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Soviet Union.

59513  
For action on Mr. Blaker's  
comment below.

PS/R. Blaker.

See PS/Pus  
25/6/79

Mr Fergusson

SOVIET LEADERSHIP

1. The Vienna Summit has again drawn attention to Brezhnev's uncertain health. I submit a note on what may happen when he goes.

C L G Mallaby

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Eastern European and Soviet  
Department

20 June 1979

- cc: Mr Bullard
- Mr Maxey (Assessments Staff)
- Mr Murrell (Research Dept)
- Mr Fall, Moscow
- Mr Allan (OID)
- Chancery, UKDEL NATO
- Warsaw
- Prague
- Budapest
- Bucharest
- Sofia
- East Berlin
- Belgrade
- Peking
- Washington

This is a useful survey. Roy / Leave  
is to the Minister of State to decide whether it  
should be seen by other Ministers, passed the  
relevant services both which it gives to the office.

Copy to PS ✓

- PS/LPS
- PS/Mr Hurd
- PS/Mr Ridley
- PS/Mr Marten
- PS/Mr Luce
- PS/Lad Trefgarne

The attention of all Ministers  
should be drawn to paras 1-3  
and 9-12 of this useful paper.

*[Signature]*  
20/6

ARb.  
23/6

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## SOVIET LEADERSHIP

The Problem

1. Brezhnev's health continues to deteriorate and it seems unlikely that he will survive for much more than another year. He seems to suffer from a number of ailments including coronary trouble (for which he has a pacemaker), high blood pressure and severe dental problems which affect his speech. He walks stiffly, has problems of balance and finds it increasingly difficult to deliver public speeches. In discussions with foreign leaders he can occasionally be vigorous but relies heavily on reading from prepared texts and tends to lose concentration after an hour or two. There is however no evidence that his mental faculties are as yet seriously impaired.
2. Despite his physical decline Brezhnev's political authority appears to be intact. As far as we can judge he remains in charge of major policy questions and important appointments. The award to him recently of the Lenin prize for literature is among several recent indications that the cult of his personality flourishes. It is possible that he will resign but it would be more in accordance with the Soviet political tradition and his own temperament for him to cling to power until death or total incapacitation intervenes. This may be the most likely scenario. But it is also possible that some or all of Brezhnev's colleagues might decide that he is no longer capable of the job and try to force him from office. Already his fragile health presents problems for the smooth and dignified conduct of Soviet foreign policy. The recent visit of the French President had to be postponed at very short notice. Brezhnev was not fit enough to travel to the United States or to hold anything more than a carefully prepackaged summit with President Carter - at a time when it is an important Soviet interest to make a favourable impact on the US leadership and public opinion, at least comparable to that achieved last year by Deng Xiaoping.

/Stability

Stability of the Succession

3. It has been argued that the succession to Brezhnev could be disorderly and attended by some kind of power struggle because:

- (a) there is no obvious successor and Brezhnev appears to have made no arrangements for the succession;
- (b) in view of the average age of the Politburo (68) and the Central Committee (62) there is likely to be a rapid turnover giving rise to dissension over appointments;
- (c) economic problems expected in the 1980s may exacerbate the usual disagreements over resource allocation.

But there are factors which favour an orderly succession. Brezhnev's main political achievement in the Party has been to establish rule by consensus in the leadership and stability in the Party bureaucracy as a whole. There is no reason to suppose that the successors will not maintain the practice of consensus as well as the stable cadre policy (a low turnover in senior positions and often promotion of the next in line) which, apart from reducing the scope for factional manoeuvring and preventing everyone except Brezhnev from building a power base, has been very popular among the cadres themselves.

4. The presumption that in view of the age factor a number of senior leaders will depart over the next few years has led to speculation about a younger generation of Soviet leaders coming to power in the near future. In fact the holders of the principal Party and State positions over at least the next five year period will almost certainly come from the 27 present full and candidate members of the Politburo and Secretaries of the Central Committee (only 5 of whom are under 60). They will not all die or retire at once and there will be enough replacements available (some of them elderly) to plug the gaps

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which will appear in the Politburo. Rapid promotion is rare nowadays in the Soviet political system and great importance is attached to seniority and experience. The rejuvenation of the Soviet leadership is likely to be a gradual process.

Candidates for the Party Leadership

5. Discounting Suslov (who looks too old at 76, but is still very influential), Kirilenko and Chernenko stand next in line after Brezhnev, being the only full Politburo members who are also Party Secretaries. Though the same age as Brezhnev (72), Kirilenko remains the most likely candidate to take over as Party General Secretary if Brezhnev goes soon. He has concentrated on the economy and Party organisation, and could be expected to continue Brezhnev's policies, with which he is closely associated. Recently there have been minor signs that Kirilenko's status may have slipped, eg the transfer from the Party Secretariat of Ryabov, Secretary for the Defence Industry, who had career links with Kirilenko, and the curious case of the publication in a Moscow newspaper of a photograph of the leadership at the May Day Parade which had been doctored so as to remove Kirilenko. The significance of these incidents is dubious and they may add up to nothing; but they have occurred since the promotion to the Politburo of Brezhnev's protege Chernenko and it is difficult to ignore them entirely. It would be consistent with Brezhnev's past political performance if he were to try to push aside one of the last remaining Politburo members whose career was not entirely dependent on himself.

