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**Prospects for Soviet Institutions  
in the Brezhnev Succession**

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## Prospects for Soviet Institutions in the Brezhnev Succession

*Office of Regional and Political Analysis*

*May 1977*

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### *Summary and Conclusions*

Although Soviet political institutions have proved themselves and have won a measure of legitimacy by their durability and accomplishments, they face serious tests in the years immediately ahead. At present, although Brezhnev has not achieved mastery over the Politburo, he appears able to manipulate it sufficiently to maintain relative political stability and to achieve the restricted objectives he sets for the leadership. This precarious balance will be disrupted by his disappearance. Consequently, his departure from office, probably in the not distant future, will pose a limited crisis for the regime, which has not yet succeeded in ordering the transfer of supreme authority. In this succession crisis, the effective powers of the Politburo vis-a-vis the new leader are likely to be strengthened. The net result may be a widening of the political arena, at least temporarily, and a reduction in the new leadership's capacity to institute fundamental reforms or to pursue an integrated foreign and defense strategy.

The succession problems may be exacerbated by Brezhnev's failure to make preliminary arrangements for the succession and to deal with long-deferred economic and social problems which the new leadership may have to confront. Among these problems are a declining growth rate of the economy and an emergent energy crisis; an entrenched bureaucratic machine whose discipline may be falling; domestic agitation for greater ethnic, religious, and personal freedoms; and political instability in Eastern Europe.

Failure to deal effectively with these problems in the succession would lead to a serious reduction in the resources available to the leadership for its goals. It might also lead to inadvertent institutional changes, perhaps even to a serious challenge to the sovereignty of the party apparatus over the other institutions of the regime. Alternatively, but less likely, manifest failures of a

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This memorandum, a personal assessment by the [ ] Scholar in Residence, presents some preliminary findings of his ongoing study of the Brezhnev succession.

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weak post-Brezhnev leadership might enable a strong individual subsequently to consolidate personal power, capitalizing on the manifest need to rejuvenate the leadership and restore discipline. Such a leader might impose institutional reforms from above to strengthen discipline and central direction of the system.

While vulnerabilities in the present system thus could lead to its transformation in the direction of either oligarchy or strong personal rule (perhaps in sequence), the regime that emerges from the Brezhnev succession is likely to have the following features:

- Continued hegemony of the party apparatus.
- Persistence of the present mode of leadership, with authority concentrated in a Politburo whose members have markedly unequal powers and which is subject to manipulation by the general secretary of the Central Committee.
- Inability of the successor leadership to deal effectively with the regime's fundamental problems.
- A reduced growth rate of the economy, although it would still provide the resources needed to compete with the West.

## Discussion

Soviet political institutions have won a measure of legitimacy by their durability and accomplishments—in economic development, in defeating Germany's war machine, in effectively waging cold war against the US, in proving broad social services and a rising standard of living to the Soviet people, and, in recent decades, in avoiding high levels of political turbulence. A rough and conservative assessment of the prospects for Soviet political institutions would be obliged to project this impressive performance forward at least one decade.

A more refined assessment is needed, however, taking account of: (1) the forthcoming Brezhnev succession; (2) certain vulnerabilities that have been revealed in particular institutions in recent years; and (3) the challenges that developments in Soviet society and in the international environment seem likely to pose for these institutions. Such an assessment suggests that Soviet political institutions will be seriously tested in the Brezhnev succession, and that crises lie ahead.

It is true that such crises likely to involve basic turning points in the further development of Soviet institutions, not necessarily dangers that are likely to destroy them. But the difficulties confronting the Soviet regime in the years ahead should not be discounted merely because the politics of the post-Khrushchev period have been relatively quiescent. It should be recalled, in this connection, that in the People's Republic of China a decade of seemingly tranquil politics ended abruptly in 1965, when the fissures that had been concealed from observers suddenly came to the surface in the great cultural revolution, and the resulting divisions in the leadership led to more than a decade of purges and counter-purges.

### Vulnerabilities in Soviet Political Institutions

Vulnerable points are to be found in institutions engaged chiefly in decisionmaking as well as in institutions engaged in implementing decisions.

In the first place, the ordering of the highest organs and offices in the top leadership has not been fixed but has varied according to circumstances. As a result, the relative authority of the highest party and government organs has repeatedly emerged as a subject of contention, as has the relative authority of the highest bodies within the party. The Politburo is the decisive legislative and executive organ (its policies being formally confirmed by the Central Committee), but the Politburo has found it difficult to

operate as a collegial body and to maintain even a rough equality in the powers of its members. In particular, the great potentialities of the office of the general secretary have enabled strong incumbents to arrogate an important part of the Politburo's powers. The result has been a considerable fluctuation in the relative power of the Politburo and the general secretary, and substantial tension between them.

