

WASHINGTON, D. C. 20505

Deputy for National Intelligence

13 September 1977

MEMORANDUM FOR: The President

VIA : The Honorable Zbigniew Brzezinski  
Assistant to the President  
for National Security Affairs

FROM : Deputy N/I to Director of Central Intelligence

SUBJECT : "The Next Two Years: Brezhnev, or a Succession?  
Implications for US Policy"

1. Some time back Bill Hyland requested a careful intelligence look at these questions:

-- How do we estimate Brezhnev's current personal and political health? What are the chances of his leaving power in the next year or two?

-- If Brezhnev leaves power within the next year or two, how long and orderly or otherwise is the early succession period likely to be?

-- What are the short-term policy implications of the succession for the US?

-- What succession scenarios are likely? Possible? With what varying policy implications for the US?

2. State/INR, CIA and NSA have worked out some answers in the attached memorandum.

15/  
Robert R. Bowie

Attachment

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# Intelligence Memorandum

**THE NEXT TWO YEARS:  
BREZHNEV, OR A SUCCESSION?  
IMPLICATIONS FOR US POLICY**

**Secret**

NI M 77-024  
September 1977

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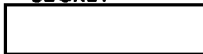
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## THE NEXT TWO YEARS: BREZHNEV, OR A SUCCESSION? IMPLICATIONS FOR US POLICY \*

### THE QUESTIONS

*How do we estimate Brezhnev's current personal and political health? What are the chances of his leaving power in the next year or two?*

*If Brezhnev leaves power within the next year or two, how long and orderly or otherwise is the early succession period likely to be?*

*What are the short-term policy implications of the succession for the United States?*

*What succession scenarios are likely? Possible? With what varying policy implications for the United States?*

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*This paper was prepared under the auspices of the Acting National Intelligence Officer for the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, with drafting by the Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Department of State, and by the Central Intelligence Agency. It was reviewed by working-level specialists on the Soviet leadership in State/INR, CIA, and the National Security Agency.*

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consolidate power. It is thus more likely than not that the early years of the succession will be more troubled, at least within leadership circles.

- It is most likely that the new leadership will be more collegial than it has been in the recent past and will probably avoid taking foreign policy initiatives with far-reaching implications. Soviet foreign policy focus is likely to be on urgent matters rather than on items which require long-term planning and consensus-building among various elite groups. The leadership would, of course, respond vigorously to perceived significant threats to Soviet security or interests. Otherwise, its energies will be devoted primarily to domestic concerns.
- Political succession will probably slow down the pace of Soviet-US relations and tend to a further gradual cooling. Selective detente, however, should remain the framework of Soviet foreign policy after Brezhnev. A loss of momentum in the conduct of detente need not result in an overall destabilization of the US-Soviet relationship.
- Specific policies of interest to the United States such as arms control, the Middle East, and trade could easily get tangled in succession politics. The influence of those elements urging a higher priority for maintenance of internal self-sufficiency, furthering the socialist movement, and, perhaps, projection of Moscow's influence to areas abroad rather than limited cooperation with the United States could increase markedly. In these circumstances, the potentialities for Soviet miscalculations in dealing with the non-Communist world would be considerably higher than in the recent past.

### *Succession Scenarios*

- Brezhnev's colleagues might ease him into figurehead status should his performance become uneven enough to cause them to conclude he could no longer handle the job of general secretary, instead of pushing him out of the leadership altogether into retirement. Brezhnev might reluctantly prefer to acquiesce. Should this occur, Brezhnev's own policy influence would presumably be drastically curtailed, and the above policy implications of a collective period of succession would probably obtain.
- Brezhnev's actual departure from office in the next year or two would give Kirilenko, now 71 and Brezhnev's unofficial deputy in the party, perhaps a 70-percent chance of becoming general secretary. All things considered, however, a reasonable estimate

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## KEY JUDGMENTS

### *Brezhnev's Staying Power*

- Barring an unlikely but unpredictable heart attack or stroke, there is no specific reason to expect Brezhnev to die in the next year or two, or be incapacitated enough to have to leave office.
- We judge that his colleagues would seek to remove Brezhnev outright, or ease him into figurehead status, only if they perceived that he was no longer consistent or vigorous enough to run the country, or—perhaps somewhat less likely—that the balance of his power and theirs urgently needed redressing.
- On balance, we think there is a better than even chance that Brezhnev will remain in office for the next year or two.

### *Nature of the Succession Process*

- Whenever Brezhnev leaves, we expect that the succession will be in two phases, rather than clean and decisive. The first will be when Brezhnev is replaced as party boss and head of the party Secretariat; and the second and longer phase when the new senior secretary attempts effectively to consolidate his power. The new leader must gain a working majority in the Politburo. Winning this influence comes chiefly through control of the Secretariat and its powerful staff departments, the government's economic ministries, the security organs and military command, and the party's territorial organizations in the cities and republics.
- It has taken several years—an average of about five, depending on the criteria one uses in marking when the new top leader has consolidated power—to resolve each of the three previous succession crises.
- Brezhnev himself is unlikely to want or be able to arrange the succession definitively.

### *Policy Implications*

- The USSR currently faces serious economic and political problems. The economic ones, in particular, are expected to worsen during the next half-dozen years. These problems will complicate efforts to resolve an early Brezhnev succession and

of the probability that Kirilenko would be able to consolidate his rule and maintain it for several years is less than even, say 30 percent, and the greater likelihood is that there would be two successions.

- There is perhaps a 30-percent chance that someone else will succeed Brezhnev even initially. While he is unlikely to come from outside the present top leadership, he could be any one of a number of men now in it. These leaders each at present have one or more handicaps to overcome in filling out their credentials for a claim to the top job. If the Brezhnev succession is delayed or, as may well happen, occurs in two or more stages, one or more of these men could well improve their power and experience. Should a younger man succeed in the next year or two, the initial succession crisis might be sharper and the leadership's instability more manifest than under Kirilenko, with an even stronger urge to concentrate on domestic affairs and with conflicting tendencies in foreign policy.
- There is an outside chance—say, 10 percent initially and 20 to 30 percent later on—that a strong, innovative, new general secretary will emerge to capitalize on the manifest need to rejuvenate the Politburo, Central Committee, and middle levels of the party as well as to stimulate the economy. Such a succession scenario would probably impact most on United States interests, as the party chief would be less dependent on the collective and freer to pursue dynamic policies, for better or worse.

