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SOVIET POLITICS AFTER KHRUSHCHEV

THE PROBLEM

To review events on the Soviet domestic political scene since the removal of Khrushchev, to discuss the stability of the present collective leadership, and to estimate trends in internal politics over the next year or so.

CONCLUSIONS

A. The men who forced out Khrushchev achieved a smooth transfer of authority, but they are almost certainly engaged in maneuvering for power and in debating a number of critical political and economic issues. Like Khrushchev, they must make decisions in the face of controversy and opposition. (*Paras. 2, 5, 6, 7, 10-12*)

B. Most notably, they must deal with the continuing and fundamental problem of how best to allocate the nation's economic resources. Their recent Khrushchev-like emphasis on agriculture, for example, has probably antagonized advocates of increased spending for heavy industry and defense, and, in fact, there have recently been signs of growing pressures on the regime to ease restraints on military spending. The leaders themselves probably hold differing views about this and other problems. In addition they must take into account the attitudes and strengths of increasingly important non-party elements, such as the military, the state apparatus and even the people themselves. (*Paras. 13-20, 23-33, 37, 39-43*)

C. The new regime's most pronounced innovations have been in the field of foreign policy. Khrushchev's successors, seeking new ways to cope with the Chinese challenge to Moscow's authority, have altered their priorities. They began to do so very shortly after gaining power and well before present US policies in Vietnam went into

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effect. The new leaders did not set out deliberately to reverse the course of East-West relations which had developed after the Cuban missile crisis. Rather, they gave first priority to efforts to repair the USSR's position in its own camp and in the underdeveloped world, consciously accepting as a consequence a deterioration of relations with the US. (*Paras. 21, 22, 38*)

D. Issues such as these, together with the tendency toward political infighting inherent in the Soviet system, will subject the collegiality of the leadership to recurrent strains. Though collective leadership could endure for some time, we believe that there will be a strong tendency toward one-man rule. The matter may come to a head at the next party congress (apparently scheduled for early 1966) or even sooner. (*Paras. 34-36*)

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DISCUSSION

I. THE NEW LEADERSHIP

A. The Removal of Khrushchev

1. Though individual political ambitions almost certainly played a large role in the decision to remove Khrushchev, there seems little reason to doubt that most of his colleagues had become genuinely disenchanted with Khrushchev's style of leadership and at least some of his policies. A series of failures—the Cuban missile crisis of 1962, the nearly disastrous wheat harvest of 1963, the accelerating erosion of Soviet authority in the Communist movement—increased his frustration and his propensity to act in an arbitrary and capricious manner. Indeed, in the fall of 1964 he was pursuing policies toward China which may have seemed gravely ill-advised to many of his colleagues. At the same time, he was apparently moving toward yet another shakeup of economic administration and priorities. At this point, a broad agreement apparently crystallized that Khrushchev could neither cope effectively with problems of state nor be relied upon to heed the advice of others. To his colleagues, his conduct and policies must have suggested growing difficulties for the USSR and danger to their own positions.

2. There was evidently a powerful consensus to this effect among the men on the party Presidium and probably the Secretariat as well. Their plans were kept secret and were carried out without apparent difficulty. It is likely that, with such agreement and careful plotting, few of Khrushchev's potential supporters on the Central Committee had any real opportunity to oppose the move. The role of the military was probably negligible; the concurrence of some high officers was probably secured in advance, and, in view of chronic opposition among the military leaders to Khrushchev's defense policies, the plotters could feel some assurance that he would have little military backing. The support of key elements of the secret police was almost certainly secured in advance. In general, the discontent felt by the ruling Presidium was by no means unique; one way or another, Khrushchev had managed to disaffect most of the various interest groupings which dominate Soviet society.

B. The Character and Style of His Successors

3. The men who have succeeded Khrushchev do not represent a new brand of Soviet leadership. With the exception of Kosygin and Mikoyan (whose backgrounds are governmental), all owe their careers to their ability to combine political agility within the party apparatus with some specialized talents in administration or one or another economic speciality. Among the most prominent members of the collective, Brezhnev, Kosygin, Mikoyan, Podgorny, and Suslov are all over 58 and all had achieved high party status at the time of Stalin's death (except Podgorny, who did not achieve comparable rank until 1957). The

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young men on the Presidium, Shelepin, Polyansky, and Demichev, all still in their forties, appear to be on their way to greater power, but had been selected by Khrushchev for important jobs long before his departure.