Since the powers of the general secretary are neither specified in a statute nor well-established by precedent, no reliable means for the orderly transfer of these powers has yet been devised. More than this: there are no established *political* means of removing an unsatisfactory general secretary (though conspiracy may provide a poor substitute); there are no established political rules for choosing the successor; there is no way of ensuring that a new incumbent will inherit his predecessor's powers. Typically, there has been a double crisis of succession: a first crisis when the incumbent is replaced, and a second arising from the new general secretary's attempts to arrogate the powers of his predecessors, powers that he believes to be necessary—and may be so in fact—to provide stable and effective leadership. In such crises, the political police and the armed forces have played significant roles at several critical junctures (e.g., in 1953, 1957, and 1964), and they may do so again, possibly with disruptive consequences.

#### **The Present Situation in the Leading Government and Party Organs**

In assessing the stability of Soviet institutions in the period immediately ahead, the initial focus must be on the leading organs, for if the leadership is not seriously weakened the odds are that it will be able to cope with the political and social challenges that it will face. The stability of the leadership is uncertain, however, for the reason noted above: institutionalization of supreme authority has not progressed enough to establish a stable balance between the personal power of the general secretary and the collective authority of the top organs, the Secretariat, the Politburo, and the Central Committee. The present distribution of power in the top leadership appears to have arisen largely as a result of Brezhnev's effort during the post-Khrushchev period to establish his personal ascendancy. While these efforts have met with only partial success, Brezhnev's present power is sufficiently great that his departure from office, or even the substantial degradation of his physical capacities, will give rise to a struggle not only of personalities, but probably also of institutions.

What is the present balance of institutions within the top leadership, how did it arise, and how is it likely to be affected by Brezhnev's

continuation in office in the near future and by the subsequent struggle for his succession? Brezhnev initially relied heavily on the *Secretariat* to enhance the powers of his office of general secretary. He used the General Department of the Central Committee, in particular, to control the internal administration of the Politburo. He was unable, however, to secure the strong personal control of the Secretariat and its staff that enabled Stalin (in the 1920s) and Khrushchev to influence the composition of the Central Committee, and thereby to determine the membership of the Politburo. In the 1970s Brezhnev became more deeply preoccupied with foreign affairs and economic administration. He acquired a second office, inside the Kremlin, and his involvement in the Secretariat declined; his dependence on Kirilenko, his deputy in the Secretariat, correspondingly increased and with it, perhaps Kirilenko's scope for independent action.

The Central Committee is too unwieldy to serve as a truly deliberative body, and for many years has not done much more than confer status on its members and provide important channels of information to them. Because of its size, it is subject to manipulation by the senior secretary. In recent years it has assembled twice a year for plenary sessions lasting a day or two, usually to hear Brezhnev report on his foreign policy activities, or to criticize Gosplan and various ministries for their inefficient operation of the economy. The Central Committee is not as important to Brezhnev as a sounding board as it was to Khrushchev, however, and it seems questionable, in view of Brezhnev's apparent failure to achieve strong control over appointments to the Central Committee, that he could confidently rely on it in a political crisis to protect his position.

Brezhnev's limited ability to choose the members of the Central Committee has lessened his capacity to achieve mastery over the Politburo. Within a half dozen years of their succession, Stalin and Khrushchev were in each case the sole survivors of their predecessor's executive body; in contrast, four veterans of Khrushchev's executive organ (Podgorny, Kosygin, Suslov, and Kirilenko) sit with Brezhnev today in the Politburo. Nevertheless, Brezhnev has strongly influenced the composition of the Politburo by adding followers (Kunayev, Kulakov, and Shcherbitsky) and allies of varying dependability (Gromyko, Andropov, Ustinov, and Romanov) and, since 1973, by purging potential rivals and others with strongly independent views (Shelest, Voronov, Shelepin, and Polyansky).

### **The Role of the Politburo**

The Politburo remains central to the working of the system. There the key institutions and information channels come together so that major problems can be dealt with and national policies established. The Politburo meets regularly and appears to be consulted on all important questions.

