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Analysis Report

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Gorbachev Takes Charge at CPSU Plenum

The CPSU Central Committee plenum on 23 April provided an impressive demonstration of the political strength of new General Secretary Gorbachev. He brought his closest associates in the Secretariat into full Politburo membership and used his plenum speech to lay out an economic program that challenges the ministerial bureaucracy and promises a shift of power to the local level. He also called for a shakeup of party officials at all levels in preparation for the next party congress—scheduled by the plenum for February 1986. In his remarks on foreign policy, Gorbachev was sharply critical of U.S. arms control policies, but affirmed Moscow's readiness to improve relations with Washington.

Leadership Changes

The personnel changes enacted at the plenum greatly strengthened Gorbachev's voting support in the Politburo and altered the power relationships in the Secretariat, putting the general secretary in an excellent position to influence the composition of the party congress and the new Central Committee it will elect. The additions made to the Politburo were the most extensive since 1973. Three leaders who gained their current positions under Andropov were elected as full members of the Politburo: Cadres Secretary Yegor Ligachev, 65; economics Secretary Nikolay Ryzhkov, 56; and KGB chief Viktor Chebrikov, 62. In addition, Defense Minister Sergey Sokolov, 74, was made a candidate member of the Politburo, and RSFSR Agriculture Minister V. P. Nikonov, 56, was brought into the Secretariat.

The large number of vacancies in the Politburo gave Gorbachev an unusual opportunity to put his stamp on the composition of the leadership. The new promotions restore the size of the Politburo to 13 members—its minimum membership from 1971 until Andropov's death. Under Chernenko no new members were added to the Politburo to replace Andropov or Defense Minister Ustinov, who died in 1984.

Gorbachev showed considerable strength by winning the promotion of his allies Ligachev and Ryzhkov—the most junior members of the Secretariat—to full Politburo membership. The feat was all the more impressive because

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neither had been a candidate member—a break with practice since 1973 when Foreign Minister Gromyko and Defense Minister Grechko were brought directly into the Politburo.

Ryzhkov and Ligachev have been closely associated with Gorbachev. Both worked directly under him in the Secretariat and have voiced views similar to his on economic issues. Since Gorbachev became party leader they have become more prominent, most notably at the late March session of the RSFSR Supreme Soviet, where they played roles normally reserved for Politburo members.

The promotion of Ligachev and Ryzhkov should result in a new distribution of responsibilities among the senior secretaries. Ligachev is likely to continue to supervise cadres, but may be given additional responsibilities such as ideology—a key portfolio previously held by Chernenko and Gorbachev. Ligachev has some previous experience in ideology, having served briefly as a deputy head of the CPSU Propaganda Department for the RSFSR from 1961 to 1962 and again in 1965. That he will play a specially important role in the Gorbachev regime was suggested by his strikingly high status in the first post-plenum lineup. On May Day he stood seventh—after Gorbachev, Tikhonov, Gromyko, Grishin, Romanov, and Solomentsev, but ahead of Aliyev and Vorotnikov, who had become Politburo members earlier. Chebrikov and Ryzhkov, on the other hand, stood last, as new members should.

The role of the other new senior secretary, Ryzhkov, is somewhat clearer. He will most likely be the senior secretary for industrial affairs, jumping ahead of longtime industry Secretary Vladimir Dolgikh, 60, who is only a candidate Politburo member. His promotion would also appear to dilute the authority of the only other secretary who is also a full member of the Politburo, Grigoriy Romanov, who has played a role in industrial management. If Romanov is not given new responsibilities—such as ideology—his role could be reduced to overseeing security matters and defense industries.

The addition of Nikonov to the Secretariat—presumably to become secretary for agriculture—appears to have been a move by Gorbachev to turn his own portfolio over to a favorite while ignoring higher level candidates. Nikonov, who was far down the line among qualified agricultural officials, had prospered earlier under Gorbachev's tenure as agriculture secretary: In August 1979 he left his post as first secretary of tiny Mari oblast to become

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*Viktor Nikonov, new
CPSU secretary.*

USSR deputy agriculture minister, and in January 1983 he became agriculture minister for the whole RSFSR. It is unclear whether Nikonov, as a junior secretary, will work under the supervision of Ligachev, who has been overseeing agriculture in recent weeks, or directly under Gorbachev.