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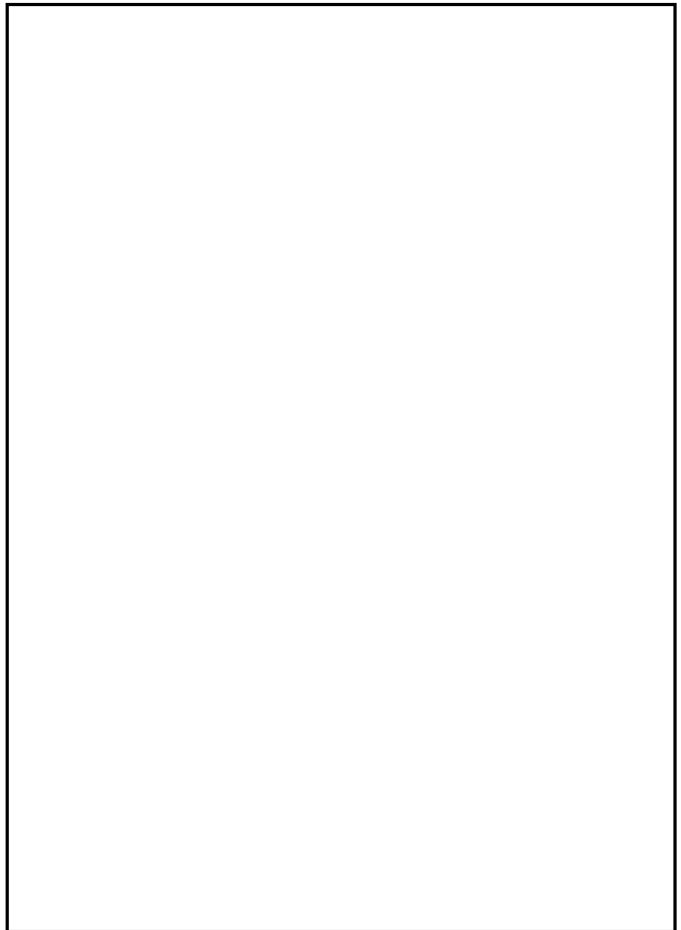
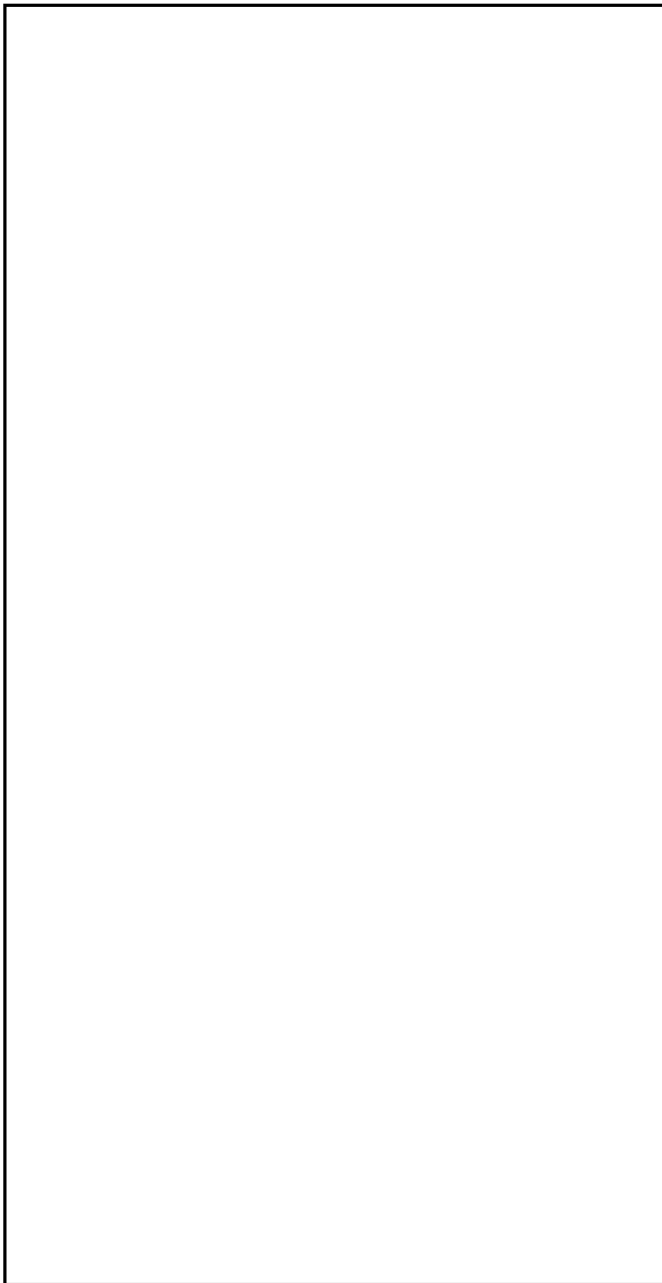
### DISCUSSION

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#### I. WILL BREZHNEV LEAVE OFFICE?

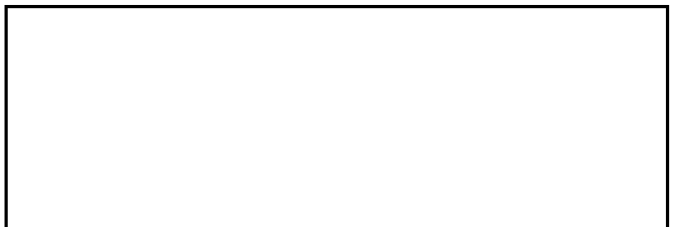


*What are the chances of his leaving power in the next year or two?*



#### Brezhnev's View

5. Brezhnev's behavior suggests that his own perception  has been more sanguine, perhaps overly so. His attempts to build up his position over the last two years indicate that he expects to be politically active for several more years. What we know of his instincts for power and general temperament, moreover, strongly suggests that he is unlikely to choose retirement or figurehead status voluntarily. In any event, no vigorous young leaders



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have been groomed for the succession, and senior leaders in Moscow, with the partial exception of Kirilenko, have not been able to broaden their competencies except when Brezhnev has been out of action. It would thus appear that Brezhnev has been more concerned with protecting and enhancing his own powers than setting the stage for their orderly transfer.