6. Chernenko (67) was promoted to full membership of the Politburo in November 1978. He has had an unspectacular career as a Party bureaucrat and obviously owes his recently rapid promotion to his very close links over 30 years with Brezhnev. He is now better placed for succession to the post of General Secretary than other candidates of his generation or younger who include Grishin (Party Secretary for Moscow), Romanov

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(Party Secretary for the Leningrad region), Shcherbitsky (Party Secretary for the Ukraine) and Andropov (Head of the KGB). Chernenko could attract support in the middle ranks of the Party since the many Party officials who now owe their positions directly to Brezhnev may well prefer that a close associate of Brezhnev's should succeed him and maintain his stable personnel policies. But Chernenko could be very vulnerable after Brezhnev's departure, for he has yet to establish any political role on his own account. And none of the other likely candidates can in any sense be written off.

The Structure of a New Leadership

7. The new Party leader will not inherit at once all the power and prestige acquired by Brezhnev over 14 years. In particular it is uncertain whether the posts of Party General Secretary and State President will continue to be held by one man. Brezhnev's acquisition of the Presidency in 1977 in addition to his Party post was not simply a result of his vanity and ambition but had a certain logic. Given the increased importance of foreign policy and especially summitry it was convenient for the Party leader to be able to represent the USSR on equal terms with Western leaders. (The 2 posts are combined in 4 out of the 6 other Warsaw Pact countries). But Brezhnev's successor will not initially have the experience and prestige to occupy both posts with the same conviction. There is moreover likely to be reluctance to invest any one leader with too much power immediately and considerable pressure to re-emphasise the principle of collective leadership, as after Stalin's death and Khrushchev's fall. It may also be thought important that the USSR should be represented at the Head of State level by an experienced figure who is familiar abroad. The President has a largely symbolic internal role but his foreign policy function has grown significantly under Brezhnev. The solution

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might therefore be to make Kosygin or Gromyko President when Brezhnev goes. It is possible that in a new leadership, assuming posts were not combined, the President would initially have a status roughly equal to that of the General Secretary. But in the longer term power and prestige would almost certainly gravitate to the Party leader.

8. While the President may have an important role in the new leadership the status of the Prime Minister may remain secondary. The responsibilities for economic policy formally associated with the position have been largely taken over by Brezhnev in his capacity as Party leader and those for foreign policy have been acquired by Brezhnev first as Party leader then as President. If Kirilenko succeeds Brezhnev he is likely to continue the Party domination in economic policy but if the successor is inexperienced in economic affairs (eg Chernenko) the Council of Ministers might recover some of its former influence. In any event when Kosygin goes the Prime Minister is unlikely to have the weight in the leadership which he had in the first post-Khrushchev years.

#### Policies

9. A new leadership will take over at a time when the USSR faces difficult problems at home and abroad. The 1980s will be a period of economic difficulties as a growing labour shortage coincides with energy problems, agriculture remains inefficient and overall growth rates continue to decline. Problems of resource allocation will continue, especially if defence spending is to be maintained at its current high level. And what the Russians perceive as a serious long-term threat from China will continue to be a major preoccupation.

10. In East-West relations Brezhnev's successors are unlikely to see any realistic alternative to the present line of "peaceful coexistence" and detente; and a number of factors favour continuity in the broad lines of policy at least for a period. A change

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in leadership has occurred only three times since 1917 and is a traumatic event for the Soviet political system. The first concern of any new leadership will be to establish itself, ensure stability and reassure the Party and the world that no radical and alarming changes are to be expected. Any new leadership would probably lack the confidence to disturb the status quo. The Party and State bureaucracy is well entrenched, conservative, and likely to resist abrupt changes.

11. In the longer term a change in leadership may encourage proponents of new policies and ideas, eg economic reform, which have run into the sand during the last decade, to put them forward again. Moreover the economic problems mentioned in paragraph 9 may bring a need to contemplate new approaches. Possibly some of the younger leaders would be prepared to support new ideas if their own positions are strengthened in the meantime; but in view of the conservatism of the Party and State apparatus as a whole it is likely to be some time before a new leadership is receptive to proposals for anything more than superficial changes.

12. A new leadership is likely to pay careful attention to the views of the military, whose prestige and influence have grown under Brezhnev. Despite economic pressures, significant reduction in military expenditure seems unlikely. Military power is the one area where the USSR continues to compete successfully with the West, and spending on arms produces results in terms of status, prestige and influence in the world. There is a risk that a new leadership might be tempted to exploit enhanced military capability rather more aggressively than in the past to make gains in the Third World, as a way of compensating for lack of economic or ideological success and to strengthen the Soviet position vis-a-vis China as well as the West. There seems, however, to be no serious likelihood of the military achieving a dominant role in the leadership. Party control of the armed forces, as of the whole political

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system, is very solidly entrenched and, short of some major upheaval, sets a limit to the extent of military influence.

20 June 1979

Eastern European and Soviet Department