The relationship of Chebrikov and Sokolov to Gorbachev is less clear. Like Ligachev and Ryzhkov, however, Chebrikov was an Andropov appointee and may also be a Gorbachev ally. Sokolov's advancement only to candidate membership in the Politburo suggests that he carries little political weight in the leadership. Since Ligachev and Ryzhkov were advanced directly to full Politburo membership, a similar move could have been made for Sokolov, giving him equal status to the head of the KGB and that held by the late Defense Minister Ustinov.

Economic Program

Gorbachev's report to the plenum focused mainly on economic policy and called for immediate and concrete changes in planning and administration to improve economic performance—which he called “the main issue now.” The thrust of his statements was that the central ministerial bureaucracy must be changed and its powers reduced in order to stimulate local initiative and creativity and boost productivity. He sharply criticized past inaction on economic problems, stating that the need for better management methods had not been recognized early enough and there had been “no persistence” in working out and adopting “major measures” to improve the economy.

Gorbachev laid out a number of specific proposals for improving economic performance:

- ***Restructure ministerial work.*** The general secretary called for “restructuring the work of the upper echelons” of economic administration, implying the need for reorganizing ministries or at least reducing their powers and changing their methods of operation. He stated that some administrative units that have turned into “obstacles” to progress must be eliminated and the state apparatus simplified, and he criticized heads of some ministries for maintaining “old approaches.” He indicated that some ministerial prerogatives should be reduced. For example, he urged limitation of central organs’

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practice of issuing "instructions" interpreting party and state decrees, because, he said, these instructions are sometimes used "capriciously" to constrain enterprises.

- ***Change planning procedures.*** Implying that planning is hampering growth, he argued that it must be changed into an "active lever" for boosting production. To this end, he insisted that the number of plan indicators sent down to enterprises must be reduced and that incentives must play a bigger role.
- ***Expand local rights.*** He advocated expansion of the rights of plants and also of local government organs in managing economic matters. Local organs, he declared, should have "full responsibility" for questions in their jurisdiction and should not buck local problems to the center.
- ***Increase priority for machine building.*** He called for sharply accelerating the replacement of old equipment and the development of new technology in order to spur economic growth. He also insisted that the next five-year plan must increase the rate of growth of machine building by 50 to 100 percent.
- ***Reorganize agricultural organs.*** Gorbachev indicated that he intends to strengthen the agroindustrial organs created by the May 1982 CPSU plenum by expanding their authority over more agricultural and agriculture-related agencies. Declaring that the management of the agroindustrial complex "needs further improvement," he called for measures to "make it possible to manage, plan, and finance the agroindustrial complex as a single entity at all levels."

Gorbachev's proposals are limited in scope, but they are fairly concrete and will provoke resistance since they encroach on the powers and prerogatives of the entrenched central bureaucracy. Gorbachev's intention to frontally assault the bureaucracy was clear in his first major domestic policy statement after becoming general secretary—at a special gathering of managers of plants and associations on 8 April—when he invited local managers to criticize the existing system.¹ He endorsed the managers' criticism of higher organs and their proposals for decentralizing powers in both his closing speech at the conference and at the plenum. His plenum speech also repeatedly cited sentiments expressed at the conference, which, he claimed, had "convinced" him that action is needed to improve management and reduce excessive regulation from above.

¹ Gorbachev's 8 April speech is discussed in the FBIS *Trends* of 17 April 1985, pages 19-22.

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Gorbachev visits Moscow factory. (Soviet television, 17 April 1985)

The Gorbachev regime is conveying the impression that the general secretary's proposals have strong backing at the top levels of the party. As if to underscore the clout behind his program, Gorbachev asserted in his plenum speech that the Politburo had "unanimously" concluded that action is needed. Politburo support for Gorbachev on this issue also was suggested in a 22 April Lenin Day speech by First Deputy Premier Aliyev, the top government economic administrator below Premier Tikhonov. Aliyev argued for reorganization of the work of the central economic ministries and agencies, for more "flexible combination of centralism and autonomy" in economic management, and for greater reliance on economic levers. Prior to the plenum, *Pravda* on 19 April reported that the Politburo, in response to the 8 April conference, had ordered Gosplan and other agencies to work out measures to implement the managers' proposals, especially on reducing the number of planning indicators sent down to plants.

