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# CHANGING THE GUARD

After years of halting rule by feeble old men, the Soviet Union suddenly has a leader who looks like he *belongs* at the helm. Mikhail Gorbachev, 54, is smart, tough and relatively young—a good match for Ronald Reagan. Until now, the Kremlin has had no one who could match Reagan in public. Gorbachev is the Politburo's answer to the Great Communicator. He is as hard as his predecessors, but unlike them, he is smooth, charming and healthy enough to do his job. The superpower competition is a brand-new game—and Moscow's man has a 20-year edge in age.

The first moves of both players were reassuring. Reagan responded to Konstantin Chernenko's death and Gorbachev's ascent with a polite three-page letter inviting the new Soviet leader to a summit in Washington "at your earliest convenience." Receiving the letter from Vice President George Bush, Gorbachev didn't accept the invitation, but in the course of a long and businesslike discussion, he didn't reject it, either. And his government did not allow the change of leadership to delay, for even one day, the resumption of nuclear-arms talks with the United States. They began in Geneva right on schedule.

Gorbachev created the impression of a young man in a hurry. Less than four hours after Chernenko's death was reported on Soviet television, the usual mournful music was interrupted by the announcement that Gorbachev had been elected general secretary of the Soviet Communist Party, the country's most powerful position. The next day, poor Chernenko, 73, didn't even rate a front-page portrait in Pravda; his successor's picture pushed his own onto page two. Gorbachev's selection by the ruling Politburo apparently had been arranged well in advance. Once the transition was official, Gorbachev quickly took charge, delivering an ambitious policy address that promised to get his lethargic country moving again.

With an eye on his own place in history, Reagan is beginning to think that he can and must deal with Soviet leaders. "He doesn't like them, and he doesn't trust them," says a top counselor. "But over the last four years, he's come to understand that it's important to have some sort of relationship with them." Now Reagan cannot count on having things his own way on the propaganda level. With some trepidation, American analysts suspect that Gorbachev soon will launch a "peace offensive" aimed at driving a wedge between the United States and its West European allies. Already Reagan seems to be conscious of the generation gap that exists be-

tween Gorbachev and himself. "It isn't true," he joked in one gathering, "that I don't trust anyone under 70."

The rise of Mikhail Gorbachev is more than a change in personal style, but its principal impact will be felt inside the Soviet Union, rather than overseas. Gorbachev represents a new generation of Soviet leaders in all fields, from government to the arts (page 34). But political power was not seized by the young last week; it was conferred by the old—and for good reason. The Soviet Union faces an array of economic and social problems, from declining oil production to a drop in male life expectancy. Now, after years of stagnation, the survivors of the establishment created by Leonid Brezhnev have handed some of their power to a man they can trust: an apparatchik like themselves. Gorbachev's mandate is not to liberalize Soviet communism, but to make the old system perform better—and to squeeze harder work out of its people. "The Soviets are not looking for a Kennedy-style democrat," says Kremlinologist Dimitri Simes. "They are looking for a ruthless, decisive leader."

Patrons: They seem to have found their man. A secret study prepared for Reagan by the CIA describes Gorbachev as a careerist who earned his job the old-fashioned way: by paying court to powerful men. His first important patron was hard-line ideologist Mikhail Suslov; then came Yuri Andropov, the KGB chief turned "reformer"; finally, Gorbachev made his peace with Andropov's former rival, Chernenko, and became his heir apparent. In a sense, Gorbachev is a Teflon commissar; failure doesn't seem to stick to him. During his tenure as the head of Soviet agriculture, harvests were so disastrous that the government stopped issuing crop statistics.

Even so, Gorbachev's career prospered.

"He's the most intelligent and the best-trained leader the Soviet Union has had since Lenin," says Berkeley economist John M. Letiche, an authority on the Kremlin. Gorbachev also has an intelligent and elegant wife named Raisa. He is first and foremost a child of the party, which he joined at the relatively tender age of 21, just as Joseph Stalin was launching his last purge. "He is a serious and cultivated man with a great deal of style," says Peter Temple-Morris, Gorbachev's official host during his visit to Britain last December. "Nevertheless, he is as tough as old boots—that's important to remember."