Brezhnev has recognized the need to elaborate policy within its confines and has been careful to observe the procedural requirements of consultation and formal voting by its members. Instead of attempting to ignore or override the Politburo, as Khrushchev did, Brezhnev has sought to manipulate the Politburo, to exploit its vulnerable points in order to achieve his objectives.

The Politburo's integrity as a deliberative body is questionable, however, for several reasons. First, it is big and unwieldy. There are 15 full members, as against the customary 10 or 11 at times when the Politburo has been most decisive, and several members are not in a position to participate effectively in its work. Three of the 15 have posts outside Moscow (in the Ukraine, Leningrad, and Kazakhstan) and are not in a position to bring informed and independent judgment to bear on disputed issues of policy. Several others, like Gromyko and Ustinov (and Grechko when he was Minister of Defense), have had narrowly specialized careers outside the party apparatus which probably limit their capacity to judge the full range of issues coming before the Politburo. Of the six alternate members of the Politburo, three work outside Moscow and are not available for its meetings. For members and candidates who work outside Moscow, Politburo rank may be more important in conferring prestige, which makes them more effective in work at their assigned posts, than in providing them influence on Politburo deliberations.

Despite these deficiencies in the Politburo's capacity to act as a deliberative body, there can be no question that the Politburo as it currently functions significantly restricts Brezhnev's ability to act independently. Not only is he obliged to get formal approval of his major initiatives, but there is evidence that the Politburo's senior members, at least, are able to argue vigorously against particular proposals of Brezhnev without being subjected to sanctions. The Politburo remains a forum where major decisions are discussed and disputes are aired. Brezhnev is obliged to win over or neutralize those who hold dissenting views and are willing to voice them. He is not at present in a position to disregard the Politburo or to override it. To this very limited degree, then, Brezhnev has furthered the institutionalization of the Politburo.

To sum up: In his dozen years tenure as general secretary Brezhnev has aggrandized substantial powers which have given him the predominant position in the Secretariat and provided him with substantial, if not infallible, means to manipulate the Politburo in order to effectuate his will. In addition, Brezhnev seems to have won substantial though diffuse support in the Central Committee, based on his respect for the tenure of officials and



the elevation of many of them to membership in the Central Committee.\* Consequently, Brezhnev's departure from office, or a significant degradation of his physical capacities, is likely to upset the present balance within the leadership, giving rise to struggle among individuals and, probably, among the leading political organs and institutions.

#### Sources of Short-Term Instability

While Brezhnev's health is not likely of itself to force his retirement in the next year, a combination of slow physical deterioration and political challenges to his authority, perhaps acting reciprocally, could deprive him of office in the not distant future. Moreover, Brezhnev's history of cardiovascular disease makes him vulnerable to a sudden heart attack or stroke. However, even if Brezhnev remains in office for several years, which is quite possible, the present balance between personal and collective authority probably will not persist.

There are important sources of instability:

- The balance between collective and personal authority, despite some setbacks suffered by Brezhnev, has shifted markedly in his favor and may be approaching a point where the Politburo will feel the need to reassert itself as a collegial body.
- A disproportion currently exists between the cult of Brezhnev—which he enhanced considerably during the past year, particularly by the recognition accorded him as an outstanding military figure—and his personal power, which did not increase correspondingly. Brezhnev may yet try to convert the cult's new rites into effective personal power. Although Brezhnev does not appear to be strongly committed to major economic or social reforms which would require him to possess overriding authority, he has reason to try to make his position more secure in the event his policies suffer severe setbacks.
- Because of the advanced age and poor health of the Politburo members, vacancies probably will occur in the next year or two. They need not be filled, in view of the inflated size of the present Politburo, but the effect, nonetheless, would be to change the

\*These accretions of power were not the result of accident, nor were they the inadvertent outcome of defensive maneuvers to protect himself against rivals. There is every indication that Brezhnev actively sought these increased powers and, to achieve them, had to overcome the resistance of some of his colleagues. One revealing sign that Brezhnev has willfully arrogated power is his reticence in recent years about the principle of collectivity of leadership, a reticence that was similarly characteristic of Khrushchev.

balance in the leadership. Moreover, Brezhnev probably would try to take advantage of vacancies to bring his proteges into the Politburo.

### **The Forthcoming Succession**

Changes in the balance among the leaders in what remains of Brezhnev's tenure in office could affect both the institutional balance between the party and the government, and the likelihood that attempts might be made to order the succession in advance. If Brezhnev's position weakened, this could produce instability in the leadership and could lead to a sharp struggle for the succession even before the position of general secretary was vacated. On the other hand, a moderate increase in his power probably would not end his preoccupation with its preservation and, consequently, his unwillingness to share his authority in an attempt to order the succession.