### His Colleagues' View

6. If Brezhnev's objective capacity to survive and function and his perception of his capabilities were the only considerations, there would be no strong reasons for expecting his departure from office in the next year or two. Brezhnev's political and personal relationship with his Politburo colleagues, however, and their perceptions of his performance will also affect his ability to maintain his authority.

It is possible that some individual Politburo members, presumably those least satisfied with Brezhnev's policies and his performance in office, may hope to replace him with a more vigorous and politically acceptable leader.

relations. In Europe the Soviets have won political recognition of the de facto postwar settlement, their efforts to improve relations with Western Europe have eased tensions, and they have seen a weakening in the political unity of NATO. Continuing Warsaw Pact force improvements, however, have reawakened NATO's concerns about its own military capabilities, the post-Helsinki period has brought with it heavy and continuing foreign pressures on the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe over human rights, and once-promising detente relationships are currently stalled (with West Germany) or largely ceremonial (with France). Several West European Communist parties have improved their domestic positions, but their attitudes toward the Communist movement make them a mixed blessing for Moscow. In the Middle East the Soviets have sustained a net loss of influence continuing since the 1973 war. In sub-Saharan Africa, on the other hand, they have substantially increased their influence. It is a mixed foreign policy picture; in general, Soviet leaders focusing on the immediate foreign policy balance sheet may be more aware of their problems than their opportunities, but they would also count substantial gains in years just past and would anticipate more within a few years.

8. On the domestic side the balance is somewhat more negative, with substantial problems looming in the not-too-distant future. Economic growth continues to decline; labor productivity remains low; periodic agricultural crises produce food shortages and risk domestic discontent. These problems are chronic, of course, and the effect for the present has been limited. The regime can take some comfort from an overall standard of living that is higher now than ever before, from prospects for two good crops in succession, from containment of dissident activity, and from the system's ability to meet the basic requirements of superpower status.

### Does Brezhnev Have Policy Vulnerabilities?

7. The Soviets remain confident that the long-range global correlation of forces has been and will continue to shift in their favor, and they are specifically very proud of having achieved overall strategic weapons parity with the United States during Brezhnev's regime. They assisted their allies in the defeat of US efforts to maintain a foothold in Indochina. They now are coping, however, with their perception of a more confident and assertive America than in some years, with a deterioration in relations with the new US Administration, and with renewed fears of US technology in new channels of the arms race. China has so far rejected Soviet post-Mao efforts to improve

9. Recent policy developments, therefore, do not contain the sudden and visible failures that would be most likely to jeopardize Brezhnev's political position. So far, moreover, Brezhnev has always sensed when the leadership consensus was drifting dangerously away from him and has trimmed his own policies accordingly. Furthermore, Soviet problems represent systemic difficulties and reflect policies based on general consensus. Nevertheless, if the consequences of policies that have been closely identified with Brezhnev visibly worsen in the next months, this may increase his political vulnerability: This in turn could reduce his capacity to get the extended rest periods he has needed to perform the duties of his office. The

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resulting worsening of his political and physical fortunes could prevent him from acting with the requisite vigor and decisiveness to deal with political opposition. Under these conditions an effort might be made to oust Brezhnev as General Secretary, or at least to deprive him of much of his power. This effort might take the form of a tacit leadership consensus to push Brezhnev out, or assume more of the aspects of an outright conspiracy such as toppled Khrushchev in 1964.

10. Organization of a conspiracy, of course, would be a very risky undertaking, requiring careful preparation and secrecy. To be successful it would probably require the participation or acquiescence of Suslov, the unofficial guardian of party collectivity; Andropov and at least key elements of the KGB center in order to execute the plan; Ustinov, signifying support of and control over the military; and Kirilenko, as a senior party secretary and logical key figure in the succession.

influence in the Politburo. It suggests that he can carry the day on some, but not necessarily all, questions on which he has strong views.

Now his formal responsibilities have been further enlarged with the result that more will have to be exercised by others. The stability of this new balance between Brezhnev's personal authority and the Politburo's collective authority will be tested in the next year or two.

13. Within these general outlines, there is at present a range of opinion (within as well as between State/INR and CIA) as to how solid Brezhnev's real political position is underneath the personnel moves in his favor. At one end of this spectrum of opinion, specialists are more impressed with ousters of Politburo members and appointments to the Secretariat; they see Brezhnev at least holding his own and perhaps gaining influence. Toward the other end of this spectrum, analysts focus more on the collective's tolerance for Brezhnev's power in relation to troubled policies and his declining energies, and see Brezhnev's effective influence as waning.

14. In the next several months, as the USSR approaches its 60th anniversary, Brezhnev probably will avoid policy initiatives that might give rise to political turbulence. Subsequently, perhaps at the customary December meetings of the Central Committee and Supreme Soviet, Brezhnev might propose major innovations in domestic policy. If, as some observers expect, his proposals involve economic management, this could bring him into conflict with other leaders (Kosygin in particular) who have important responsibilities in this area. Moreover, proposals that appeared to aggrandize Brezhnev's powers further at the expense of the Politburo might be resisted by its senior members.\*

### Brezhnev and Political Developments Since the 25th Congress

11. How, then, is Brezhnev faring politically? Developments since the 25th Party Congress have appeared to strengthen, not weaken, Brezhnev's position. While subsequent changes in the top organs (see chart on the appended foldout page) did not entirely reflect Brezhnev's will, their overall result was largely to his advantage. Brezhnev benefited particularly from the addition of his close associates, Chernenko and Rusakov, to the Secretariat, and the removal from the Politburo of Polyanskiy (who was made the scapegoat for failures in agriculture) and Podgornyy. Podgornyy clearly was removed from his post as chairman of the Supreme Soviet Presidium in order to make way for Brezhnev, although the precise circumstances of his ouster from the Politburo are not known and other issues may also have been involved. Ryabov's addition to the Secretariat is a major change, but probably a plus for Kirilenko. Tikhonov probably counts as a partial plus for Brezhnev. This Brezhnev client as First Deputy Premier balances Kosygin and Mazurov in the Council of Ministers on the government side, but Brezhnev has evidently been unable to get Tikhonov named additionally as even a candidate member of the Politburo.

