Soviet leaders have often been confronted with separatist movements struggling for national self-determination against central authorities. When relations between the USSR and the central government are strained, the existence of the separatist movement does not present any difficulty for the Soviets. Indeed, in such cases, the Kremlin may feel that it is to its advantage to support the rebels and thereby use them as a lever against the central government. A dilemma emerges, however, when Moscow attempts to maintain friendly ties with the central government. In these situations, the Kremlin comes under great pressure from both the separatist movement and the central government to take its side in the dispute.

Moscow could, of course, support the separatists under the assumption that the movement would be heavily dependent upon the USSR for aid and, consequently, if the movement was successful, a new Soviet satellite state would be established. Such a strategy would, however, make it extremely likely that the central government would adopt an anti-Soviet position. Furthermore, even if the rebellion were to succeed, the establishment of a Soviet satellite would confirm allegations that the Kremlin's foreign policy is essentially expansionist, an image which Moscow has sought to avoid. Under these circumstances, Moscow could expect many of the neighboring states of the area, not to mention the government of the state hosting the separatist movement, to view the USSR as a threat to their security and territorial integrity.

Another factor governing Moscow's assessment of the advisability of supporting the separatists centers on the question of the unity of the movement and the degree to which Moscow feels itself capable of influencing the movement's actions. Moreover, Kremlin leaders would have to assess their own capacity to provide aid to the movement during the rebellion, as well as after the projected independence. In making the latter assessment, Moscow would have to assume that the rebels would be resolutely challenged by the central authorities.

Finally, the Soviets would have to expect the central government, possibly joined by other regional states who felt threatened by Moscow's policies, to look to the USSR's enemies for support in its efforts to crush the separatists. This would raise the prospect of the Soviet Union's adversaries establishing a presence on territories contiguous to the new Soviet satellite. This, of course, implies that the separatist movement would be successful.
this assumption prove to be erroneous, the USSR would then reap all the liabilities of overtly interfering in the internal affairs of another state, while enjoying none of the advantages.

Conversely, the Kremlin could abandon the rebels to their fate. This would have the obvious advantage of allowing the USSR to maintain its friendly ties with the central government, while simultaneously avoiding the image of a threatening, expansionist power. Indeed, by providing the central government with political and possibly material support in crushing the separatists, the Soviet leaders would graphically illustrate the desirability of friendship with the USSR. Of course, to do so not only deprives the USSR of future use of the separatist movement, but also leaves Moscow open to charges that it is abandoning the cause of national liberation and self-determination of peoples.

Traditionally, however, Moscow has attempted to avoid taking sides in these situations, at least at the outset of the dispute. Instead, the Kremlin usually prefers to strike the pose of a concerned observer counselling a peaceful solution. This strategy has often ultimately led to Soviet involvement in the dispute in an effort to mediate between the antagonists. If successful, however, the strategy has the advantage of allowing Moscow to avoid alienating the central government or abandoning the revolution. Instead, it enables the USSR to maintain friendly ties with both the movement, as well as the central government. Indeed, the Soviet leaders may even be able to play one side off against the other to their own advantage. The problem with this approach is that arranging a compromise between a separatist movement and the central government is difficult at best.

During the last twenty years, the complexities of Iraqi domestic affairs have often forced the Soviet leaders to make difficult choices. For example, immediately following the 1958 revolution, pro-Nasserist forces in Iraq were attacked by Kassem and the Iraqi communists. Ultimately, the Soviets chose to support the latter, despite the negative impact which that decision had on Soviet relations with Egypt. Later, when Kassem moved against the Iraqi Communist Party, Moscow was again presented with a difficult choice. This time the Soviet leaders elected to abandon the Iraqi communists, in order to avoid disrupting their friendship with the Iraqi government.¹

The question of Kurdish autonomy has been another vexing problem for Moscow. The Kurds, a rugged mountainous peoples numbering about 10 million and possessing their own language, live in an area encompassing portions of Soviet Armenia, Turkey, Iran, Syria and Iraq. Only in Iraq,