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DATE: FEB 2001



After Kulakov: Impressions of "Young" Succession
Contenders.

The death of Fedor Kulakov eliminated a major contender to succeed General Secretary Brezhnev. Kulakov had an advantage over other relatively young leaders in that he sat on both the Politburo and the Secretariat. As things stand now, Kirilenko is still the odds-on favorite to succeed Brezhnev if the General Secretary departs soon, while Kirilenko is in relatively good health and before any of the younger contenders have been given time and opportunity to broaden their bases of support and experience. The aging Kirilenko, however, will probably be unable to provide more than an interim succession. In the wake of Kulakov's death speculation about a long-term successor has centered on Ukrainian party head Shcherbitskiy, Leningrad party head Romanov, and to a lesser extent, on other relatively young (ages 55-64) Politburo members and candidate members who could conceivably emerge as winners in the succession sweepstakes.

Shcherbitskiy: Brezhnev's Choice

There is little doubt that Shcherbitskiy has enjoyed Brezhnev's personal favor for many years. Brezhnev appears to regard the younger man in an almost fatherly way. Nevertheless, Brezhnev has been either unwilling or unable to groom Shcherbitskiy more actively as his successor. It is possible that he has deliberately refrained from designating a successor, having in mind that Khrushchev set himself up for removal by doing so. It is more likely, however, that restraints on Brezhnev's authority have prevented him from advancing Shcherbitskiy to an important post in Moscow. For several months prior to Kulakov's death there had been indications of differences between Brezhnev and other top Soviet leaders about the relative standing of younger members of the Politburo, with Brezhnev attempting to push Shcherbitskiy forward at the expense of Kulakov.

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It is questionable whether Shcherbitskiy has been completely successful in putting the Ukrainian house in order. He has been more successful in removing old foes than in replacing them with clients of his own. As a result, the two most important steppingstones to the top republic post are held by men who have not been closely associated with Shcherbitskiy. It is possible, however, that Ukrainian "President" Vatchenko, who is an old crony of Shcherbitskiy, could fill his shoes should Shcherbitskiy be promoted to a more important job in Moscow.

His connection with Dnepropetrovsk Oblast, which figured in the careers of Brezhnev and Kirilenko, is an important asset for Shcherbitskiy. It should be noted, however, that this political grouping may not endure succession politicking and could break up even before Brezhnev departs. At some point Kirilenko, who has shown signs of more assertiveness over the last several years, may break away from Brezhnev. Should this happen, it is not inconceivable that Shcherbitskiy, whose early career ties are closer to Kirilenko than to Brezhnev, would follow Kirilenko's lead.

It is likely that Shcherbitskiy's nationality will handicap him as a contender for the top party job, although it could help him get to Moscow in the near future. Podgorny's departure eliminated the last member of what was once a sizable Ukrainian contingent holding Politburo-level posts in Moscow, and the central leadership may sense a need to placate a disgruntled Ukrainian apparat by appointing an ethnic Ukrainian to a leading post at the center.

Romanov: The Leningrad Connection

All of the "younger" leaders have serious drawbacks as succession prospects, but in comparative terms Romanov looks like a good bet. He seems to have the requisite qualifications with regard to ethnic origin, education, Politburo status, and territorial base. He is the youngest full member of the Politburo, and his candidacy would not suffer if Brezhnev remains in power for several more years or if he is replaced on an interim basis by Kirilenko. Under these circumstances other contenders would be pushed above the age category

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from which a full-term successor would be likely to be chosen. Recently Romanov has succeeded in securing promotions outside Leningrad for several of his subordinates. As a result he appears to have lengthened his political "tail" more than some of his peers among the younger Politburo members.

Romanov's willingness to experiment and his inclination to facilitate more rapid upward mobility for younger men of ability could win him a following among younger officials whose ambitions have been somewhat thwarted by the principles of tenure and stability that have dominated the Brezhnev era. He has the support of various senior leaders on a number of policy matters. Though evidently not a personal patron of Romanov, Brezhnev has offered personal backing for a number of Romanov's administrative innovations in Leningrad. Most recently, during his Siberian trip Brezhnev praised a Leningrad economic initiative. Kirilenko also appears to favor Romanov's orientation toward administration of the economy. Romanov seems to share Suslov's conservatism on cultural and foreign policy issues.