12. The recent move against Podgornyy provides a new and impressive reflection of Brezhnev's political

\* Suslov, in particular, has emphasized the principle of collective leadership. Although he consented, or was obliged, to nominate Brezhnev to his state post, Suslov described Brezhnev as the chief "representative" of the "party and state" rather than the "leader of the party and people." Moreover, Suslov referred to the May Plenum's having deemed it expedient that "Brezhnev, General Secretary of the CPSU, should simultaneously occupy the post of Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet," whereas Brezhnev's formulation had a more institutional and permanent ring: "the combining of the posts of General Secretary of the CPSU and Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet."

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15. To conclude, the current political balance within the leadership may change substantially over the next two years. Given the advanced age and poor health of many in the leadership, opportunities for political exploitation will present themselves irrespective of the political maneuvers initiated by individual leaders. We anticipate a continued uneven course and [redacted] during the next year or two which will limit his capacity to take advantage of such opportunities. It may even increase his vulnerability to the maneuvers of his opponents, especially if Brezhnev's policies meet with manifestly poor results.

- Barring an unlikely but unpredictable heart attack or stroke, there is no specific reason to expect Brezhnev to die in the next year or two, or to be incapacitated enough to have to leave office.
- Whether Brezhnev will be removed by his colleagues is also essentially unforeseeable. If this should happen, we judge that the real cause would probably be his colleagues' perceptions that Brezhnev was no longer consistent or vigorous enough to run the country, or—perhaps somewhat less likely—that the balance of his power and the collective's urgently needed redressing.

On balance, we think there is a better than even chance that Brezhnev will remain in office for the next year or two.

## II. HOW ORDERLY A SUCCESSION?

*If Brezhnev leaves power within the next year or two, how long and orderly or otherwise is the early succession period likely to be?*

16. Our answer to this question is based primarily on our general understanding of the Soviet system—especially such precedents from the Stalin and Khrushchev successions as are likely to be most relevant—[redacted]

### The Succession Process

17. The highest authority in the USSR is the party Central Committee which confers legitimacy on the actions of the party and the state. Since the Central Committee meets for only a few days each year and

has almost 300 voting members, however, it is too large and unwieldy to exercise its nominal authority. Higher Soviet politics is largely the informal and concealed struggle of political organs and powerful individuals who speak in the name of the Central Committee. At the apex of this Soviet hierarchy is the "collective leadership," the members (now 26) of the Politburo and Secretariat, the Central Committee's chief executive organs where the dynamics of top-level politics are played out. These men determine national and foreign policy as a whole, but individually also represent all the major elements of the Soviet system—party, government, economy, military and police, foreign affairs, key domestic regions—and carry their associated political clout. The leadership is not fixed but is constantly shifting as leaders are removed or added and functions and portfolios are redistributed. Formally, and frequently in fact, the Politburo is the ultimately authoritative forum, but the power of its individual members varies markedly, and strong external influence can be brought to bear on the Politburo. Any new party boss must gain a majority in the Politburo or be frustrated. Any who aspires to the top role must forge political majorities and at the very least avoid joining the minority on key issues. This has been Brezhnev's style. The chief means of winning influence in the Politburo has been through control of: the Secretariat of the Central Committee and its powerful staff departments, the government's economic ministries, the security organs and the military command, and the party's territorial organizations in the cities and the republics. As a result, the Politburo has at different times been controlled by an individual (as under the despotic Stalin in his last years), by a triumvirate (as in the early 1920s under Zinoviev, Kamenev, and Stalin), and by loosely organized factions (as in the early post-Stalin period.)

18. The most powerful individual in the Politburo usually has been the General Secretary of the Central Committee (sometimes called the First Secretary). No individual or faction since Lenin's time has been able to make coherent policy in the name of the Central Committee unless he or it controlled this office. The General Secretary's power and authority are neither constitutionally defined nor established by historical precedent. They vary according to his capacities and ambitions and to the strength of the forces supporting him, on the one hand, and those defending collectivity, on the other. Consequently, his departure from office has initiated a struggle, first to succeed to his office, then to acquire sufficient influence in the Politburo to enable the new General Secretary and his

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supporters to speak in the name of the Central Committee. Accordingly, each of the three successions that have occurred in the USSR, to Lenin, Stalin, and Khrushchev, has given rise to acute and relatively prolonged struggle.

19. Typically in Soviet history there has been a two-phased succession: a first crisis when the incumbent is replaced as head of the Secretariat; and a second and longer phase arising from the new senior secretary's attempts to arrogate the powers of his predecessor, powers that he believes to be necessary to provide stable and effective leadership. While he maneuvers to consolidate power, the leadership tends to have trouble making decisions on complex policy matters. Policy lines tend to become fouled with political ones, and institutions just below the top leadership temporarily exercise increased influence on policy. If the party boss fails to consolidate power quickly, the Secretariat may become an arena of acute conflict, as in the 1964-67 period, or there may be an increase in the strength and assertiveness of the government in relation to the party apparatus, such as occurred in the early post-Stalin years. In these contingencies, the leadership's capacity to make urgent decisions on serious political and economic problems would be reduced, perhaps seriously, until such time as a younger, more vigorous man might assume the office and expand its powers. Meanwhile, the political arena may be widened even further by the enhanced activity of institutional "interest groups" in the military, the economic bureaucracy, the scientific establishment, and the creative intelligentsia. Unless the leadership becomes considerably more divided over policy questions than it was in the Khrushchev succession, however, the party apparatus will probably be able to maintain its control over the other institutions and to limit their participation in high Soviet politics.

20. The Soviet military has not generally been a key active manipulator in Soviet succession struggles. This is in some contrast to the state security (now KGB) apparatus, two of whose then current or recent chiefs have been themselves key contenders for the party succession (Beriya in 1953 and Shelepin in 1964). Beyond this, control of key positions within the KGB has been a political necessity for any leader trying to acquire or maintain predominance. As the other organ of force, however, the acquiescence of the professional Soviet military to new power arrangements is essential in Soviet succession struggles. And the military command's general involvement in higher politics has been important throughout the post-Stalin period. Like other key institutions, the military's influence

tends to vary according to its own cohesion and inversely to that of the political leadership. Only twice has a Soviet professional military figure also been a member of the top party leadership (Zhukov in 1956-57 and Grechko in 1973-76). Again like other key Soviet institutions, military influence has tended to be strongest at times of succession, as in the early post-Stalin years and in the post-Khrushchev period, and weakest under a strong personal leader, as under Khrushchev in the late 1950s and early 1960s.\* We would expect this pattern to recur in the probable circumstances of disunity and relative weakness in the early post-Brezhnev years. The present Soviet Minister of Defense, Ustinov, is an experienced and influential party leader with broad acceptance in the current Brezhnev leadership. Should he remain in this position at the outset of the post-Brezhnev period, his support would be important—although certainly not uniquely so—to the new party boss.

