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MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Evidence of a Rift Between Brezhnev and Ustinov

Signs of estrangement between General Secretary Brezhnev and high-ranking Soviet military leaders, including Minister of Defense D.F. Ustinov, have accumulated over the last three months. The evidence is in two forms: (1) variations in credit for organizing early Soviet missile and space programs and (2) protocol slights of Ustinov. The estrangement follows the initial phase of Ustinov's occupancy of the defense ministry when he and Brezhnev appeared to be allies. If this interpretation is valid, the estrangement could:

- reduce the likelihood of Soviet flexibility in SALT;
- undermine efforts to improve military discipline;
- affect other military policy issues;
- influence our interpretation of Brezhnev's assumption of the title of Supreme Commander-in-Chief.

Because Soviet leadership alignments change, predictions based on this analysis remain valid for the short term at best.

Ustinov's Alliance with Brezhnev

It can be surmised from sensitive and public sources that Ustinov and Brezhnev were allied during the former's

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first months at the helm of the Ministry of Defense. One report recounted Brezhnev's manouvers to appoint Ustinov in April 1976 against the preferences of senior military commanders for other candidates. Another report alleged that Brezhnev encouraged Ustinov's most important known initiative to date--the effort three months after his appointment to improve the officer corps' disciplinary performance. In overt sources this initiative came under the rubric of "the Leninist style of work", which Brezhnev had emphasized at the 26th Party Congress in February 1976. Furthermore, a historical analogy in Pravda suggested that Brezhnev and Ustinov worked together in appointing Marshal N. V. Ogarkov as Chief of the General Staff in January 1977.

Who Organized the Soviet Rocket Program?

An unusual account of Brezhnev's and Ustinov's attendance at a satellite test launch in 1957, printed in Red Star on 31 December 1976, also supports the surmise of their alliance because it associates Ustinov with a new phase of Brezhnev's cult. Brezhnev's supervision of Soviet missile and space programs between 1957 and 1961 first became a regular feature of his official biographies in connection with the celebration of his seventieth birthday on 19 December 1976, the high point of his personality cult. Strategic Rocket Forces Commander General V. F. Tolubko similarly linked Ustinov and Brezhnev in a list of those who had made "particularly great contributions" to the formation of the SRF (Military Historical Journal, October 1976).

If this evidence implies close association of Ustinov and Brezhnev, then two Pravda articles of December 1977 and January 1978 suggest possible differences between them now. The December article praises Brezhnev's "great organizational work" on the first Sputnik but ignores Ustinov; the January article recognizes Ustinov for overcoming a crisis in the early development of the SRF but omits Brezhnev. The January article stands out because of an approving commentary over Tolubko's by-line. Moreover, in the first December issue of the fortnightly Communist of the Armed Forces, Tolubko again lists "persons ...who made a great contribution" to Soviet rocket programs. This time he names Ustinov but leaves Brezhnev out.

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Pavlovskii's Input

In a departure from recent practice Ground Forces Commander General I. G. Pavlovskii omitted Novorossiisk and Kerch from a list of important World War II battles in Military-Historical Journal in November 1977. Since the two cities received the title of "hero-city" in 1974, Brezhnev's wartime service there has become a centerpiece of his military reputation, essential to a Soviet leader's personality cult. Pavlovskii's unusual omission of these symbols of Brezhnev's valor suggests his possible adherence to Ustinov's side in the rift.

Protocol

Two pictures of Ustinov published on 3 December 1977 in Red Star and 6 January 1978 in central Soviet newspapers and magazines suggest the kind of uncertainty about his political status that might result from a conflict with Brezhnev. The more striking case is the earlier photography. It clearly shows Ustinov talking to Hungarian First Secretary Janos Kadar at a reception for the military delegates to the session of the committee of Warsaw Pact Ministers of Defense, yet the accompanying text and caption mention only Warsaw Pact Commander-in-Chief Marshal V. G. Kulikov and his Chief of Staff, General A. I. Gribkov. The snub to Ustinov is underlined by Kulikov's inferred candidacy for the appointment as Minister of Defense and Ustinov's role in replacing Kulikov as Chief of the Soviet General Staff.