Before the plenum speech, Gorbachev had already demonstrated his determination to make changes by taking action in the sphere directly under his control—the Central Committee apparatus—where he removed two Central

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Committee economic supervisors. The longtime heads of the Central Committee construction and machine building departments were both replaced just before Gorbachev sharply criticized these two sectors in his plenum speech. The head of the Construction Department since 1969, 65-year-old Ivan Dmitriyev, was transferred to RSFSR deputy premier in late March, and *Pravda* on 20 April reported that Boris Yeltsin, 54, had been released as Sverdlovsk first secretary to become head of the department. On 19 April *Pravda* reported that 71-year-old Vasiliy Frolov, head of the Machine Building Department since 1958, was retiring.

The new construction head appears to share Gorbachev's disdain for the Moscow bureaucracy. Yeltsin's articles in the central press have sometimes expressed local leaders' frustration at the inefficiency and lack of coordination of central ministries. For example, in a July 1983 *Kommunist* article, he complained that construction ministries were so uncoordinated in managing the crucial gas pipeline that his local obkom had to step in and exercise "leadership over the work of all these state organs" to get tasks accomplished. Shortly before his new appointment, in a 7 April television interview, he criticized local managers who turn to central organs for help instead of resolving problems locally.

Renovation of Party Leadership

Gorbachev has clearly signaled his impatience to change things not only in the economic sphere but also throughout the party apparatus. By calling the plenum only weeks after taking office and setting the date for the next party congress, he initiated a process that could considerably change the character of the party. Toward this end, he used his plenum speech to demand an acceleration in the renovation of party leadership at all levels.

The long lead time for the congress, which is set to open on 25 February 1986, may have been determined in part in order to allow adequate discussion of the new party program that the congress will adopt. According to the *Pravda* version of his plenum speech, Gorbachev announced that the program would be presented to a future plenum and then released for broad public debate. The date for the October 1961 congress, which adopted the previous program, was set the previous January and a draft of the program was released in July. Under Brezhnev, congresses were announced from three to eight months in advance.

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The schedule will also provide a considerable time for the party election campaign, which Gorbachev indicated will be used to reshape the party leadership. He stated that the "leading party organs" elected at local conferences and congresses will need to be "replenished with fresh forces" and called upon high-level officials to play a "direct role" in election meetings, even at low levels, in order to ensure a critical review of leaders and to fully address any shortcomings.

Gorbachev went much further in stressing the need for a critical review of party personnel during the elections than Brezhnev had in an equivalent speech to the June 1980 plenum that scheduled the 26th Congress. Brezhnev had balanced his call for a review of the party's "omissions and shortcomings" with instructions to consider also "what is positive" in its work. The same contrast is evident in the resolutions on the congresses adopted by the two plenums. This year, the resolution concluded with a lengthy section directing that the election meetings make a "profound and comprehensive" examination of the party's work, discuss "in detail" questions of party management, and take a "self-critical approach" in evaluating party organs. In 1980, the equivalent resolution provided no comparable guidelines for the election meetings.

Gorbachev called for faster replacement of ineffective leaders and more aggressive advancement of new, younger officials. He acknowledged the need to ensure the "correct combination of experienced and young workers," but he leaned in the direction of youth, saying that there must be no "stagnation" in advancing cadres and that the party must promote women and young workers "with greater boldness." He criticized older officials who are lax in implementing new policies and tolerate shortcomings.



First woman president of the Ukraine—Valentina Shevchenko—elected 27 March 1985.

Since Gorbachev became general secretary, increased attention has been given to a new personnel policy, adopted in October 1984, that calls for higher leadership standards and replacement of those who fail to meet them.² Aliyev's Lenin Day speech also emphasized the need for increasing the pace of personnel changes. He indicated that the party must

² For a more extensive discussion of personnel policies see the FBIS *Trends* of 10 April 1985, pages 12-15.

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“decisively get rid” of ineffective leaders and “be bolder in advancing young people.” In contrast to Gorbachev and to the balanced formula used under Chernenko, Aliyev failed to mention any need to balance promotions with retention of experienced workers.