4. The new leadership appears essentially agreed that the government must no longer be conducted in the "arbitrary" and "subjective" manner which they consider characteristic of Khrushchev's later years. The collective is working hard to give the impression of a scientific approach to all problems. The dominant tone has been set by Brezhnev and Kosygin in speeches which are characterized by a concentration on the solution of practical problems and by criticism of the "hare-brained schemes" and "armchair decisions" of Khrushchev.

C. The Problem of Power

5. The transfer of power from Khrushchev to his successors appears to have been accomplished in an orderly way. The people as a whole greeted the event with apparent indifference and the party with at least surface calm and acceptance of change. Nevertheless, the removal of Khrushchev has almost certainly created a new mood of uncertainty, arousing both hopes and fears among professional party and state functionaries. The fall of a leader is almost inevitably attended by political maneuvering as the contending politicians seek to secure or improve their positions, and the various interest groupings in Soviet society press the opportunity to increase their influence on the top leaders. Thus, despite a major effort to hide such activities behind a public mask of unity, a period of succession in the USSR is essentially fluid.

6. The large number of top level personnel changes—many of them promotions—which have taken place since last October also suggest the existence of considerable maneuvering within the Soviet leadership. The most notable shift has been the emergence of a circle of top decision-makers who hold membership in both the party Presidium and Secretariat. Brezhnev, Suslov, and Podgorny, who served on these bodies under Khrushchev, have now been joined by Shelepin, Demichev, and Ustinov (the last two as candidate members of the Presidium). The resulting coterie, with its combination of policy, patronage, and operational responsibilities, may now comprise an inner cabinet within the Presidium.

7. While Brezhnev may merely be benefiting as First Secretary from the inherent emoluments of his position, he has emerged in recent months as an increasingly active "first among equals." Although there were signs last fall that Podgorny had ensconced himself as the second ranking Party Secretary, there have been no indications since then that he has attained this status. During the same period, Shelepin's areas of responsibility have been greatly increased.

8. On the government side, Kosygin, an austere and capable administrator, is charged with the delicate task of establishing an economic resurgence without resorting to measures too unsettling to the entrenched power structure. Kosygin, although a member of the party Presidium, has had no chance to build up

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a following in the apparatus, and this could prove to be a political handicap. On the other hand, it could prove an asset if it allows him to stand back from areas of contention and maneuver.

9. In certain relatively routine matters, a division of labor among the leaders may have been worked out on the basis of interests, fields of competence, and formally assigned functions. Concerning major questions, the Presidium probably meets regularly and discusses the issue at hand; decisions are probably made by consensus or majority vote. But Brezhnev, as party head, has the best opportunity to maneuver in advance of such meetings.

II. PROBLEMS OF POLICY

10. Whatever may be the role of personal ambition in the contention for power, issues of national policy exert a considerable force of their own. In any case, individual contenders must formulate programs of their own with which to attract supporters. As a result, the struggle tends to revolve around specific issues of policy.

11. Even at the height of his power, Khrushchev was faced with opposition from a variety of sources. There were those in the party apparatus who feared the effects of his doctrinal innovations and structural reforms, especially on their own positions. Some must have been disturbed by Khrushchev's approach to foreign and bloc affairs, in particular by his coexistence line toward the US and by his increasingly personal vindictive approach to the Chinese Communist problem. Khrushchev's efforts to revise the traditional pattern of resource allocation elicited the opposition of conservative elements in the party, the military, and the state apparatus. On the other hand, there were some who were consumer-oriented and more inclined toward innovation than even Khrushchev.

12. There was also a group which generally favored Khrushchev's policies, though not his style. It is this group which is still setting the dominant policy tone on the homefront. It still faces the same problems Khrushchev faced and is still subject to similar differences of opinion and contradictory pressures.

