary. More often than not, leading intellectuals consider themselves to be within the system. By permitting dissidence to become more articulate and more open, the greater freedom and more liberal policies have created new and intricate problems; at the same time they have actually reduced the threat to stability.

7. In our view, dissidence of this sort will continue in Eastern Europe and in some cases will grow. As the central control of the Communist movement disintegrates, as the Soviet influence lessens, and as the liberal trends in economic and cultural policies expand, people will look to their rulers for policies that reflect national rather than supranational interests. Greater contacts with the West will encourage hopes of change and improvement. In general, however, we think the regimes will be able to keep the resulting pressures within bounds. Dissidence will be expressed in attempts to influence policies rather than in challenges to the existence of the regime. Thus we believe that anti-Communist resistance potential will remain negligible in peacetime and that the basis for developing it in anticipation of war will be minimal.

8. *Wartime.* In the event of war, the people of Eastern Europe probably would not risk any significant organized resistance until they became convinced that Communist forces were being defeated. In any case the great bulk of the population would avoid participation in any resistance. Unless the war drastically disrupted the regimes, their security forces would almost certainly be capable of quickly quelling whatever resistance might arise. If NATO forces should sweep into East Germany (particularly if these forces consisted of strong West German components), the chances of a popular uprising in Berlin and even in East Germany itself would be greatly enhanced. Elsewhere in Eastern Europe, German forces would be considerably less welcome; in Czechoslovakia or Poland in particular, American, British, and French forces would be more likely than Germans to receive support from any resistance groups which might materialize during a major allied offensive.

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9. In a protracted war, even without the prospect of an imminent Western victory, some resistance would in time develop. It might take the form of help for Western intelligence operations or of sabotage on a small scale. But it would probably not be organized resistance of any significant magnitude, and we would not expect it to pose a serious threat to the authorities. In the event of nuclear war, the peoples of Eastern Europe would probably be largely occupied with matters of personal survival. A period of chaos after a nuclear attack might lead to a breakdown of central authority, and pockets of local autonomy might develop, but they would be of marginal military significance.

The USSR

10. Dissatisfaction with various aspects of the Soviet system is widespread in the USSR, but nowhere does dissidence approach the stage of potential organized resistance in peacetime. Dissidence among large portions of the peasantry, and anti-Russian and strong nationalist feelings among certain ethnic groups, particularly in those areas annexed since 1939, are still problems for the regime. Under certain circumstances, this could lead to outbreaks of violence not amounting to organized resistance. Nonetheless, most of the Soviet population has come to accept the reality of Soviet power and, to the extent that they concern themselves with the problem, they tend to equate their own interests with those of the Soviet state. Pride in Soviet State power and a sense of patriotism, particularly among the ethnic Russian majority, have flowed from the successes of the USSR during World War II and from its postwar technological achievements and economic growth.

11. As in Eastern Europe, some of the existing dissidence reflects material grievances: the lack of adequate housing, disparity of wages between skilled and unskilled and between urban and rural workers, the shortages and poor quality of consumer goods including food. This dissidence generally translates into apathy and a stoic submission to Soviet power, though there have been instances of riots and spontaneous demonstrations. Generally speaking, however, Soviet citizens, particularly in the cities, feel that their lot is improving, although not as rapidly as they have been led to hope.

12. Dissidence on intellectual grounds is probably of greater long range concern to the Soviet Party and government than dissidence which springs from material grievances. Intellectual discontent has existed throughout Soviet history, but it has been more openly articulated since the death of Stalin. It can be argued that the Soviet intelligentsia is politically impotent, striving for more intellectual freedom but incapable of inducing appreciable changes in the nature of Communist rule. It can also be argued that their activity is an extension of the 19th Century Russian literary tradition—an expression of political and social unrest that could be a liberalizing force for the gradual transformation of Soviet society, with crucial effects on the vast scientific-technological elite. There is probably some truth in both views, but in any case

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intellectual discontent in the USSR does not threaten the overthrow of the regime nor is it likely to do so.