Gorbachev coupled his call for faster personnel changes with a demand for increased discipline. He said that “we will not tolerate” an attitude of “mutual forgiveness” where managers overlook “indiscipline in workers” and workers in turn ignore managerial “blunders.” He made it clear that enforcement of discipline should extend to the party, stating that “not a single party organization, not a single worker” should be exempt.

Foreign Policy

In his report to the plenum Gorbachev criticized U.S. foreign and arms control policy more sharply than in any of his previous statements since becoming the top Soviet leader. At the same time, he reaffirmed Moscow’s commitment to promoting East-West detente and its readiness to improve relations with Washington and seek mutually acceptable arms control agreements. His mixture of criticism of the United States and advocacy of detente seemed intended both to assure the party that Soviet interests will be guarded and to defend the Soviet rationale for continued dialogue with the Reagan Administration.

Gorbachev toughened his depiction of U.S. policy, leveling a number of attacks explicitly against the United States:

- For the first time, he directly accused Washington of violating the U.S.-Soviet accord reached in January on the linking of space, strategic, and intermediate-range nuclear weapons issues at the Geneva talks. He cited alleged U.S. refusal to discuss the question of preventing “the spread of the arms race into space” as the prime indicator of U.S. violation of the January accord.
- He charged that the United States is not seeking an accord at the Geneva talks. Maintaining that the first round of the talks “provides grounds for saying that Washington is not holding to a course directed at accord with the Soviet Union,” he averred that the Administration’s “haste” in rejecting Soviet proposals demonstrated U.S. “unwillingness to steer” negotiations toward “reasonable results.”

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- Elaborating on themes he articulated in his 23 March meeting with representatives of the Socialist International and in his 8 April *Pravda* interview, Gorbachev placed primary responsibility on "U.S. ruling circles" for creating an "alarming and dangerous" international situation. He accused Washington of "sabotaging" disarmament and of "trampling on" the interests of other countries, the traditions of international relations, and existing treaties and agreements.

In his critique of U.S. policy, Gorbachev appeared to reflect concern that the Geneva talks might be used to damage Soviet interests and as a justification for funding U.S. weapons programs. He warned that Moscow would not encourage a course that indulges in the "hypocrisy" and public deceit of combining an arms race and disarmament talks, and he underlined his point with a cryptic reference to the last round of negotiations that were aborted by a Soviet walkout in 1983: "We would not want a repetition of the sorry experience of the previous talks." Gorbachev had raised similar concerns in his 28 March reply to German peace activists, charging that statements from "high-ranking U.S. representatives" had created the impression that they "need talks as a screen" for carrying through their military programs.

Despite these sharp words about U.S. policy, however, Gorbachev continued to emphasize both the necessity for improved U.S.-Soviet relations and the persistence of Soviet efforts to that end. In language similar to his 8 April *Pravda* interview, the Soviet leader declared that confrontation was not a "fatal inevitability" between the Soviet Union and the United States. Rather, he asserted, the "most rational" course is for both sides to seek to "smooth relations" and "build a bridge of cooperation." In regard to the Geneva talks, moreover, he pledged that the Soviet Union would "work persistently for concrete, mutually acceptable agreements," and he asserted that the Soviet Union stood ready to reach such accords.

Gorbachev's defense of Soviet positions and criticism of Washington is consistent with Moscow's current tactical approach to relations with the United States. In statements calculated to affect world opinion, Gorbachev has taken the lead in seeking to promote opposition to U.S. policies, especially among U.S. allies, by encouraging doubts about Washington's willingness to seek compromise solutions while insisting that Moscow is being flexible at the talks.³ The same approach was taken in the annual 22 April Lenin Day

³ For more detailed discussion of Gorbachev's earlier efforts to intensify public pressures on the Administration's arms control posture in Geneva, see the FBIS *Trends* of 3 April 1985, pages 1-3, and 10 April 1985, pages 1-5.

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address delivered by CPSU Politburo member Geydar Aliyev. While claiming that Moscow was “unswervingly” pursuing a policy of dialogue and cooperation with all states, Aliyev also used strong language in accusing “aggressive circles, first and foremost in the United States,” of exacerbating the international situation, “pushing mankind toward the edge of the abyss,” and elevating “state terrorism” to the status of official policy.

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