21. The real key to success in the succession struggle until now has been control of the Secretariat and its powerful staff (the central apparatus of some 22 departments and over a thousand officials). Control of the Secretariat, in turn, has been converted into varying degrees of influence over the provincial party apparatus, the economic ministries, the security apparatus, and the military command. After 1937 only Stalin succeeded in winning complete control over the regime's entire machinery. Short of this, a strong and reasonably stable leadership has been possible when the General Secretary and his factional supporters had sufficient strength to dominate the Politburo. This was achieved by Stalin in the late 1920s, by Khrushchev in the late 1950s and early 1960s, and, in much more limited measure, by Brezhnev in the 1970s.

#### Effects of Succession on Decisionmaking

22. It has taken several years—an average of about five, depending on the criteria one uses in marking when the new top leader has consolidated power—to resolve each of the three previous succession crises. During this time divisions in the leadership have complicated decisionmaking. A successor leadership tends to concentrate on urgent matters and to neglect policy innovations that require long-term planning and the building of a consensus among diverse groups.

\* On one important occasion in 1957 Khrushchev successfully enlisted the assistance of Zhukov and the Soviet military in a unique appeal over the collective to the Central Committee against his "antiparty" leadership opponents. Less than five months later, Khrushchev "repaid" Zhukov for his services by ousting him from the leadership.

Second, it prefers if possible to concentrate on domestic rather than foreign affairs. Successor leaderships have not been precluded from taking decisive measures on urgent matters. If sudden international crises confront the post-Brezhnev leadership, it will not be incapable of acting, although it may not be able to deal with them in optimum fashion. The succession leadership may find it difficult to respond to early US diplomatic initiatives—especially complicated or imaginative ones—but it would respond vigorously to perceived threats from any quarter to important Soviet security interests. Finally, factional struggles within the leadership make it difficult to initiate basic reforms or to carry out coherent and effective domestic programs, and this may prove especially damaging in the Brezhnev succession, when the cost of a continuing failure to deal with the USSR's growing economic and political problems may well rise sharply.

#### Setting of the Brezhnev Succession

23. The constant clashes of major institutions and the shifting alliances on issues in recent years, combined with the natural caution of an aged and experienced leadership, have resulted in lowest-common-denominator decisions and frequently in immobilism in domestic affairs. The present aged leaders, seasoned by their long apprenticeship under Stalin, will attempt to continue their policy of barring the road to the top to a young, energetic, and ambitious leader who might be tempted to push his programs with extreme methods. Collective leadership stands at the opposite pole from Stalinism as a method of Kremlin rule, and today's rulers find life much more stable and secure now than in the days of the dictator. Furthermore, much of what Americans view as lack of movement in internal policy is seen by the Soviets as consistency and stability, qualities traditionally prized by Russians.

#### Domestic Problems To Be Confronted by the Successor Leadership

24. The stodgier manifestations of these habits of governing are likely to be severely tested by conditions in the succession period. The USSR currently faces serious economic and political problems; and the economic ones, in particular, are expected to worsen during the next half-dozen years. These new challenges will probably cause considerable division within the leadership, complicating efforts to resolve an early Brezhnev succession and consolidate power. It is thus

likely that the early years of the succession will be more disorderly and troubled, at least within leadership circles.

25. The overriding problem is the slowdown in the growth of the economy, caused in large part by factors that will continue to operate: a steady decline in the output obtained from given increments of capital, increased costs of extracting raw materials, declining oil production, and reduced growth in the labor force. As a consequence, we expect annual growth in the early 1980s to decline to about 3 percent. Energy shortfalls and bad harvests in one or more years might cause negligible or even negative growth. Tinkering with the administrative apparatus that directs the country's economic enterprises is unlikely to solve the problem, but a search for administrative solutions may well be made and could prove a divisive issue for the leadership in the early succession period.

26. Available alternative policy choices are bound to be contentious. Further reducing the rate of increase in consumption might adversely affect labor productivity and contribute to popular disaffection. Shifting industrial capacity from defense to the production of investment goods, or stretching out R&D and production schedules to slow the rate of expansion of defense-oriented industrial capacity, would have little effect in the short run. Moreover, defense production is what the Soviets do best as well as the principal engine of Soviet power, and any encroachment on it would be anathema to many Soviet leaders as well as to the military establishment. Selective continued dependence on Western technology, while perhaps improving growth potential, would be expensive, politically controversial, and subject to Western willingness to cooperate. Options to augment the labor force—by retaining older workers longer, bringing more young workers in by adjusting education policies, or reducing the armed forces' terms of service—might be somewhat less controversial to a succession leadership, but would have limited impact. Indeed, even a combination of measures—such as a leveling off of defense production coupled with measures to obtain additional manpower—would probably raise economic growth only slightly. In the energy sector, our estimate is that the longer the leadership delays adoption of a top-priority program of feasible conservation and increased production, the greater the overall adverse economic impact. Such delays would be particularly difficult to avoid in a divided leadership.

27. Political problems that will face Brezhnev's successors include aging cadres throughout the party

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and an erosion of party discipline—a development serious enough to be noted in Brezhnev's report to the 25th Congress. Outright political dissent in the USSR will undoubtedly continue to be a manageable, albeit embarrassing, problem. But the detente era and CSCE (Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe) have set in motion currents of information and independence that will continue to prove troublesome for Brezhnev's successors, involving repeated choices with contentious domestic and foreign policy implications. The nationalities question is likely to be manageable in the next half-dozen years, because the Slavic leaders, if united, probably can cope with the non-Slavic quarter of the Soviet population. Somewhat further down the road, however, the nationalities problem may well become a more serious aggravation. The Soviets' East European empire has moderate-to-serious economic problems that will worsen with Soviet energy shortfalls, and which, combined with the seeds of detente, CSCE, and Eurocommunism, forecast a more unstable than usual Soviet backyard.