The transition from Chernenko's leadership to Gorbachev's may actually have taken place long ago—whenever the younger man began to sit in for his boss at the Thursday meetings of the ruling Politburo. Chernenko appeared on television for the last time in a brief, carefully staged event on Feb. 28. It seemed clear that he was succumbing to emphysema. According to the Soviet government, he died at 7:20 p.m. on Sunday, March 10. The process of burying one leader and elevating another went on with practiced smoothness. The next day Gorbachev addressed the party's Central Committee, endorsing the reforms begun by Andropov and promising to work toward "speeding up the country's social and economic development."

Chernenko's funeral had the air of a play that had been staged once too often by a cast that was no longer interested. "Hurry up, comrades," a policeman barked through a megaphone as buses unloaded the ordinary citizens who had been chosen to pack Red Square. Giggling and chatting, they trotted into position facing Lenin's Mausoleum. The open casket was brought into the square by soldiers, and Gorbachev delivered a perfunctory eulogy. He aligned himself with Andropov's legacy, emphasizing initiative and discipline. Only at the last moment, when Chernenko's widow, Anna, stroked her husband's hair and tearfully kissed him goodbye, was

there any display of uncalculated sadness.

Soon Gorbachev was working his way through the foreign dignitaries, courting the West Europeans, upbraiding the leaders of Japan and Pakistan, with whom his country has longstanding differences, and quietly mending fences with the Chinese. Ronald Reagan had decided not to attend the funeral almost as soon as he heard of Chernenko's death, before dawn on Monday. Later he explained that "there's an awful lot on my plate right now [and] I didn't see that anything could be achieved." Bush represented the president and was pleased by his own meeting with Gorbachev. "We're not euphoric," he said.

"But the climate is such that we feel this is a good time to move forward." After his own return to Washington, Secretary of State George Shultz described Gorbachev as "a very capable, energetic person who ... seems to be well informed, well prepared. Whether it turns out that we can do business," Shultz added, "is another matter."

RUSSELL WATSON with ROBERT B. CULLEN in Moscow, JOHN WALCOTT, MARGARET GARRARD WARNER and RICH THOMAS in Washington, ANNE UNDERWOOD in New York and bureau reports

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## Measure of the Man

ing ideologist until his death in January 1982, had worked for several years. Gorbachev's first job was driving a tractor. In 1950 he made a significant leap forward by gaining entrance to Moscow State University. Admission is notoriously hard to win, unless a student is exceptionally talented, he needs family influence to enter. The farm boy apparently got his boost from a good work record and from local party officials who had been impressed by the ambitious youth.

Gorbachev joined the Communist Party in 1952, while he was still in school. Lev Yudovich, a fellow student who knew Gorbachev slightly, remembers him as a "gray," or average, student who enjoyed slapping backs as much as hitting the books. "He didn't have a lot of original ideas," recalls Yudovich, who left the Soviet Union in 1977 and now teaches at the U.S. Army Russian Institute in West Germany. "But he made an effort to be everybody's buddy." Gorbachev soon was devoting as much time to party activities as to his studies. After graduating with a law degree in 1955, he decided on a career as a party professional. He returned to Stavropol, where he specialized in running collective farms. In 1970, at age 39, he was named first secretary of the regional party organization.

In 1978 Gorbachev made his second major move: he went to Moscow as a member of the Secretariat of the Central Committee, a kind of inner cabinet that runs the Soviet Union from day to day. He was apparently being pushed upward by Suslov, who was something of a mentor to him. Once in Moscow, Gorbachev reportedly established an almost filial relationship with an even more influential patron: Andropov. The then KGB chief is believed to have been behind the 1980 decision to make Gorbachev a full member of the Politburo at the remarkably young age of 49. Between 1978 and 1984 Gorbachev was in charge of the country's agriculture. Despite a string of disastrous Soviet harvests, which normally would have doomed the future of the man in charge, Gorbachev's career flowered. After Andropov became General Secretary in 1982, it is believed that he relied on Gorbachev as his closest lieutenant.

