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## Nation

### Who's Running the Show?

Andrei Gromyko's trip to the U.S. has given new urgency to a task that preoccupies Western experts on Soviet affairs: interpreting the current murky status of the Kremlin leadership. Says a top U.S. analyst in Washington: "We've got to get a better fix on who is running the show. This ignorance could really screw up our decisions."

The mystery facing the specialists deepened with the brief, repeated appearances on Moscow television last week of a strikingly frail Soviet Leader Konstantin Chernenko. The General Secretary, who took office in February, had vanished from public view on July 13, ostensibly to enjoy a summer vacation. He had been seen only once after that, presenting medals to three cosmonauts in a ten-minute film clip on the Sept. 6 Moscow evening news.

Chernenko's latest appearances, within days of his 73rd birthday, were hastily arranged. One occasion was the presentation of the Order of Lenin to Harilaos Florakis, head of the pro-Soviet Communist Party of Greece. During the proceedings, Chernenko looked visibly weaker than he had two weeks earlier. He leaned on the corner of a desk for support and had difficulty breathing as he read his prepared text. Three nights later, Chernenko turned up again on the news program, giving a strained, five-minute message to the Finnish people.

The strange vignettes only confirmed what most Western analysts have suspected: Chernenko is in precarious health. In an effort to determine the extent of his illness, CIA experts have been running the Soviet-made clip of his Sept. 6 appearance through a sophisticated film analyzer, frame by frame. Their conclusion: snippets were cut from the film to eliminate some of Chernenko's more obvious stumbles and trembling. Although an exact prognosis cannot be made from a piece of celluloid, it is clear, says a senior British diplomat, that Chernenko "does not look like a man with too long to go before incapacity or death removes him from the scene." The Soviet leader is known to suffer from emphysema and a heart condition.

The real problem lies in deciding what relation, if any, exists between the state of Chernenko's health and the way decisions are being made in the twelve-man Soviet Politburo. Specialist opinion varies widely, but there is broad agreement that the Kremlin is preoccupied by the recurring problem of succession. The process is more complicated and painful than usual because it is the third period of uncertainty in two years (Leonid Brezhnev died in November 1982, Yuri Andropov last February). The upshot, says Harvard University Professor Richard Pipes, is "a profound crisis and lack of direction." Kremlinologist Marshall Goldman of Wellesley College in Massachusetts calls the Politburo situation "the worst of all circumstances. Everyone knows Chernenko is sick, so no change is possible."

Others take a slightly more sanguine view. Says a Western diplomat in Moscow: "I really think Chernenko is there just to keep the political mechanism going until they decide

what to do. For the moment, it looks like a collective leadership with everyone very much in charge of his own portfolio." According to Middlebury College President Olin Robison, who has had frequent dealings with high-level Soviet officials, collective leadership in the Politburo has gradually grown more diffuse since Chernenko took office. Says he: "There is no longer any strong personality at the center. The people around Chernenko are stronger than he is."

Those explanations dovetail nicely with the apparent rise in Gromyko's influence. He derives clout from long experience as the Kremlin's top diplomat and a flawless record of cleaving to the collective Politburo line. Says Uri Ra'anan, professor at Tufts University Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy: "I am astounded at Gromyko's authority. He has absolutely no political power base." Agrees Pipes: "By default, he has moved in."

However complicated the Politburo's internal state of affairs, Chernenko's public appearances indicate an effort on the part of the leadership to keep his image at center stage. In-



Visibly weaker: Chernenko with Greek Party Leader Florakis

deed, some analysts speculate that such recent Soviet actions as the harsh treatment of Dissident Andrei Sakharov and the pressure brought to bear on East German Party Leader Erich Honecker to cancel a trip to West Germany are similar bids to reinforce the regime's monolithic authority. Another such incident may have been the sudden announcement two weeks ago that Moscow's outspoken Military Chief of Staff and Deputy Defense Minister, Marshal Nikolai Ogarkov, had been replaced. Last week a Soviet military official told a U.S. arms-control expert that Ogarkov had been named to head the

country's second-ranking military academy, a job transfer that Pipes calls "both a demotion and a humiliation."

While Western analysts agree that the succession crisis is far from resolved, they point out that the Kremlin's options are limited. Adam Ulam, director of Harvard's Russian Research Center, and others note that any aspirant for the top Soviet leadership post must be both a full member of the Politburo and a secretary of the Communist Party's Central Committee, which comprises more than 300 members. The importance of having those two titles became clear when Andropov was hastily made a party secretary as a prelude to assuming the top job. The only men who fit the bill at the moment are two of the youngest Politburo members, Grigori Romanov, 61, and Mikhail Gorbachev, 53. U.S. analysts believe that Gorbachev is now firmly established as the No. 2 man in the Kremlin. Thus, despite the political sclerosis, there are indications that the Politburo may be getting ready to hand over power to a younger generation.

Part of the dead weight on the Politburo is the remorselessly accumulating array of Soviet internal problems, ranging from agricultural failure to shrinking productivity to endemic corruption. Recent experience has been that East-West tensions fester when the Soviet leadership withdraws into a shell. The sight of Andrei Gromyko's familiar face in the U.S. may be a signal that the Kremlin is aware of the need for a new and healthier equilibrium.

—By George Russell.

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