### III. POLICY IMPLICATIONS FOR THE UNITED STATES

*What are the short-term policy implications of the succession for the United States?*

#### What We Expect

28. No Kremlin leader has been so closely identified with detente as Brezhnev. He was a prime mover of the major Soviet-American accords of 1972-74 and is believed to have had difficulty on occasion selling these to associates who took a less conciliatory position on bilateral issues or preferred other policy priorities. Any successor will have less personal prestige tied up in the cause of rapprochement with the United States. Accordingly, political succession will probably slow down the pace of relations and tend to a gradual cooling. Selective detente, however, should remain the framework of Soviet foreign policy after Brezhnev. The motives for dialogue with the United States will be durable so long as both sides perceive the nuclear arms race to be dangerous and expensive. At best, however, any achievable strategic arms limitation agreement at this stage can only temper the competition for some form of strategic advantage, primarily through restraining weapons development programs.

29. Brezhnev's successors will be aware of how effectively he used summitry to advance his cause at home as well as abroad. They, too, may succumb to this temptation, though they may be inclined to accent

the ceremonial rather than substantive. In any case, summitry will be awkward until a clear single leader emerges because of the edge in prestige it affords.

30. While prospects are that the Sino-Soviet antagonism will not soon be mollified, within a few years Peking as well as Moscow could view some easing of tensions in state relations (though probably not party relations) as desirable. The road to such an easement will be difficult, and Peking's ability to initiate new policies or be responsive to Soviet moves in this direction will be limited by its own succession struggle.

31. The Soviets' perceptions of their foreign economic requirements will continue to make it difficult for the leadership to adopt markedly different policies. These perceived needs include both a desire to use Western technology in order to modernize the economy and the periodic necessity of importing food and feed grains because of harvest shortfalls. Pursuit of these two goals reinforces the Soviet interest in keeping political relations with the West from deteriorating too far. On the other hand, the drop in Soviet oil production anticipated in the next few years will seriously erode Soviet hard-currency earnings needed to purchase Western products; oil exports accounted for more than half of the USSR's hard-currency earnings last year. We imagine that this predicament may activate residual autarkic sentiment in some quarters of the Soviet leadership and heirarchy. While a drastic shift in economic policies back toward autarky is probably not feasible, we expect more Soviet debate and harder choices over trade policies in the next few years.

32. A loss of momentum in the conduct of detente need not result in an overall destabilization of the US-Soviet relationship. As it is, a slowdown has been under way to varying degrees since late 1974 without producing any drastic escalation of trouble to the point of confrontation. Nevertheless, a lapse of two to five years in the strategic arms limitation talks, especially without some arrangement to extend the Interim Agreement, could have an unsettling effect insofar as pressures for the development and deployment of new weapon systems mount, and the hazards of a downward spiral in US-Soviet relations increase. And other substantive and atmospheric strains in the bilateral relationship could sufficiently cumulate and trouble the dialogue that any top-level Soviet decision to resume a specific search for improved relations would encounter great difficulty, both in obtaining the support of a domestic consensus and in interesting the United States.

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33. In view of the signs of controversy during Brezhnev's tenure, specific policies of interest to the United States—arms control, the Middle East, and trade—could easily get tangled in succession politics. Some Soviet leaders can be expected to urge that higher priority be given to maintenance of internal self-sufficiency, furthering the common objectives of the socialist movement, and, perhaps, projection of Moscow's influence elsewhere abroad, than to limited cooperation with the United States. This tougher outlook is probably well represented among the ideologues, among many provincial party bosses, in the security forces, and in the higher officers corps. The foreign policy influence of these elements could increase markedly if they come to believe that the then-extant leadership's policies threaten their perquisites or jeopardize the security of the Soviet state. In these circumstances, the potentialities for Soviet miscalculations in dealing with the non-Communist world would be considerably higher than in the recent past.

#### The Unexpected

34. More far-reaching complications could arise from a sharp deterioration in the Soviets' internal or foreign situation, especially the former. Elements within the leadership could become so frustrated with immobilism that they would launch a palace revolution. Such a move would be facilitated if Brezhnev had to delegate major responsibilities to others because of his declining stamina. In these circumstances Soviet policy might well become more vigorous, although changes in direction might be minimal. Major changes could ensue, however, if, for example, successive harvest failures generated widespread popular unrest or a "worst case" combination of economic troubles impacted simultaneously. Over the longer term, nationalism among the minorities could even lead to massive separatist outbreaks with ramifications in the leadership. This danger is more imminent in Eastern Europe, where nationalism is combined with anti-Sovietism. Also of a more immediate nature is the possibility of Soviet interference in post-Tito Yugoslavia. While we expect the Soviets' China problem to remain intractable, we would be surprised if large-scale hostilities broke out. But if they did, it would be more likely to be by accident than design, with both sides striving to limit the conflict. Should any of these kinds of threatening contingencies materialize, residual Stalinist orthodoxy would tend to be resurgent, probably leading to a further stiffening in policy toward the United States and to general limitations on

contacts with the outside world as part of a tightening of internal discipline.

35. On the other hand, there is an outside chance that reformers-from-above will emerge who would introduce innovative economic measures, both internally and in terms of greater economic dependence on the West. In the next section we explore the possible implications of these kinds of policies in connection with an outside-chance succession scenario.

#### IV. SCENARIOS FOR THE BREZHNEV SUCCESSION

36. Brezhnev himself is unlikely to want or be able to arrange the succession definitively. Even if he manages to augment his present authority significantly, he probably will not share substantial power with a single heir presumptive. While Brezhnev may strengthen the position of several of the younger candidates, he will probably attempt to balance and circumscribe their power with extreme care to assure that none of them does to him what he, in similar circumstances, did to Khrushchev. He is also presumably aware of the risk either that his other lieutenants might shift their allegiance from the General Secretary to the heir presumptive, or that a designated heir becomes the principal target for other contenders and their patrons among the present leadership seniors.