Though Gorbachev was rumored to be Andropov's chosen heir, he failed to make it to the top after the leader's death in February 1984. Yet there was little doubt who was second-in-command behind Chernenko. Gorbachev ran the Secretariat and brought loyalists into key party jobs. His reported chairing of Politburo meetings as early as last summer would have made him the de facto leader of the Soviet Union. His ascension last week formally acknowledged what has long been known in the Kremlin: the boy from Stavropol is a practiced politician of formidable skills. It is now the world's turn to learn about the substance behind the style.

By James Kelly, Reported  
by Erik Amfitheatrof/Moscow

Months ago when Mikhail Gorbachev began to move more visibly around the power circuit of the Soviet Union, U.S. intelligence analysts started to feed background on him into Ronald Reagan's morning reading. There was an assumption among the experts that something was bubbling up in the Kremlin's gerontocracy, whose members were expiring with discouraging regularity. After 67 years there were signs that the old group of Soviet leaders, steeped in the traditions of the revolution and shaped by the horrors of World War II, was giving way to a new generation.

In the President's intelligence report, a thick black notebook with gold lettering that is delivered to the Oval Office at 9:30 a.m. every working day, single lines about Gorbachev grew to paragraphs, and head shots became full-length photographs of a well-tailored, energetic man. Reagan took notice, knowing that Konstantin Chernenko would be dead sooner than later. Gorbachev's good-humored outing in Britain last December with his fur-clad, stylish wife provided plenty of new material. Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher stored up a lot of im-



A Thatcher welcome in 1984

pressions from her 3½ hours of meetings with Gorbachev, and she carried them all across the Atlantic with her a month ago and constructed for Reagan the first flesh-and-blood portrait of his new adversary. The thrust of Thatcher's counsel was that Gorbachev, while still a Soviet and a Communist, was fresh and intelligent, a potentially major improvement over being dim and dying. The Prime Minister found something hopeful in the man's eyes and manner. The 30 or so people who run this world analyze one another that way and then make decisions of life and death for us. Scary, but true.

When Reagan was handed a note at about 10 a.m. Monday saying that Gorbachev had been confirmed as General Secretary, he knew more about this Soviet leader than he had about Andropov or Chernenko. He had been told that Gorbachev is a 9-10-9 six-day-a-week worker, family man, restrained vodka drinker, classical music listener, chess player. The problem of course is that those kinds of data tell almost nothing about Gorbachev as leader of a surly, hostile superpower. How did he rise so fast? Why was he chosen? What makes him special? There is no sure way to measure a man's soul.

Gorbachev may be an admission of sorts by the Soviets that personality can be as potent as armies. The superpowers are fighting a war of words, and the Soviets may have concluded that they too need a great communicator. Whether Gorbachev can lead is another matter. Personality is an outcropping of character, but there is no true test of character at that level until it goes through the fire.

"It's for them to solve their problems," an aide said Reagan had told his staff after Gorbachev's elevation. "If the Soviets worry about us being aggressive, we ought to be able to solve that one. Beyond that, we can only keep trying." Reagan's first try was to send George Bush to the Chernenko funeral; then he shaped the personal letter to Gorbachev that the Vice President would carry. The responses from Brezhnev, Andropov and Chernenko to such private entreaties had read like the handiwork of a committee, and not a very skilled committee at that. Reagan rather thinks he will get a personal, and perhaps mildly revealing, answer this time. Prime Minister Thatcher did in correspondence following Gorbachev's visit to Britain.

Meantime, Bush, the professional mourner (six funerals of top foreign leaders), was Reagan's eyes and ears when he gripped Gorbachev's hand in Moscow last Wednesday afternoon. Funerals are robust ground for political intrigue. Bush, the former CIA head, hardly needed coaching. From the Brezhnev and Andropov burials he returned with mental notes on eye contact, humor, intellectual agility, confidence, vitality, tailoring, shirt collars, hair color, complexion and hand size.

The short of it is that we are starting a new chapter in superpower relations, and the twists and turns that lie ahead are for the most part utterly unknown. More than ever the reaction of one man to another will set the mood of this anxious world. That chemistry is not fathomed yet even by the two men themselves. Still scary, but still true.