Even were he to consolidate his position to a point where he had secure control of the Politburo, thereby facilitating efforts to arrange the succession, Brezhnev, in view of his record of caution in using his power, might still choose not to make the attempt. While the actual outcome of previous succession arrangements have often diverged sharply from what their authors had in view, these arrangements have facilitated the transfer of power. Thus if Brezhnev failed to make preliminary arrangements for the succession, the chances of an orderly succession would probably be reduced.

In the event Brezhnev fails to survive the next few years or does not use them to groom younger leaders for the succession, his likely successor would be Kirilenko. Because he is the only senior figure who is a member of both the Politburo and the Secretariat, and also is ambitious and relatively vigorous, he would probably be able to assume the post, perhaps without an acute struggle, if Brezhnev were to vacate it in the near future.\* Kirilenko's age (he is 70), however, and certain limitations of experience (particularly in the realms of foreign and defense policy) would probably result in a substantial weakening of the office of general secretary. The Secretariat might then become an arena of acute conflict once more, as in the mid-60s, and the government might become as strong and assertive as it was in the early post-Stalin period. Were these things to occur, the leadership's capacity to make urgent decisions or to initiate basic reforms would be reduced, perhaps seriously, until such time as a younger, more vigorous, man might assume the office and expand its powers.

\*Kirilenko, although he deputizes for Brezhnev, is not formally the presumptive heir. According to Brezhnev's rank-order listing of the newly elected Secretariat following the 25th Party Congress, Suslov is senior to Kirilenko, and this circumstance might enable a younger rival of Kirilenko--though presumably not the superannuated Suslov himself--to contest Kirilenko's claim to the succession, particularly if such an alternative figure were supported by senior members of the Politburo.

From this analysis it follows that the prospect in the next several years is for a weakening of the leadership's capacity to act decisively owing to the probable slow deterioration in Brezhnev's physical powers and to the likelihood that his probable heir in the event of an early succession, Kirilenko, would find it difficult to assert strong personal leadership.

A weakening of the leadership, were it to accompany the Brezhnev succession, would have political consequences of two major kinds: it would probably reduce the leadership's capacity to reform institutions and resolve serious political and social problems that have already been too long deferred; in addition, it could lead to a widening of the political arena by activating institutional interest groups in the economic bureaucracy, the scientific establishment, and the creative intelligentsia. The latter development, while it cannot be discounted, may be the lesser danger. Despite the expectations of many observers, interest groups in the USSR—*other than the military*—have displayed neither a strong inclination to engage in higher Soviet politics, nor great effectiveness when they have attempted to do so. This was true even when circumstances seemed propitious, as during the succession to Khrushchev. Unless the divisions in the leadership become considerably deeper than they were in the Khrushchev succession (which, as discussed below, is a real possibility), the party apparatus will probably be able to maintain its control over the other institutions and to limit their participation in higher Soviet politics.

#### Problems of Rule That Must Soon Be Faced

In the next few years the leadership will have to deal with institutional defects and adverse social developments that have emerged prominently during the past decade. Many of them were not addressed seriously by the leadership that followed Khrushchev and was repelled by his activism. They concentrated for the most part on urgent questions of policy rather than on underlying problems that are difficult to resolve and whose effects might not be felt for some time. In the next few years these problems, having grown more acute, will have to be dealt with, or their seriously adverse consequences accepted, by a leadership that (as argued above) will be somewhat weakened and perhaps seriously divided.

The critical institutional and policy problems facing the leadership in the next several years include the following:

1. The overriding problem, in view of the regime's long-established priorities, is the progressive reduction in the rate of growth of the economy. This has been caused in large part by factors that will continue to operate: a steady decline in the output obtained from given increments of capital, increased costs

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of extracting raw materials, and a declining rate of growth in the size of the labor force. The problem of the labor force will worsen over the next few years until a point is reached where increases in production must come entirely from increases in labor productivity. (In the past, these increases have tended to lag behind planned rates of growth.) A partial solution might be sought in institutional reform, by improving the administrative apparatus that directs the country's economic enterprises, which has long been a source of serious dissatisfaction to the leadership. But unsuccessful attempts during the past third of a century to amalgamate the numerous economic ministries (in 1953), to modify them (in 1965, when they were reconstituted), and to create an alternative mechanism (in 1957) suggest that no administrative solution to the problem of reduced economic growth is readily available.