37. It is conceivable though unlikely that Brezhnev's colleagues might ease him into figurehead status should his performance become uneven enough to cause them to conclude he could no longer handle the job of general secretary, instead of pushing him out of the leadership altogether into retirement, either honorable or otherwise. We attach perhaps a 10-percent possibility to this scenario. Brezhnev would find himself in the position of having to acquiesce in retreating into the honorary but largely ceremonial character of the presidency, and might prefer to keep his hand in than retire altogether. The collective would select a new party boss—perhaps Kirilenko, Brezhnev's present unofficial party deputy, but perhaps not. Should this happen soon, an inner collective of the present key senior leaders would share power with the new party leader. Should one or more of the present seniors precede Brezhnev out of the picture, the inner collective would consist of the most senior and influential extant, and they would begin a period of tugging and hauling with the new party boss over effective authority in party affairs. In either case, Brezhnev's own policy influence would presumably be drastically curtailed. Implications for Soviet foreign

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policy and US interests would probably be along the lines we consider the likeliest for the actual post-Brezhnev period, as discussed in paragraphs 28-33 above.

#### A Kirilenko Succession and Its Implications

38. If Brezhnev does not soon take measures to prepare the way for a chosen heir, and should he leave the office of general secretary in the next year or two, Kirilenko would have by far the best chance to assume it. (See the appended chart for the present positions of the key players in this shuffle.) As Brezhnev's chief deputy in the Politburo and party apparatus, with responsibility for internal party organization and its supervision of the economy, Kirilenko has superior claim to the requisite experience to be general secretary. This and his current access to the crucial levers of power strongly favor his candidacy in an early contest for the succession to Brezhnev. There is evidence that Kirilenko has in recent years taken over more of the daily routine of running the CPSU, but it is not clear how far this has gone. He also appears to have strengthened his position within the past year through the appointment of a former associate, Ryabov, as a secretary of the Central Committee with the important defense industry portfolio, and at least partial responsibility for "administrative organs."\* Further, Kirilenko has publicly participated in two meetings of the Council of Ministers, a break in precedent he shares only with Brezhnev.

39. Whether or not Brezhnev has deliberately fostered Kirilenko's strong tacit claim to the succession, he may welcome that claim as giving assurance, to himself and others, that the contingency of his own sudden incapacitation has been provided for. Moreover, given the long career association between the two men, Brezhnev may feel more secure with Kirilenko as his heir presumptive. In any case, Kirilenko's availability gives Brezhnev a plausible excuse for not grooming a younger, perhaps more dangerous, heir. Since Kirilenko's age necessarily limits how long he can serve as a stand-in for Brezhnev, however, his own impatience to obtain the top party post might produce increased tension between them with the passage of time, particularly if Brezhnev's performance comes into question. If Kirilenko were deprived of his superior position, and Brezhnev failed to make new arrangements favoring a

\* The CPSU's euphemism for the organs of control, "administrative organs," applies to the Committee for State Security (KGB), the uniformed police, the military, and the judiciary.

particular candidate, the prospects for an orderly transfer of Brezhnev's power—which in any event are dubious—would be worsened. Apart from the loss of Brezhnev's favor, Kirilenko must fear an alliance between Suslov as potential kingmaker\* and some other candidate for the succession. Moreover, if the succession were initiated by a successful conspiracy or political maneuver, Kirilenko's prospects would depend on the part he had played in forcing Brezhnev from power. All things considered, a reasonable estimate of the probability that Kirilenko would become general secretary is about 70 percent.

40. Kirilenko's succession to the office of general secretary probably would ease the crisis of leadership initially and impress the outside world with the leadership's stability. Consolidating his power would be something else again. Even if Kirilenko won election as general secretary and survived a turbulent initial phase of the succession, his age and the magnitude of the economic and political problems that face the USSR in the next few years make it doubtful that he could bring relative stability to Soviet politics as Brezhnev did in the late 1960s. Little is known, however, about either Kirilenko's policy vision or his political acumen—key factors in predicting his chances for success. We might conceivably be surprised by a dynamic and even innovative Kirilenko in power. All things considered, however, a reasonable estimate of the probability that Kirilenko would be able to consolidate his rule and maintain it for several years is less than even, say 30 percent. Even if Kirilenko were not simply defeated in this contest and forced from office, he might be able to hold onto it only by accommodating to the pressures of his peers in the Politburo and to the powerful constituencies and interest groups they represent.

41. The prospects in the event of a Kirilenko succession are for a relatively weak leadership, one unable to deal vigorously with the worsening performance of the Soviet economy, and incapable of achieving far-reaching agreements with the United States. Little is known of Kirilenko's foreign policy views. In general, he is believed to be somewhat more conservative ideologically than Brezhnev, and likely to give a lower priority to improving relations with the United States and the West. Brezhnev's detente policy probably would be continued in an attenuated form,

\* Suslov is not himself inclined or suited (by age, health, and expertise) actually to run the party. So long as he remains active, however, his unique 30 years' experience in the Secretariat and unofficial role as senior custodian of both party ideology and collective rule give him a key say in who does run the party.

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particularly out of concern to avoid dangerous encounters in the international arena.

#### Implications of Succession by a More Junior Leader

42. There is perhaps a 30-percent chance that someone else will succeed Brezhnev even initially. Should Kirilenko depart the leadership for whatever reason\* in the next year or two, Kulakov currently is probably immediately best placed of the younger figures for the party succession. He is the only secretary of the next generation of Soviet leaders who is simultaneously a member of the Politburo. At 59, he appears, in the few glimpses Westerners get of him, to project well politically among his colleagues. Although he is presumably generally acquainted with the country's business from six years of participation in Politburo and 12 in Secretariat deliberations, his own portfolio has been almost exclusively agriculture and he has not been given broad party responsibilities to oversee personally. Should Kulakov become party boss, either instead of or after Kirilenko, he would probably be more under the constraints of the leadership collective, since his current experience, power base, and party authority, at least, are much less striking than Kirilenko's, and he would have much further to go to consolidate his position in the leadership.

43. While in the closed system of CPSU politics the next party leader or two are unlikely to come from outside the present top leadership, they could be any of a number of men now in it. Each of its present members has one or more handicaps to overcome in filling out credentials for a claim to the top job, but if the Brezhnev succession is delayed or, as may well happen, occurs in two or more stages, one or more of these men could well improve their power and experience.

44. Of otherwise promising young candidates, Romanov and Shcherbitskiy for example, have not worked in the central Secretariat, or even in a responsible capacity in Moscow. Unless they are brought into the Secretariat in the very near future, they will lack both the experience and the power base needed to assert an effective claim to Brezhnev's office if it were vacated within the next year or two. Of those currently in the central Secretariat who might suddenly be elevated into the Politburo, some, like

Dolgikh and Ryabov, lack experience with and access to the organizational levers of powers; others, like Kapitonov, lack broad policy experience. The chances of any of these are low now, but may well improve substantially over the next two to five years.