A. The Central Problem: Economics

13. The underlying domestic question facing the Soviet leadership is how best to allocate the nation's economic resources. As the rate of growth of the Soviet economy has slowed down, and as the Soviet military and space effort has placed increasing demands on the country's high-quality resources, this particular problem and controversies over its resolution have intensified. Khrushchev contended with the economic problems of the USSR, and the political storms they created throughout his tenure in office. Favoring investment in agriculture at the expense of heavy industry, and attempting to restrain the demands of the military establishment, he was frequently balked both by circumstance and by his opponents. In the end, his failure to solve the allocations problem contributed materially to the decision to remove him.

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14. It would not have been surprising if Khrushchev's successors had sought to place economic priorities on a more conservative track; among the men who helped to remove Khrushchev were those who favored traditional emphasis on heavy industry and the armed forces. The new leadership did give some early hints that it would restore some of the priorities to defense and industrial development, but subsequently it also declared itself in favor of a higher rate of investment in light industry and agriculture. Indeed, the new program of agriculture investment announced by Brezhnev in March is at least as ambitious as any proposed by Khrushchev.

15. The regime is apparently making an earnest effort to expand the experiment, begun under Khrushchev, of incentive systems and structural innovations in industry, including allowances for the role of profits. Though the new leaders recognize the need for popular support, particularly during the period of the succession, and hence have pledged increased consumer benefits, they have not indulged in the grandiose promises so characteristic of their predecessor.

16. Of late, however, debate over the defense issue has intensified, and military spokesmen are once more, in effect, advocating that restraints on military spending be eased. The weight of their argument has almost certainly been strengthened by the Vietnamese crisis, though not all political leaders seem to agree on this issue. Podgorny, speaking in late May, claimed—as did Khrushchev just before his removal—that the consumer need no longer suffer, as he once did, because of the demands of defense and heavy industry. In contrast, only two weeks later, Suslov took the opposite tack in a militant speech which called for maintaining defense at the "highest level" and which acknowledged the necessary burden this imposes on the people.

B. Other Domestic Issues

17. A number of other specific domestic issues are probably now agitating the leadership. The failure of the regime to announce a replacement for Khrushchev as the chairman of the CPSU Bureau for RSFSR (Russian Republic) affairs probably reflects contention at the top and the reluctance of the leadership to give any one man more than one of Khrushchev's positions in the party and state machinery. The recent gradual change in the treatment of Stalin may also reflect some controversy at high levels; Khrushchev's virulence on the subject was in part simply an effort to improve his own image and to tarnish those of his opponents. The question of Stalin remains one of the most sensitive of all issues, and the Soviet press has already shown signs of the leadership's ambivalent approach to it.

18. The treatment of Khrushchev also poses a problem for the new leadership. If his successors intended to mount a strong campaign against him, and there were some signs of this, the adverse reaction of the Communist parties in East and West Europe may have given them pause. Moreover, it seems likely

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that some within the present leadership would oppose a direct campaign against their old mentor. Others, particularly those who would like to reverse one or another of Khrushchev's policies, may, however, attempt to further blacken his reputation. The whole issue could come to a head at the next Party Congress, as, indeed, the question of Stalin did in 1956.

19. The question of how best to reorganize the state administration of the economy remains under debate. A public call for the abolition of the regional economic councils appeared in *Pravda* last December, but this was quickly rebutted by a speaker at the session of the Supreme Soviet. Several subsequent moves and statements by Kosygin and others have hinted at uncertainty and controversy over this issue.

20. Finally, the regime's attitude toward the intellectuals probably remains an active issue. Though in the first few months after Khrushchev's fall there were some signs of high-level uncertainty and debate over this question, the official line seems now to have settled on a relatively permissive approach. The opponents of relaxation will almost certainly remain active, however, and will no doubt receive some ammunition for their cause by the provocative activities of the protesting intellectuals themselves.