2. If economic growth continues to decline—that is, if current efforts to improve economic management do not yield the anticipated gains—the Soviet leaders may confront difficult choices among further reducing the rate of capital formation, which could accelerate the decline; reducing the rate of increase in consumption, which might adversely affect labor productivity or sharply reducing the rate of increase in defense spending, which could slow to some extent the decline in economic growth, but at the probable cost of antagonizing the military establishment, thereby aggravating the leadership's political problems. The basic choice, between accepting a reduced rate of economic growth or a reduced rate of growth in defense spending, has long-term implications for Soviet foreign policy. The first might lessen the USSR's capacity to deal with world problems a decade or more hence; the second choice might weaken the USSR's capacity to cope with its chief adversary, the United States, in the years immediately ahead.

3. Major inefficiencies in the regime's bureaucracies have been a serious problem from the beginning, but the disease and its consequences appear to have worsened substantially in the past decade. To remedy the disaffection and uncertainty caused by Khrushchev's numerous and disruptive reorganizations, the post-Khrushchev leadership gave officials virtually ensured tenure, short of gross incompetence or serious misfeasance. Thus, inclusion in the *nomenklatura* (pool of officials) at the higher levels has tended to confer a vested right to occupy positions that entail high salaries as well as numerous perquisites and privileges.

As a result, opportunities for the rapid advancement of able and ambitious young officials have declined, and discipline, previously a key strength of the regime's institutions, has suffered. Disturbing signs of a worsening of discipline have appeared not only in the work force, in local administration, and in the economic ministries, but also in the army, the provincial K.G.B., and in the party apparatus itself. Stalin's means of dealing with this problem, which though costly were effective, are not available to the present leadership.

4. The party apparatus, the key institution of the regime as it is currently constituted, appears to be suffering from substantial ills. Brezhnev, from the rostrum of the 25th Party Congress in 1976, warned against the Leninist sin of "liberalism" (i.e., toleration of incompetence and wrongdoing) in party work and revealed that the *apparatus's* lack of responsiveness to commands was receiving prolonged attention from the party's leading bodies.\* Frequent reports reach the West that party officials are becoming more openly cynical and increasingly less committed to the official ideology. The *apparatus* clearly needs to be rejuvenated, a process that presents opportunities as well as dangers. It may facilitate an improvement in the technical and personal qualifications of its members, but, carried too far, this could undermine the *apparatus's* coherence and "party spirit," thereby jeopardizing its capacity to give coherence to the Soviet political system as a whole.

5. The major ethnic minorities and the republics they inhabit will continue to be a source of concern to the leadership. The acute nationalities problem that existed at the time of Stalin's death, however, was ameliorated by Khrushchev, who brought ethnic Ukrainians into the central leadership. As long as the Slavic

\*In discussing the problem of party discipline in his Report to the 25th Congress, Brezhnev spoke at some length and used uncharacteristically sharp language:

Along with questions of criticism and self-criticism [on which "a liberal attitude" could not be allowed], the Central Committee has also examined another problem, that of the control and verification of fulfillment of adopted decisions. This has often been a subject of discussion at meetings of the Politburo and the Central Committee Secretariat. [The Secretariat, "which held 205 meetings in this period ... paid much more attention than previously" to this question.] A special letter was devoted to this, which the Politburo circulated to all party organizations, as well as a series of Central Committee decisions .... Now and again, after it turns out that some decision has not been carried out, a second is adopted on the very same question, and sometimes even a third. In substance, it might appear, they are not bad. But we are speaking of something that should already have been done. Thus the question inevitably arises: does not the new decision on an old theme appear at a discount, as a manifestation of liberalism? Is not exactingness consequently reduced? It is necessary to put an end to this practice!

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peoples of the USSR are not in conflict, the nationality question is likely to be manageable, since the Slavic leaders, if united, probably can cope with the remaining quarter of the Soviet population. There is, however, a residual danger over the next decade that manifestations of strong nationalist feelings among Ukrainian members of the leadership (like that shown by Shelest in the early '70s, for example) may encounter strong currents of Russian national sentiment (as seen in Shelepin) inside the Politburo. In any case, institutional adjustments may eventually be required to accommodate the national and religious sentiments of the republics of the Caucasus, the Baltic area, and, especially, Central Asia, where the rapid growth of population in the next quarter century may pose serious social and political problems for the regime.