Andropov: The KGB Connection

KGB boss Andropov also cannot be totally ruled out as a successor. His party background, experience in foreign affairs, and past service as a Central Committee secretary stand him in good stead. He has apparently served more as the party's man in the KGB than as the KGB's man in the Politburo. That is to say, he has loyally carried out party policy without making undue efforts to enhance the KGB's power or to engage the KGB in activities at cross purposes with the interests of the policymakers.

While not a Brezhnev protege, Andropov's career has flourished under Brezhnev. He has strong career ties to Suslov and perhaps some earlier association with Kirilenko as well. There are gaps in Andropov's experience, however, especially in administration of agriculture and industry. His regional party executive experience is quite outdated. Although Andropov is the first KGB head since Beriya to have a place on the Politburo, his KGB post is probably a major disability.

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Other KGB heads--Shelepin, Semichastnyy--were not able to use the KGB job as a steppingstone to better things. It seems likely that, at the least, Andropov would have to go through a "sanitizing" period in another job before being seriously considered for the succession. Finally, Andropov is thought not to be in good health, and this could work to his disadvantage in the selection of a long-term successor to Brezhnev.

Grishin: A Shadowy Figure

The succession chances of Moscow party chief Grishin, like those of Mazurov and Andropov, probably decline substantially with each passing year. (All three are approaching 65 years of age.)

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Grishin emerges as something of a "grey blur," whose political and personal allegiances are a matter of speculation. Apparently he is not an out-right Brezhnev protege, but his career has prospered during Brezhnev's tenure. Grishin, who gives the impression of aping Brezhnev as a consensus-oriented centrist, might appeal to those conservative leaders seeking a "safe" successor. Grishin's political base in Moscow, where he has been party chief for over a decade, has doubtless given him considerable opportunity to build political alliances and working relationships with senior leaders, and this could also work to his advantage.

Mazurov: Highly Qualified, But Slipping

First Deputy Premier Mazurov, whose breadth of experiences surpasses that of all other Politburo "juniors," seems to have slipped in recent years. His standing was probably not enhanced by his reported participation, with Suslov and Shelepin, in a 1970 alliance against Brezhnev. In 1976 Mazurov lost his status as Kosygin's only first deputy when Brezhnev succeeded in elevating one of his clients to be first deputy premier. In addition,

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his lack of experience in a central party job, may well remove him from serious

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contention as a successor to Brezhnev. (He nevertheless has a fairly good chance of succeeding Kosygin as Premier.)

Mazurov's fortunes could improve once Brezhnev is out of the picture. There are indications that Mazurov, who like other Belorussian leaders appears somewhat wary of Brezhnev's detente initiatives, has received support from Suslov. He evidently shares with Kirilenko mildly reformist views on economic administration.

Masherov: Some Serious Handicaps

Belorussian party head Masherov appears to be no better than a long shot, for a number of reasons. His greatest strength--success in administering his republic's economy--may in a sense be his greatest weakness as well. Masherov's bold and incautious advocacy of innovations in economic organization may frighten the generally conservative leadership, which appears to crave stability above all. Only in a period of serious economic crisis does it seem likely that they might turn to Masherov.

In addition, Masherov is clearly not a Brezhnev favorite. He has been unusually reticent in building the Brezhnev cult. On a number of policy issues and in his generally ideological cast of mind, Masherov seems close to Suslov. Their views are similar on the nationality question (both are centralizers), foreign affairs (both highly distrustful of the West), and investment priorities (both detest "consumerism"). Suslov, however, probably is not a supporter of Masherov's economic experiments.

Masherov appears to enjoy the personal support of Mazurov, but Mazurov's own influence and standing have declined somewhat. In addition, Masherov could be at a disadvantage because of his nationality. A Belorussian as top party leader might be acceptable to the Russians, but Masherov's elevation would result in disproportionate representation of Belorussians in the central leadership: Masherov, Mazurov, Zimyanin, and whoever would replace Masherov as first secretary of Belorussia, a post that appears to have ex officio Politburo representation. (~~CONFIDENTIAL~~)

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