13. The Soviet security system still maintains a pervasive and effective control, and its forces are highly unlikely to desert the Communist Party and system. Thus, capabilities for organized resistance in peacetime are virtually nil. Moreover, as Soviet government and society develop over the next several years any potential for organized resistance will almost certainly not grow. Dissidence or dissident groups will not disappear from the Soviet scene; on the contrary, discontent among various groups will probably increase with the growing complexity of social and economic development. This discontent if not altogether apathetic is far more likely to take the form of attempts to modify policy and improve conditions rather than to challenge the regime's existence or control.

14. *Wartime.* It is unlikely that much active resistance would develop early in a war. Soviet security controls would almost certainly be tightened. As long as the combat had not reached the Soviet borders, even national minority groups would not be likely to take the risk of action against the regime. If the battlefield did shift to the USSR, there would be a possibility of resistance in those areas annexed to the USSR during and after World War II, and in other areas of strong national minorities. As elsewhere in Eastern Europe, such resistance would probably not be organized on a scale sufficient to menace the existence of the regime.

15. In case of a nuclear attack, considerable turmoil would develop and it is possible that the regime would lose effective control in some areas, particularly if administrative governmental centers and communications facilities were destroyed. In this case, some resistance might develop over time, particularly if defeat of the USSR appeared imminent.

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ANNEX *

RESISTANCE POTENTIAL IN WARTIME

INTRODUCTION

1. In this annex we consider briefly some of the local factors affecting potential resistance in wartime, and identify elements of the population that may be encouraged by the prospect of an imminent Western victory to translate dissidence into resistance. We estimate that without such a prospect there is little chance of resistance, and that in any case the great bulk of the native populations would avoid participation in any resistance. Next to the tide of battle, what would affect the thinking of East Europeans most would be statements of policy by the Western powers.

2. The vagueness of what follows reflects the paucity of our information on any prospects for the creation and maintenance of resistance movements anywhere in Eastern Europe, either local, regional, or national. We believe, however, that if there were any such prospects, of a kind on which the West could count for valuable assistance during any early stages of a war, we would have more information about them than is in fact obtainable.

3. We have not estimated shifts of loyalty within the various internal security forces, since these too would depend greatly on the course of the war. In general we feel that the security forces are likely to remain loyal and reasonably effective.

ALBANIA

1. Under the conditions of an East-West war not involving an invasion of Albania by Western forces, resistance against the regime would probably be insignificant. The Albanian armed forces would probably remain loyal in hopes that the war might pass them by. Albanian mountain clans, however, might under these circumstances consider the possibility of again settling scores left over from past blood feuds, particularly against rival clans that have closely collaborated with the Hoxha regime.

2. The absence of religious cleavages among the predominantly Moslem population, the low level of development among Albanian social groups, and the

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strong nationalistic feeling among the people militate against a popular uprising even in wartime. This will particularly be the case if Albania is invaded by her traditional enemies, Italy, Greece, and Yugoslavia. If Western forces other than these should invade Albania individual desertions from the military forces might be numerous, but unit defections would probably not materialize.

BULGARIA

1. Historically there has been much less anti-Russian sentiment in Bulgaria than elsewhere in Eastern Europe; this reduces one potential source for anti-regime or anti-Soviet resistance in wartime. Among the sources of potential resistance would be the peasantry, which includes much of the large Turkish minority of about 650,000 (about 8 percent of the population). In fact, elements of the Turkish minority rioted as recently as 1965. The possible resistance value of this minority would be enhanced if the war involved combat between Bulgarian and Turkish forces.

2. The Bulgarian officer corps has a tradition of interference in the political life of the country. While this group still pays allegiance to the Communist system and to friendship with the USSR, discontent has been manifested as recently as April 1965, when an anti-Zhivkov plot involving one faction of military officers was uncovered. This plot suggests that some elements of the military might constitute a potential for anti-regime action in wartime, especially under the conditions of an imminent Western advance. As of now, however, the officer corps' concern seems to be one of internal Communist politics, rather than anti-Communist opposition.

3. None of Bulgaria's other social classes, except possibly the pro-Western segment of the youth, appears to be sufficiently daring to translate existing disaffection into organized resistance even under wartime conditions. Further, discontent resulting from the regime's anti-religious posture is most likely not sufficient enough to cause the regime serious trouble.

CZECHOSLOVAKIA

1. The vast majority of the Czechoslovak population for one reason or another is alienated from the Communist regime. But a highly effective police apparatus, disillusionment with the West, and the traditionally cautious character of most of the population, have generally prevented open or organized resistance. These factors would still be significant impediments to open collaboration or active resistance in wartime. There is, in addition, no strong tradition of anti-Russian or even anti-Communist feeling among the Czechs.