C. A New Departure in Foreign Affairs

21. The new regime's most pronounced innovations have been in the field of foreign policy. Khrushchev's successors, seeking new ways to cope with the Chinese challenge to Moscow's authority, have altered their priorities. They began to do so very shortly after gaining power and well before present US policies in Vietnam went into effect. The new leaders did not set out deliberately to reverse the course of East-West relations which had developed after the Cuban missile crisis. Rather, they gave first priority to efforts to repair the USSR's position in its own camp and in the underdeveloped world, consciously accepting as a consequence a deterioration of relations with the US. Though Soviet conduct continues to reflect a concern to avoid high risks and a desire to remain in contact with Washington, the new leadership has narrowed the limits of Moscow's freedom of maneuver in all areas of East-West relations.*

22. The altered tactics toward Peiping have in some respects put the Chinese on the defensive but have neither silenced their polemics nor halted the erosion of Soviet authority in the Communist movement. The involvement in Vietnam has exposed the USSR to greater risks in a situation over which its control is indirect and very limited. And the adoption of a harsher stance in world affairs raises questions about the continued restraints on military expenditures. It would not be surprising if, as a result of all this, some leaders may now be questioning the wisdom of the new line.

* See SNIE 11-11-65, "Soviet Attitudes Toward the US," dated 26 May 1965, SECRET.

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D. The Role of the Party and Non-Party Groups

23. Khrushchev constantly professed his belief that the party must maintain supreme power in the USSR. To that end, he restored the party apparatus to the dominant position it had once held and sought to enhance its authority by restaffing the administration of non-party groups with reliable party workers. At the same time, however, he undermined the party's authority by assigning to it tasks which it did not wish to accept. The apparatus was neither qualified nor eager to assume the kind of day-to-day responsibility for running the economy which Khrushchev sought to impose on it with his division of party organs into separate industrial and agricultural units. Further, he sapped the party's morale with reorganizations, diatribes, and controversial doctrinal innovations, while diluting the prestige of party membership with a massive recruitment program. He also underplayed what had long been considered paramount, the party's function as the engine of ideological inspiration.

24. While Khrushchev was thus damaging the party, events themselves conspired to further the process. It was difficult to maintain the revolutionary and, later, wartime elan of the party in a time of peace both at home and abroad. It was also difficult to maintain a consistent line at a time when stereotypes of the imperialists and the Chinese allies were being altered, with some of the former becoming "sober" men and the latter becoming arch villains. But, most important, the increasing complexity of the Soviet economy and Soviet society as a whole rendered the party ill-equipped to lead. Others on the domestic scene, from nuclear physicists to literary figures, began to make important independent contributions to Soviet life. Khrushchev's efforts to educate the party, to staff it with technical experts, were but minor—and unsuccessful—efforts to deal with this trend.

25. All this does not mean, of course, that the party's power is in jeopardy; clearly, the party apparatus remains the primary instrument of rule. Moreover, all Soviet institutions are subject at least indirectly to party control and most of the elite in all fields of endeavor are members of the party, even if they do not give their first allegiance to it. Nevertheless, the evolution of a Soviet society no longer constrained by terror from the top has seen a concomitant weakening of the party's ability to enforce its will on that society. Its leaders remain firmly authoritarian but must now consider the consequences of their acts within a much broader political environment and an increasingly complex society.

26. If the leadership decides, for example, to crack down on wayward literary trends, it must remember past failure and be prepared to weather protest, foreign as well as domestic, and to accept a decline in the quality of literary work. The writers have long since ceased to be completely cowed by injunctions from above. Similarly, if it is of a mind to remove a top political leader, it must concern itself with the reactions of others, most especially the military. And if the leadership declares a new policy for industry, it must be prepared to cope with the possible resistance of the plant managers affected and the probable

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reluctance of the economic administrators assigned to carry out the change. The longer instability in the leadership persists, the greater the probable role to be played by interested "outsiders."

State Apparatus

27. The government and economic apparatus, though no longer quite the distinct force it was in Malenkov's time, nonetheless remains an important element in Soviet political life. Its importance could increase if events encouraged its members to assert their common interests, many of which diverge from those of the professional party apparatus. Indeed, the state apparatus may have already grown in significance with the assumption of the premiership by Kosygin, whose entire career has been in the government service. Kosygin gives every evidence of an intention to perform his job with vigor, seems willing to subordinate doctrine to practical necessity, and would probably resist party interference in government. These tendencies could lead to the emergence of a competitive force in the administration of domestic affairs and, at the same time, win for Kosygin the loyalty of the state bureaucracy.