The second photograph shows the Soviet Politburo at an awards ceremony. The uniformed individual prominent in the front row next to Brezhnev is not a soldier but Minister of Internal Affairs N. A. Shchelokov, whose personal ties to the General Secretary reach back to their association in Dnepropetrovsk in the 1930's. While Shchelokov's prominent position may be explained by his receipt of an award at the ceremony, Ogarkov received a more important medal at the same ceremony yet is shown in a less prominent position behind Brezhnev. In some published versions, a photograph of Ogarkov taken at some other time was cut into the negative, apparently

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because he was obscured by Brezhnev. Ustinov, whose picture also shows signs of tampering, is in the background, too. The increase in Ogarkov's status after Ustinov became Minister of Defense, culminating in Ogarkov's appointment to the General Staff, makes their common standing in this picture especially suggestive.

Implications

The admittedly speculative evidence of a rift between Brezhnev and his senior defense officials provides only general indications of the possible underlying policy issues. These may include SALT, other defense issues, military discipline, or command and control.

SALT. Any difference between the General Secretary and the Minister of Defense, the Chief of the General Staff, and the Commander of the SRF are likely to affect SALT policy if only by contagion. An indicator of the possibility that the disagreement may stem from SALT in the choice of the history of missile programs to communicate the estrangement to elite Soviet audiences. Evaluations of a leader's past accomplishments reflect indirectly on the wisdom of his current proposals in the same policy area.

A possible conflict between Brezhnev and Ustinov would make it more difficult for the General Secretary to convince the Minister of Defense of the need for any Soviet concessions in SALT. This difficulty might be particularly acute if the concessions entailed restrictions on Soviet military programs as opposed to tolerance of US programs.

Other Military Issues. As Ground Forces commander Pavlovskii has much less to do with SALT than Ustinov, Ogarkov or Tolubko. If his slight to Brezhnev's war record suggests his agreement with them, then policy of more direct concern to Pavlovskii may be in dispute.

Military Discipline. The possible estrangement may also have affected the Soviet effort, probably sponsored by both Ustinov and Brezhnev, to correct deficiencies in

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military discipline. This effort manifested itself after June 1976 in pointed press criticism of the disciplinary performance of the officer corps. If Brezhnev and Ustinov now have differences, they may not both continue to favor this policy. A split between them would thus allow more scope for objections to it. This may explain why on 1 December 1977 General Ye. Ye. Mal'tsev, Chief of the Lenin Military-Political Academy, printed an entirely positive evaluation of the state of discipline in Red Star. This reversal suggests either that the campaign against the officer corps is over or that Mal'tsev represents a strong body of opinion that it should end. Other recent articles corroborate reduced criticism of the central command apparatus originally blamed by Ustinov. Mal'tsev's pretense that all is well undermines the rationale for efforts to improve discipline.

Command and Control. The announcement in October 1977 that Brezhnev was Supreme Commander-in-Chief came amidst unusual attention to the subject of party leadership of the armed forces and some uncertainty as to his precise title (in September Marshal Moskalenko referred to him in print as chairman of the State Defense Committee, which the Soviet abolished after World War II). The juxtaposition of public recognition of Brezhnev's military authority and evidence of differences with military officials is subject to at least two interpretations. The announcement preceded the signs of conflict by two months and may have been one source of the differences. Brezhnev probably had not previously been publicly identified as the Supreme Commander-in-Chief, and the added authority implied by the title may be at the expense of Ustinov's legal authority as peacetime executive of the armed forces. Alternatively, press attention to party leadership of the armed forces suggests that the relative authority of the party General Secretary and the military Minister of Defense may already have been at issue. In this case Brezhnev's assumption of the supreme command was a tactic in a continuing conflict rather than its resolution. Later signs of differences suggest incomplete success for the tactic.

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Outlook

As Brezhnev recovers from his illness during the last half of December, he will have more energy to pursue political objectives and may be able to overcome any differences between him and the military. In the near future Ustinov may find a more subservient attitude toward the General Secretary advantageous. At the same time, the longer Ustinov occupies the defense post, the more he is likely to identify with his ministry's interest. To the extent that Brezhnev must reconcile military preferences with the needs of other bureaucracies, differences with Ustinov are to be expected. In any case the apparent dissolution of the two leaders' former cooperation exemplifies the transitory character of Politburo alignments, a phenomenon that renders predictions based on leadership analysis valid at best for the short term.

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