2. If a Western military victory were imminent, passive resistance and perhaps some limited organized resistance might arise throughout the population. The

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Slovaks, constituting approximately one-third of the population, have been bolder in expressing their anti-Communist feeling than the Czechs and are the principal source of potential resistance. Never satisfied with the domination of the Czechs over them, the Slovaks have long desired independence, greater autonomy, or greater representation in the central government in Prague. Some Slovaks would prefer an "independent state," but their number is probably not significant.

3. The German and Hungarian minorities might also be sources of activity against the regime. The Germans, who are mainly in the Czech lands, would probably not remain loyal to the Prague government, just as in the days before Munich when they were more German than Czech in allegiance and activity. The Hungarians, the largest minority in Czechoslovakia, for the most part reside in parts of Slovakia which have been the subject of dispute with Hungary. This minority is more reliable than the Germans, but is basically irredentist.

4. Religious belief can provide a motive for resistance in Czechoslovakia, although no religious body as such offers a basis for organized resistance to the regime, even among the deeply religious Slovaks. The Czechs have a generally anti-clerical tradition and would not be likely to rally around a religious group as such to work against the regime. Moreover, the Roman Catholic hierarchy in Prague is not entirely united in its ideas on how best to survive communism. The Church carries much greater weight in Slovakia—where it has been generally more defiant of Communist decrees and efforts against religion—but it has lost most of its notable leaders and therefore much of its ability to lead.

EAST GERMANY

1. We have concluded, in the estimate, that a successful Western offensive might cause a general uprising in East Germany and especially in Berlin as Western troops advanced. Short of this, a variety of resistance activities of military significance might develop—military intelligence, sabotage, assistance for escape and evasion, and so forth. The policies and programs of the West German government would obviously have a significant bearing on the potential for resistance.

HUNGARY

1. Hungary has a long tradition of anti-Russian, anti-Slavic prejudices and an equally deep-rooted affinity for Western political and social ideals. However, contemporary political realities, and particularly Western failure to assist Hungarian revolutionary aims in 1956 have strongly influenced these concepts, with the result that Hungarians generally would be unwilling to take any action that could again expose them to Soviet or their own regime's retribution. In wartime, however, younger elements of the population would probably be willing to undertake considerable risk.

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2. Though intellectuals played a major role in the dramatic prelude to the 1956 revolt, their active participation in resistance groups was quite limited. Hungarian youth and urban industrial workers were the backbone of the revolt in 1956 and would again be the elements most likely to engage in any active resistance. Over two-thirds of the population are—at least nominally—Roman Catholic. Possible resistance activities by members of the local clergy would have important influence on some segments of the population, especially the peasants. The clergy as a body, however, is likely to be passive as was the case in 1956.

POLAND

1. There are no known subversive organizations operating in Poland on a national scale, but there is evidence that passive, small, and local subversive groups do exist. Members of these groups, primarily youths, do not appear to be identified with any specific social or political group and appear to be motivated by little beyond a general resistance to authority. In time of war these groups might participate in resistance operations against the regime.

2. Of all the Communist countries in Eastern Europe, with the exception of East Germany, Poland has the highest potential for anti-Communist and anti-Soviet resistance. Polish nationalism is still strong and so is anti-Russian sentiment. Whereas the Gomulka regime enjoyed considerable popularity in the years immediately after 1956, since then dissatisfaction has steadily risen. The Roman Catholic Church also remains a force in Poland, and participation by the clergy in resistance activities would be quite important. Among young Poles today there are signs of disenchantment with the futility of some of their past struggles, but the heroic strain in the Polish national character could again emerge in time of war. Thus, a resistance movement might develop in Poland that would prove to be of military significance for advancing Western forces, though it would probably not assume national proportions until Polish national gain appeared assured.

3. Ethnic minorities form an insignificant part of the Polish population. These include some 180,000 Ukrainians and 165,000 White Russians, predominantly peasants, and some 100,000 to 300,000 remaining ethnic Germans, mainly industrial workers. Neither of these groups, however, possesses the cohesion to develop resistance.