The Military

28. The military form an even more important grouping. We do not believe that the high command wishes to exercise the powers of an independent political force. But it might seek much greater political powers if it came to feel that military interests were in danger; the scope of these interests becomes larger with the increasing complexity of military requirements. Despite some disagreement on questions of military policy and strategy and despite certain personal rivalries, the military leaders do in fact form a group which controls powerful assets of its own. In general, the military has been a force for conservatism.

29. The relationship between the Soviet military and political leaderships does not appear to have changed significantly as a result of Khrushchev's removal. The principal topics of argument under Khrushchev are still in contention—the size and function of the ground forces, the share of the military in national resources, and, in general, the role of the military in national policy-making. The failure of the regime either to deny or to reaffirm Khrushchev's stated intention to cut troop strength in the face of obvious military opposition is perhaps the clearest case in point. But other instances of military opposition or concern have from time to time appeared in the press since the first of the year. The question of force roles, relevant to budgetary allocations, remains in debate. Thus, in February, *Izvestiya* published an article with the provocative title, "The Queen of Battle Has Yielded Her Crown"; in April, *Pravda* specifically rebutted *Izvestiya* with an article arguing that the ground forces remain the queen of battle.

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30. As to the proper role of the military in the formulation of defense policy, the military point of view was presented again in February by the new Chief of Staff, Marshal Zakharov, who implied that the elaboration of military policy belonged by rights to the professionals concerned. On the question of the military's proper share of economic resources, a military theorist advocated the line in March that, because of the danger of surprise attack, the outcome of a future war would be decided by the forces and means available at its outset. He implicitly cautioned against false economies which might deprive the nation of the wherewithal to combat the enemy. Other spokesmen, presumably defending the regime's position, have challenged this view, arguing that the interests of military preparedness demand the balanced development of the economy as a whole.

31. Soviet involvement in Vietnam has doubtless contributed to a recent increase in the assertiveness and self-assurance of military spokesmen. An index of this trend was a forceful article in *Red Star* on 4 June arguing that military requirements for manpower had not only not diminished with the advent of nuclear weapons but had increased. Addressing the sensitive question of the proper allocation of manpower resources between military and civilian requirements, the article also asserted that all measures necessary to assure the defense of the country, including the maintenance of adequate production levels of weapons and equipment, must be carried out in peacetime, prior to the outbreak of hostilities.

The People

32. Since 1953, major changes in Soviet society have had a substantial effect on popular moods and expectations; the people are no longer a completely docile mass. The most striking expressions of discontent have, of course, come from the growing and increasingly sophisticated intelligentsia. Chafing under the controls of the party, protesting intellectuals have found for themselves a sympathetic audience among students, scientists, and other segments of literate society. Even among the people at large, where discontent has mainly economic roots, the intellectuals can probably find a fairly sympathetic environment for some of their ideas; the de-Stalinization campaign, and now the criticism of Khrushchev, have accelerated the erosion of popular faith in the party.

33. The impact of popular and intellectual discontent on the leadership and its policies is ordinarily indirect. We believe, nevertheless, that Soviet leaders since Stalin have felt a need to take the public temper into greater account. Some policies may be repressive, but others take a more positive approach. Thus the leadership speaks more and more of the necessity to provide the people with material incentives, and even the intellectuals are permitted to exercise some individual initiative in the arts. Like Khrushchev, his successors show signs of realizing that the old ways of ensuring the fidelity and productivity of the people will no longer suffice for the modern Soviet state.

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III. PROSPECTS

A. The Leadership

34. The uneasy collegiality of the Soviet leadership will be subject to recurrent strains. The very nature of the Soviet system encourages political infighting, and the character of the men who were trained in that system, and who now direct it, fosters distrust. It is likely that the unity imposed by the agreement to remove Khrushchev will weaken further and the ambitions of the various contenders for power will grow. A major shakeup in the leadership need not lead to comparable revisions of policy, but such an event would at a minimum open up the possibility.

35. While we think that the Soviet system still tends strongly toward one-man rule, a form of collective leadership could endure for some time. The fact that Khrushchev could be removed from his party and state offices without violence, despite his presumed hold on all the levers of control and the years in which he had an opportunity to dispense patronage, suggests a considerable diffusion of power at the upper levels since the death of Stalin. In any event, the success of the plot shows that the top leader is after all vulnerable. This demonstration may discourage aspirants, and it may also encourage the new leaders to unite against any of their number who seems to be trying to arrogate the group's power to himself.