45. If a younger figure rather than Kirilenko succeeded Brezhnev in the next two years, the initial crisis of succession might be sharper and the leadership's instability more manifest than under Kirilenko. The new general secretary's efforts to consolidate his position might lead to a further weakening of the leadership, and perhaps to a new succession. Less probably, they could lead to a resolution of the succession crisis on the basis of strong personal leadership by Brezhnev's heir. The urge of these men to concentrate on domestic affairs and to conduct a foreign policy conducive to that end might be even stronger than Kirilenko's. Soviet foreign policy might be subject to conflicting tendencies as the older Politburo figures tried to guide the new incumbent along established lines, while his age peers would perhaps favor more venturesome policies, particularly to deal with sudden dangers and attractive opportunities that might appear on the international scene.

#### Possible Emergence and Implications of a Strong and Effective Ruler

46. The above analysis indicates that an early Brezhnev succession would probably lead to a weakening of the leadership's capacity to deal with the worsening problems confronting it. Are there circumstances in which an early Brezhnev succession might have the opposite result—that is, lead to a strengthened leadership better able to cope with these problems? Several of the necessary conditions currently exist, and these could provide an able and ambitious candidate for the succession with large opportunities for aggrandizing personal power:

- There is a manifest need to rejuvenate both the Politburo and the Central Committee, which have grown old and complacent during Brezhnev's reign.
- There is a similar need to purge the middle levels, where bureaucratic tenure and promotion based on seniority have fostered stagnation and caused some loss of discipline.
- There is a substantial reserve of able and relatively young officials whose ambition for rapid advance has been frustrated by Brezhnev's conservative personnel policies. If a candidate for

\* Kirilenko is a few months older than Brezhnev.

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the succession could mobilize the support of these men, by rewarding them with positions in the Central Committee and the Politburo, he might be able to create a powerful personal machine that could dominate the Soviet political system.

- The relatively poor performance of the Soviet system in recent years, which is reflected in reduced economic growth and in the failure to fulfill high expectations of foreign policy successes, could provide the basis for an appeal to patriotic and Communist sentiments for support in order to compete more effectively on the world scene.

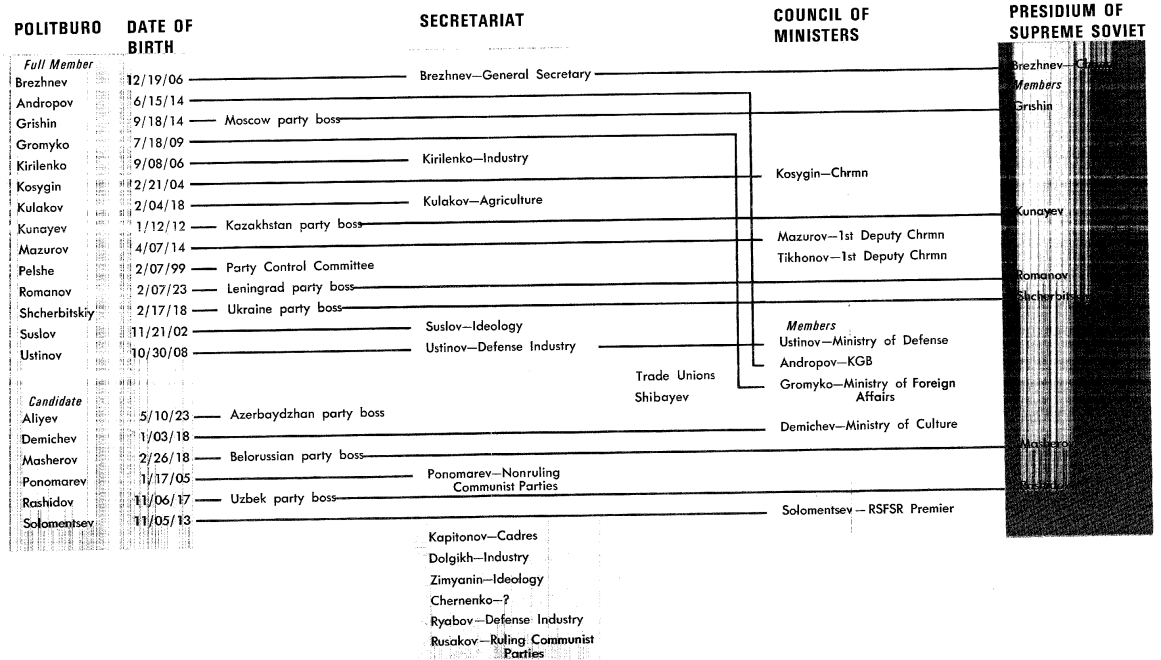
47. Militating against the rapid rise of a powerful and innovative new general secretary is the apparent capacity and determination of bureaucratic groups to protect their institutional and personal privileges from reformist measures and arbitrary commands imposed from above. Normally the system penalizes innovators and risk takers. A leader possessed of a powerful will and superior cunning would be needed to overcome their resistance, and it is hard to discern such a figure close to the peaks of power. Still, it cannot be ruled out that one of the contenders may possess the requisite qualities but is obliged to conceal them temporarily so as not to provoke his colleagues. The probability that a

leader will emerge to capitalize on the conditions favoring strong personal rule is a bare 10 percent in the next two years, perhaps 20 to 30 percent in the next five years.

48. Such a succession scenario would probably impact most on US interests, as the party chief would be less dependent on the collective and freer to pursue dynamic policies, for better or worse. Internally, of course, even if a strong, dynamic leader tried seriously to ameliorate the basic problems of the Soviet regime, he might manifestly fail, as Khrushchev did, and his rule might be followed by a new phase of bureaucratic conservatism and acquiescence in the decline of the economy. On the other hand, he might have some success in reforming the Soviet system. His reforms, unlike Khrushchev's, would most likely be directed at strengthening party and state discipline, with the object of achieving increased efficiency in the economy. At the same time, he would probably find it necessary to encourage initiative in economic management. Technocrats might have a greater influence on policy formulation, although the leader's position would still depend on his control of the party apparatus. Were he to succeed in his endeavors, the Soviet Union might end up having greater resources available for competition with the United States than now seems likely.

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### Interlocking Directorate of the Soviet Leadership



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