ROMANIA

1. The Romanian regime continues to be confronted with the serious Hungarian minority problem in Transylvania. Attempts to "Romanize" the 1.6 million Hungarians have sustained dislike for the regime among the minority population since World War II, and have led to continued friction between the

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governments of Hungary and Romania over this issue. In the event of war this minority might be the source of resistance of more than nuisance value.

2. In recent years the Romanian party has deliberately taken an independent line from the Soviets and in the process stimulated anti-Russian sentiment and Romanian nationalism. Among the sources of Romanian-Soviet friction have been Romanian irredentism over Bessarabia (now part of the Moldavian SSR), and Bucharest's reluctance to cooperate fully in the Warsaw Pact.

3. This new situation raises the possibility that Romania would seek neutrality in any East-West conflict. It also raises the possibility that the Soviets would enter Romania as occupiers. At the outbreak of hostilities, therefore, the Romanians are likely to adopt a stand which would not give the USSR cause to carry out a preemptive occupation, even if it involves honoring their commitment to the Warsaw Pact. Whatever course the regime follows, any anti-regime or anti-Soviet resistance is likely to arise only when Soviet defeat is all but a certainty.

USSR

1. Whatever anti-Soviet resistance might appear in wartime is most likely to spring from the discontented peasantry, restive youth and intelligentsia, and those with strong religious convictions. Such resistance would be most pronounced among the national minorities, constituting 45 percent of the population of a little over 229 million. Ethnic feeling is in itself a strong force for dissidence throughout the Soviet Union, but it varies in intensity. Some of the non-Slavic minorities, while resentful of Russian dominion over them, accept it as preferable to any likely alternative. For example, the Armenians prefer Russians to Turks, and the Central Asian minorities probably cherish Soviet protection from the Chinese. Others, including the many Volga peoples, are landlocked into Russia with no alternative. Such groups are not likely to be sources of organized resistance against the regime. More likely are those ethnic minorities who feel not only a cultural superiority to the Russians but also a closer affinity to their Western neighbors. Opposition to Soviet rule is probably most intense in the territories absorbed during World War II along the Soviet Union's western borders. In these territories resentment of the Russians is shared among Balts, Poles, Ukrainians, Slovaks, Hungarians, and Romanians.

2. *The Baltic Republics.* Resistance potential in the Soviet Union is probably highest in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. The most important single factor in Baltic opposition to Soviet rule is the experience of national independence between the world wars. The bitter memory of forced Soviet annexation is intensified by the brutality of Soviet rule, which brought the exile or liquidation of hundreds of thousands of natives, by the radical depression of living standards, and by traditional Baltic hatred of Slavs. Outright Communist sympathizers comprise only a small fraction of the native population. Many

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of the present Communist Party leaders lived in the USSR when the Baltic states were independent and returned only upon Soviet annexation of their native countries; Balts in general look on them as renegades.

3. The regime brought the Baltic states under control through the use of militarized security forces and army troops. Suspect elements of the population were deported during the period 1945-1950 and later replaced by other ethnic groups, mainly Russian. Subsequent destruction of resistance groups by security organs, along with deportations, depleted the Baltic states of resistance leadership, organization, and activity. Russification of government organizations has proved effective in keeping potential resistance in check. Feelings of dissidence are widespread but their intensity cannot be evaluated because the populations have not translated dissidence into action since the early 1950s. Because of the strategic position of the area and the known disaffection of the native population, security measures in the Baltics have been more stringent than elsewhere in the USSR.

4. In any future war Soviet security measures would probably be adequate to prevent organization of military and political warfare in the Baltics of more than nuisance value. Only if the Soviet control force were demoralized and its communications disrupted could widespread resistance be expected.

5. *The Ukraine.* Ukrainian nationalism, although of dwindling importance, continues to be a political factor with which the Soviet regime must reckon. The Ukrainians are the largest minority group in the USSR and the political, economic, and strategic importance of the Ukraine is second only to that of the RSFSR.

6. The intensity of Ukrainian nationalist feeling is difficult to measure. A great many Ukrainians, probably the majority, are loyal members of Soviet society, particularly now that living standards are gradually rising and police controls have been slightly relaxed. Russification has probably gone farther in the eastern Ukraine, particularly in the cities, than in any other of the non-Russian lands. Nationalistic sentiments increase as one moves away from the cities and into the villages or westward in the Ukraine away from the Russian lands.

