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Analysis Report

THE SOVIET LEADERSHIP SITUATION:
SIGNS OF MANEUVERING SINCE THE CPSU CONGRESS

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S U M M A R Y

The recently calm facade of Soviet leadership politics again shows signs of the perturbations that from time to time have reflected maneuvering in the Politburo. The consensus of the Brezhnev years, placed under unprecedented stress by failures and mounting dangers abroad and by uncertainty concerning Brezhnev's ability to continue functioning as top leader, appears to be fraying as some leaders are showing signs of restiveness. By means of the classic instruments of Soviet politicking--signaling policy preferences or political dispositions through articles in the press, the use of status symbols, and other means of publicity--a number of leading party figures have begun to stand out more sharply within the group, identifying themselves as potential top leaders or at least as supporters of alternative emphases in policy.

In the senior ranks, Kirilenko has continued to lose ground while Chernenko has moved further into the limelight through his close association with Brezhnev and his efforts to carve out a broader sphere of influence in his own right. Senior party ideologue Suslov and Defense Minister Ustinov appear to be taking advantage of the chill in relations with the West to promote their policy preferences and perhaps their personal political interests as well. The Politburo's newest and youngest member, Gorbachev, has seemed in recent months to be raising his public profile and attempting to establish credentials in spheres beyond his agricultural purview.

At the regional level, Ukrainian party chief Shcherbitskiy has seemed critical of lethargy and stagnation in the upper echelons of the leadership. In a June PRAVDA article Shcherbitskiy hinted at a growing impatience with the status quo among younger Politburo members, several of whom have been active in promoting their images as national-level leaders.

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THE SENIOR LEADERSHIP

While no dramatic changes in the status of Soviet leaders have surfaced in the media since the February-March CPSU Congress, there are signs of maneuvering for position in the senior ranks that could affect the succession.

Andrey Kirilenko's position has continued to slip. His decline is particularly evident when his activities are contrasted with those of the other two senior Central Committee Secretaries, Brezhnev protege *Konstantin Chernenko* and chief ideologist *Mikhail Suslov*. While the latter two have demonstrated their leading roles in the party by involving themselves in a broad range of domestic and foreign policy issues, Kirilenko's public purview has been much more narrowly focused.

After the party congress, for example, both Chernenko and Suslov wrote major articles in Central Committee journals reviewing the discussions at the congress on a wide range of subjects. Kirilenko, in contrast, has limited his activities to economic management, his own area of expertise. His only article published during this period, in an August issue of the party journal *KOMMUNIST* (No. 12), discusses the introduction of new technology into the economy. The superior status of Chernenko and Suslov has also been underscored by their active involvement in foreign affairs: Chernenko participated with Brezhnev in this summer's Crimea meetings and attended the Cuban party congress in December; Suslov attended the East German party congress in Berlin in April and also made a visit to Poland.

Chernenko's other recent activities reinforce the evidence that he continues to occupy a leading position in the Politburo and that his fortunes are on the rise. In April, for example, he delivered the annual Lenin Day speech and addressed several key foreign policy issues. In the same month his collected works were published--an honor already enjoyed by other senior Politburo members. As if to emphasize Chernenko's current prestige, this event was accompanied by an unusually broad and well coordinated show of publicity. Chernenko's rising status was also confirmed at the May Day parade where he stood in fifth place in the leadership lineup--the highest position he has yet occupied in a Red Square appearance. Chernenko

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was afforded an opportunity to build support among regional leaders on 19 June when he addressed a conference of republic councils of ministers officials dealing with complaints and suggestions from the public, a subject he has avidly promoted as a central concern of party policy.

Suslov is one of several leaders who appear to be capitalizing on current international tensions to promote their special interests. In April Suslov spearheaded a broad campaign for ideological vigilance apparently designed to counter the impact of events in Poland and Western influence on the Soviet population. He delivered a major address at a well publicized six-day conference on ideology in April, and his remarks have been widely cited in speeches at subsequent ideology conferences throughout the country as well as in commentary in the press. In the wake of this campaign, other leaders have also begun to place new stress on the need for greater internal discipline and vigilance against alien ideas.

