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The Director of Central Intelligence  
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15 November 1984

National Intelligence Council

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence  
Deputy Director of Central Intelligence

VIA: Chairman, National Intelligence Council  
Vice Chairman, National Intelligence Council

FROM: [REDACTED]  
Assistant National Intelligence Officer for USSR

SUBJECT: Soviet Leadership Disorder: Possible Increased Danger of  
Unintended Provocation

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1. We typically include in our bag of images of the Soviet Union a belief that notable Soviet actions reflect specific Politburo decisions or the policy guidelines of a cohesive leadership. Since Andropov became seriously ill and particularly since his death and Chernenko's succession, a growing body of reporting suggests a different reality -- one of a Politburo suffering weak leadership and some disarray, whose major foreign policies, having run into dead-ends, have fallen victim to inertia and stagnation.

2. The absence of strong direction by a single individual compounded by lessened cohesion among the key oligarchs would seem likely to evoke more independent activities, rivalry, and intrigue, not only among Politburo members, but even more so and less subtly among apparatchiks in the party and state machines. And, indeed, we have some reporting directly to this effect. More than this, though, a number of events suggest or can readily be interpreted as indicative of increased leeway and political private enterprise by lower level Soviet officialdom.

- o Berlin -- The long string of Soviet actions affecting our access to Berlin -- the reservations of air corridors, expanded PRAs, dispute over bridge repairs, etc. -- is at least as likely the result of the Soviet military and Berlin authorities being on a longer leash -- than it is a carefully crafted response to the decline in East-West relations, US INF deployments, or other foreign developments. While Gromyko, Ustinov, and the Politburo at large have by now considered these developments and probably issued general guidance, much or all of this activity may reflect the long time goals, planning, training and other considerations of Soviet leaders in East Germany now able to exercise greater initiative.

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- o The KGB -- In recent months KGB elements may have played a role in the Leadership sweepstakes by spreading stories that could be interpreted as helpful or harmful to Chernenko and Gorbachev. Romanov -- who we believe oversees the KGB for the Secretariat -- may be playing a particular role in this. It is also plausible that zealous KGB operatives close to Polish hardliners, and operating independently of Politburo direction, assisted or conspired in the kidnapping and murder of Father Popieluzsko.
- o Solidarity with British coal miners -- Of further significance is the announcement -- thereafter retracted and all but denounced -- by a lower level official that the Soviet Union was embargoing energy supplies to the United Kingdom in sympathy with the ongoing strike by British coal miners.

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3. A danger of possible lessened central control of the military and the KGB is that a greater likelihood of an unintended Soviet provocation may currently exist. The military and KGB may now be more inclined and able to adopt procedures and undertake actions that could have serious unintended political repercussions. These organizations -- with their security concerns and instinct to try to improve their far flung operational positions and support their friends and assets -- may be able, in the current Soviet domestic climate, to exercise greater initiative where there are not clear guidelines or proscriptions. Responsiveness to a single Politburo member acting on his own, in arenas where in the past he would not have dared, may simply manifest foolish or incautious behavior lacking the council of critical review.

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4. The implications of such a perspective for the US are not good. We cannot simply excuse or ignore pugnacious and coincidental Soviet behavior. If we respond too cautiously or quizzically, we run the risk of reinforcing the belief that we can be had at all levels in the Soviet regime. At the same time, tough responses may take Soviet leaders by surprise and be perceived as provocative, both in Moscow and elsewhere. Even if Soviet leaders do recognize the decline in their own cohesion, they probably cannot do much about it owing to their definition of their own critical political interests.

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