

April 22, 1981

SPECIAL ANALYSIS

USSR: Leadership Holds Together on Poland
[REDACTED]

The Politburo appears to have formed a consensus, centered around President Brezhnev, to use military force in Poland only as a last resort. There may be some differences among the leaders, however, over how long the Soviets can let the situation continue to deteriorate. [REDACTED]

In contrast to the signs of differences within the Soviet leadership that emerged before the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, there is little clear evidence of the nature of the debate on Poland. Late last year, the Politburo reportedly was divided, with some members arguing for intervention, while others--including Brezhnev--advocated continuing restraint. [REDACTED]

Some Soviet military leaders earlier this year believed Brezhnev missed an important opportunity when he decided not to intervene in December. More recently, middle-level KGB officials in Moscow were said to believe that military intervention was the only solution, but they did not know whether KGB chief Andropov held this view. [REDACTED]

Differences in Emphasis

Public statements by Soviet leaders on Poland have been cautious but not always consistent. Brezhnev's qualified expressions of confidence in the Poles have not been echoed by other Politburo members actively involved with Polish problems, such as party ideologue Suslov, Defense Minister Ustinov, or Premier Tikhonov. [REDACTED]

Brezhnev suggested in his speech to the Soviet party congress that the USSR could tolerate some political reforms in Poland, noting that there are "a wealth of ways" to develop the "socialist" way of life in the "socialist"

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community. By contrast, Suslov at the East German party congress and Ukrainian party boss Shcherbitskiy at the Bulgarian party congress stressed that "even the least deviation" from the Soviet model must be resisted. [REDACTED]

These differences in emphasis could be a calculated effort to have Brezhnev take the high road of international statesmanship while others apply public pressure. They also could represent different views in the Politburo, however, over where to draw the line. [REDACTED]

Institutional considerations could also encourage differences. As the party boss of the Ukraine, Shcherbitskiy would be especially concerned about the Polish contagion spreading across the border to his region. Suslov would be particularly worried about effects of developments in the Polish party on Leninist orthodoxy. [REDACTED]

Fluctuations in Soviet pressure on the Poles over the past six months could reflect shifting alignments within the leadership, but the evidence in this respect also is inconclusive. Increased Soviet military activity in December and again in March is equally well explained as a response to developments in Poland or as part of planned pressure on the Poles. [REDACTED]

The Underlying Consensus

Soviet actions probably reflect concern for profound risks of military intervention in Poland rather than any rifts in the leadership. The Politburo seems aware of the costs of trying to govern an economically strapped and politically hostile Poland. Moscow's moves appear to have been designed to force the Poles to take action on their own, while at the same time taking some of the steps required for military intervention, if all else failed. [REDACTED]

Brezhnev is identified with the effort to avoid military action. His power and prestige, reinforced at the recent party congress, along with his consensus style of leadership make it almost certain that his pronouncements and actions have Politburo approval. He has always

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sought to avoid taking politically dangerous positions, and he probably would not get out ahead of his colleagues on so politically sensitive an issue as Poland. [REDACTED]

Outlook

The acid test for the consensus will come if the Polish party is unable to restore discipline in its ranks. Radical reforms in the party and the removal of the few hardliners left in the Polish leadership are likely between now and the Polish party congress in July. [REDACTED]

Similar issues drove Brezhnev and the Politburo to take military action in Czechoslovakia in 1968. They probably will be crucial again. [REDACTED]