Current tensions with the United States also appear to have created political opportunities for *Defense Minister Ustinov* and other military leaders. Since the CPSU Congress, for example, Ustinov has had three major articles published in PRAVDA, including a highly unusual full-page discussion on 25 July strongly condemning the U.S. military buildup. A similar discussion, implicitly arguing the need for a concomitant Soviet buildup, appeared in an article in a July issue of KOMMUNIST (No. 10) by Chief of the Soviet General Staff Ogarkov.

The Politburo's newest and youngest member, 50-year-old *agriculture Secretary Gorbachev*, has also taken on a more active role in recent months. He appears to have avoided blame for current problems in agriculture, and his recent article in POLITICHESKOYE SAMOOBRAZOVANIYE (POLITICAL SELF-EDUCATION) (No. 7) indicated that he has been successful in winning a larger share of investment for his sector despite the generally tight constraints on new investment. Gorbachev has had a busy public schedule in recent months, making visits to Belorussia and the Ukraine. He also appears to be broadening his sphere of activities, addressing the national ideology conference in April and representing the CPSU at the Mongolian party congress in May.

REGIONAL LEADERS

There are signs that several of the younger regional leaders are becoming impatient with the stagnation that appears to have beset the top leadership. Their apparent frustration was hinted at in a

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recent article on cadres by *Ukrainian party chief Shcherbitskiy*, who had previously leveled a thinly veiled attack against Brezhnev in a December 1979 PRAVDA interview in which he complained of leaders who play favorites and keep some subordinates "at a far distance." Shcherbitskiy's recent article, in PRAVDA on 16 June, appears to criticize the lethargy of the top leadership, asserting that current conditions demand a "new approach" and new solutions to the problems facing the country--and "sometimes even new people to carry them out." As if to emphasize that his message applies to the Politburo, Shcherbitskiy repeatedly stressed that his concerns relate to all leaders, no matter how high the posts they occupy, "from the primary party organization to the Central Committee."

Shcherbitskiy himself has been active in building his own national reputation in recent months. He appears to be promoting himself as an expert on cadre policy, following up his June PRAVDA article with a more detailed discussion of this subject in an August (No. 15) issue of PARTIYNAYA ZHIZN (PARTY LIFE). As if to underscore the breadth of his credentials, Shcherbitskiy also wrote a major article on science policy in the 10 July IZVESTIYA, holding up the experiences of the Ukraine as a model for the entire country. His image as an authority on foreign affairs was enhanced at the June USSR Supreme Soviet session, where he delivered a well publicized speech on international affairs. The current strength of Shcherbitskiy's political stock was also demonstrated by his attendance at the Bulgarian party congress in April and by Brezhnev's visit to the capital of his republic the following month.

Leningrad party leader Romanov has recently emerged from a period of obscurity which lasted about two years. His new visibility dates from his attendance at the Finnish party congress in May. The following month he was awarded an Order of Lenin by Brezhnev for Leningrad's economic achievements, an honor which gave him another moment of publicity, although not the limelight that the other top contenders have enjoyed: He remains one of two Politburo members never to receive a higher "Hero" award. Nevertheless, his re-emergence into active political life appeared to be confirmed by his authorship of a major article in the 4 August PRAVDA in which he held up Leningrad's integration of science and production as a model for other regions.

Of the candidate members of the Politburo who are regional leaders, only *Georgian First Secretary Shevardnadze* appears to be building a strong image as a national-level leader. Shevardnadze has recently received unusual attention from leaders in Moscow, and his innovative stewardship in Georgia has repeatedly been singled out for

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praise. Brezhnev himself appears to have shown special regard for Shevardnadze, bringing him along to the Czechoslovak party congress in early April and visiting Tbilisi for the 60th anniversary of Soviet Georgia later in the month. In his recent book Chernenko lavished praise on Georgia for innovative use of public opinion and the close ties its leaders have maintained with the masses. This leadership style was on display at the January congress of the Georgian party, where virtually all members of the republic bureau had an opportunity to speak and the congress was divided into 15 "working groups," providing a forum for almost every delegate to express himself. These practices, pioneered in Georgia, were singled out for high praise in the leading CPSU journals. Subsequent articles in PRAVDA on public opinion have held up the Georgian experience as a model. Georgia's handling of its manpower problems has also gained national recognition and was praised by Vasiliy Kuznetsov, a candidate member of the Politburo, in KOMMUNIST No. 10.

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