36. The leadership problem is sharpened by the approach of the next Party Congress, now apparently scheduled for early 1966. It is likely that both policy and factional struggles will increasingly be conducted with that event in mind. One or more of the top men may then be removed and his power assumed by a survivor. Older members of the leadership, Mikoyan and Suslov, for example, could be retired to make way for such young and ambitious men as Shelepin and Polyansky. The member of one faction or another might be promoted in order to add growing support for his mentor. Or one of the principal contenders might suffer a political defeat and be removed by a rival or combination of rivals, assembled essentially for that purpose. But, whether matters come to a head before, during, or after, the congress, we believe that the tendency toward the assumption of predominant power by one man is almost certain to continue.

B. Policy Questions

37. The most pressing issues confronting the new regime are not susceptible of easy resolution. While the new leadership gives promise of approaching policy more systematically than Khrushchev, economic problems will be solved slowly, if at all, and then only at the expense of one or another interest. Domestic political problems in general have not been eased, and the removal of Khrushchev has created yet another—how best to treat his reign. One implication of all this is simply that unresolved problems create opportunities for the contending leaders to come forward with promises of new solutions and a general change in the party line.

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38. Foreign policy problems also plague the leadership, lead to disputes, and affect the course of domestic policy. In time, as the various foreign and domestic implications of the present more militant course of Soviet foreign policy become clearer, skepticism could harden into opposition.

39. Various forces of change are already at work within the Soviet party and among the people. Support can readily be found for a host of diverging policies. Groups within the party, the military, and perhaps the state apparatus as well, would no doubt relish for personal and policy reasons a return to the simpler standards of the Stalin era. This, in their minds, need not involve a return to wholesale terror, but would result in tougher policies both at home and abroad. The priority accorded heavy industry under Stalin, for example, would be at least partly restored. On the other hand, the advocates of a more liberal line would oppose any such trend and would seek to impose their views on the leadership. In the meantime, the present collective apparently wishes to steer between the two extremes, though its harsher foreign policy shows signs of limiting its freedom of maneuver on the home front.

40. Should the leadership suffer a severe reverse abroad or an economic crisis at home, factionalism would be likely to grow. This, in turn, would increase prospects for a change in leadership and far-reaching changes in policy. For example, Khrushchev in 1956, when factionalism was intense, saw fit to make a radical break with the past and to denounce Stalin and his works, largely in an effort to discredit his opponents and to increase his own power.

41. Nevertheless, the Soviet system and its doctrine tend to impose restraints on those seeking major change. The institution of the party itself operates as a conservative force on the Soviet political scene. Even if the party's powers are further reduced by events or by deliberate policy, its overall control will almost certainly not be jeopardized in the near term. The temptation of one or another contender to gain supreme power on the basis of a radical program—either liberal or reactionary—will be tempered by this factor and by a general fear among the leaders that rapid change endangers their own positions and the Soviet regime itself.

42. Further, whether the present collective endures for some time or is soon replaced, domestic Soviet policies are likely to continue to exhibit certain of the characteristics which have been in evidence to one degree or another for the past decade or so. The regime's attitude toward the intellectuals, for example, will probably proceed in cycles, ranging from the relative permissiveness now in evidence to periodic crackdowns necessitated by especially strident outbursts of "hostile" activity. Similarly, the regime's general attitude toward the people, its approach to such matters as material incentives vs. ideological exhortations, is likely to fluctuate. The overlapping of party and state functions will continue to be a potential source of friction. The dialogue between military and political leaders will probably be carried on more or less along present lines. Economic problems will vary in intensity but will almost certainly remain pressing; disputes over the allocation of resources will continue.

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43. Over the long term, the larger forces at work in Soviet society will effect major changes on the Soviet scene. The importance of non-party groups is likely to grow, not because the regime favors this but because an increasingly complex society requires it. The dispute with the Chinese Communists, and the erosion of the USSR's position in the world Communist movement, may proceed cyclically but are unlikely to terminate. The declining import of traditional Marxist-Leninist doctrine, both at home and abroad, is also unlikely to be reversed. Though the policies of the leadership may hasten or retard this evolutionary process, they cannot reverse it.

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