7. Ukrainian nationalist tensions, however, although a continuing problem for the Soviet administration, do not now represent any serious threat to the regime. Only in the event of a disintegration of Soviet central controls might Ukrainian nationalism rise to the surface and serve as a focus for an anti-Soviet resistance movement.

8. *The Caucasus.* Any evaluation of disaffection in the Caucasus must take into account the differing peoples of this area. While there are elements of discontent common to all the indigenous peoples of the area which unite them against the regime, there are also historical and religious factors which set the Georgians, Armenians, Azerbaydzhani and the other Caucasian peoples apart from one another. The underlying basis for dissatisfaction and discontent,

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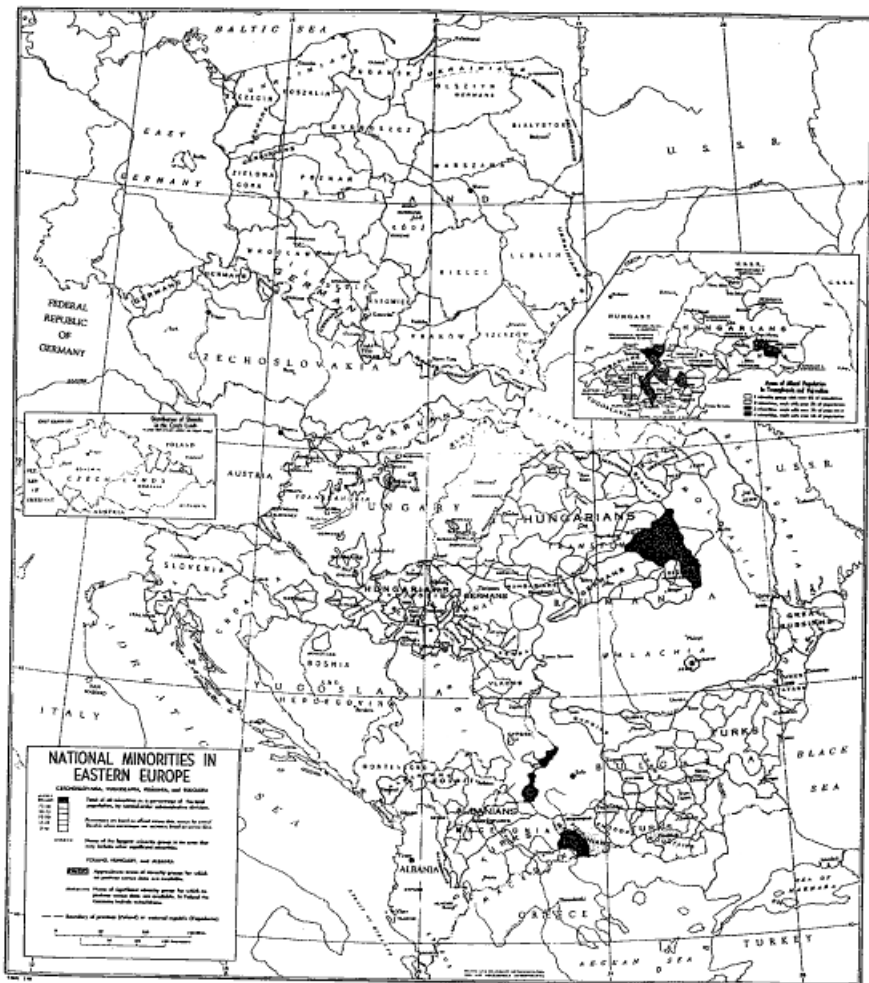
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however, is to be found in an anti-Russian attitude on the part of all the native peoples.

9. If the tide of battle turned conclusively against the Soviet regime, the potential for organized resistance would increase sharply. Otherwise, the memory of Soviet punishment of people—even entire national groups—accused of collaboration in World War II would militate against resistance movements. The optimum conditions for organized resistance would, of course, occur if the Caucasus became a theater of war or if the collapse of central authority were imminent. Resistance activities would probably be limited to assistance to enemy forces in providing intelligence information, harassment of Soviet security and armed forces, and help in escape and evasion operations. Independent military activity against Soviet forces probably would be beyond the capacity of resistance groups.

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