6. The problem of dissidence, particularly of demands that the regime respect its nominal guarantees of civil rights, may be intensified if the scientific and creative intelligentsia become more assertive during the Brezhnev succession. Even so, political dissidence is not likely to become unmanageable, since the desire for political and civil rights does not appear to be a serious concern of the working class and the peasantry and is unlikely to become so in the decade ahead.

7. On the other hand, relations with Eastern Europe, which strongly affect Soviet domestic politics, will almost certainly pose serious problems for the leadership, especially if crises arise in the area, as is likely. In particular, the issue of whether to engage in military repression would seriously strain a divided and weak Soviet leadership, such as the one in 1968 that had to deal with the Prague Spring.

#### **Alternative Contingencies for Soviet Institutions**

The problems of institutional development and policy resolution enumerated here clearly pose a serious challenge to the leadership in the next few years. If the challenge is not effectively met and the leadership simply continues to muddle through, the resources available to the leadership for the pursuit of its goals may be seriously reduced. Is it likely, however, to threaten the stability of the regime or of its established institutions? Is it likely, even, to upset the stability of the leadership?

The regime's institutions will probably persist without substantial modification for the next several years, possibly for the next decade. In view of their record of solid, if inefficient and wasteful, performance, the odds are that they will neither fail, on the one hand, nor, on the other, be reformed

to make them markedly more efficient and responsive to the leadership's commands.

There are, however, two distinct ways in which basic changes might come about: inadvertently, as the result of a weakening of the top leadership, leading to a widening of the political arena and increased participation by various groups in the making of high policy; or deliberately, if a strong personal leader were to emerge with a broad program for reform and the will to carry it through. The Brezhnev succession could have either outcome.

The first contingency, a serious weakening of the top leadership's cohesion and a reciprocal enhancement of the regime's key vulnerabilities, might occur if arrangements for the succession to Brezhnev are not made in advance. Any successor leadership will have to confront the serious problems enumerated above, particularly the most urgent ones: falling rates of economic growth and an emerging energy crisis; an entrenched bureaucratic machine whose internal discipline may be failing; some domestic agitation for greater ethnic, religious, and personal freedom; and most likely, disturbances in Eastern Europe. A weakened and divided leadership would find it difficult to deal with these refractory problems, yet unable to ignore them, and might be further weakened as a result. A crisis of such proportions might call in question the sovereignty of the party apparatus over other interest groups, which has not been seriously challenged since Khrushchev's victory over "the anti-party group" in 1957. The leaders of institutional interest groups might then take courage and form alliances aimed at weakening the party *apparatus's* control over them and to assert joint claims to a significant measure of institutional autonomy and to participation in higher Soviet politics. An incipient movement in this direction did, in fact, occur after Stalin's death, but was aborted by Khrushchev's victory in 1957.

If the Brezhnev succession brought about such a weakening of control by the party apparatus, the oligarchical elements in the present system would probably become stronger. Leaders of the chief institutions who sit on the Politburo (and perhaps their supporters and allies in the Central Committee as well) would be able to contribute more actively to the formation of national policy. This would probably lead to a further loosening of the rigors of the system bequeathed by Stalin and to a reduction in the leadership's capacity to pursue a unified grand strategy embracing foreign and defense policy. The stability of such a modified institutional order is hard to predict. If it proved ineffective in pursuing the regime's ends, it could lead, in turn, to the restoration of strong personal rule.

An alternative—but perhaps less likely—method of institutional reform might become feasible if a strong leader were to emerge, as Khrushchev did, to capitalize on the manifest need to purge incompetent officials and to rejuvenate both the supreme leadership and its middle levels. This might enable a successful candidate for the succession to create a strong personal machine, which could be employed to strengthen discipline and perhaps also to impose institutional reforms from above. The result would be to subordinate institutional interest groups more closely to direction from the ruling center and to limit the prospects for a liberalization of the regime.

### **The Probabilities**

While vulnerabilities in the present system could lead during the succession to its transformation in the direction of either oligarchy or strong personal rule (perhaps in sequence), the regime that emerges from the Brezhnev succession is likely to have the following features:

- Continued hegemony of the party apparatus over other institutions.
- Persistence of the present mode of leadership, with authority concentrated in a Politburo whose members have markedly unequal powers and which is subject to manipulation by the general secretary of the Central Committee.
- Inability of the successor leadership to deal effectively with the regime's fundamental problems.
- A reduced growth rate of the economy, although it would still provide the resources needed to compete with the West.