

October 6, 1989

East Germany: Troubled 40th Anniversary

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Summary:

An analysis of Gorbachev's forthcoming visit to East Germany amidst growing public dissent.

Original Language:

English

Contents:


Original Scan

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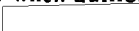


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EAST GERMANY: Troubled 40th Anniversary

East Germany's orthodox leadership almost certainly worries that President Gorbachev's arrival today will prompt additional demonstrations and deepen the crisis facing the regime. 


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The tenuous nature of the regime's hold on the population showed again this week when thousands of East Germans tried to board the trains evacuating the second group of emigrants from Prague to West Germany. A riot involving an estimated 1,000 East Germans and considerable police violence erupted at the railway station in Dresden on Wednesday when authorities tried to clear the area to allow the trains to pass. 


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With the escape route through Czechoslovakia effectively closed, would-be emigrants are seeking other exits. Some are swimming across the Elbe River to Poland and eluding Polish border guards. Small groups of East Germans have also sought refuge in the US, French, and West German Embassies in East Berlin and at Bonn's Embassy in Sofia. 

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Comment: The self-congratulatory rhetoric of the leadership during the 40th anniversary celebrations will ring hollow to East Germans, and Gorbachev's visit is likely to provoke demonstrations this weekend and afterwards, despite tight security. The size of recent demonstrations has been steadily increasing, and many disenchanted East Germans may well see the Gorbachev visit as a golden opportunity to voice grievances. Large-scale protests would increase the pressure on a regime that already appears to be suffering a leadership vacuum. 

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Gorbachev's dilemma is to avoid undermining either East Berlin's efforts to maintain the stability of the Communist regime or Moscow's relations with Bonn, which the Soviets view as their key interlocutor on European arms control and economic cooperation issues. Thus, in public Gorbachev will play up the importance of Soviet-East German ties and support East Germany's position on the reunification and refugee issues. In private, however, he is likely to press East Berlin for political reforms to ease popular discontent and emigration pressure, picking up on comments Soviet party International Department chief Falin made earlier this week advocating reform in East Germany. Gorbachev probably will also stress that the Soviets and East Germans must enlist Bonn's cooperation to find an orderly solution to the refugee crisis. 

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