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REVIEW OF SOVIET INTERNAL AFFAIRS (S)

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Domestic Politics

President Brezhnev appears to be at the height of his political power as preparations for holding the 26th Party Congress in February move into high gear. The departure of Aleksey Kosygin from the political scene in October after 16 years as head of government was the most significant single personnel change in this status quo regime since Khrushchev's ouster in 1964. A number of high-level changes in government personnel have ensued, and more are likely. The effect on the power configuration within the policymaking Politburo, while less visible, is considerable. Nevertheless, because Brezhnev has been the main beneficiary of the changes so far, the forthcoming Congress is shaping up as one of consolidation rather than transition to a successor regime.

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Kosygin Joins the Innumerable Caravan



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[REDACTED]

The correct but restrained official treatment of Kosygin's retirement and subsequent death, however, suggests that Brezhnev and Kosygin remained personally and politically unreconciled.\* In most essential respects Kosygin's funeral and the press coverage of it were identical to that accorded Defense Minister Grechko, who died in 1976. But in several minor ways Kosygin was slighted. The fact that he had already retired may partially explain the protocol lapses that occurred, but as the most prominent Soviet leader to die in favor since Stalin himself, Kosygin might have hoped for better than he received.

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Brezhnev's Position Further Strengthened

Kosygin's demise has left Suslov as the only remaining independent force in the leadership. No viable succession contender emerged from the leadership changes produced by Kosygin's departure. By promoting men who lack the requisite qualifications for the top party job, Brezhnev has once again finessed the succession issue.

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Both Kosygin's replacement, 75-year-old Nikolay Tikhonov, and the man moved up to take Tikhonov's job as first deputy premier, Ivan Arkhipov, are Brezhnev cronies whose ties to the leader date to their working together in the Dnepropetrovsk area in the 1940s. Brezhnev's praise for Tikhonov in his

*\*Although Brezhnev's primacy over Kosygin was clear by the early 1970s, as Brezhnev worked further to increase his power and that of the party at the expense of Kosygin and the government, the premier defended his territory doggedly. In recent years Kosygin moderated his public advocacy of economic reform, but he also resisted Brezhnev's plan to undertake a reorganization of the government, which Kosygin believed would result in increased party interference in economic management. Kosygin also attempted, with mixed success, to prevent the advancement of Brezhnev's clients within the Council of Ministers.*

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1978 memoirs demonstrated a special closeness. In October, Brezhnev created a diplomatic flap by failing to show up for a dinner given by Indian President Reddy, reportedly because Tikhonov's wife had died. Tikhonov's advance within the government over the last several years has clearly reflected Brezhnev's influence at Kosygin's expense. We expect that Tikhonov will be more amenable than was Kosygin in following Brezhnev's lead on policy issues.

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The promotion of 49-year-old agriculture Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev from candidate to full member of the Politburo brought at least some new blood into the leadership. Gorbachev, who apparently is politically tied to Suslov, becomes one of only five leaders who hold dual membership in the party's top policymaking and executive bodies. He evidently will assume significantly expanded responsibility in agriculture as a result of the leadership's recent decision to unify agricultural management of production, processing, and industrial support of the sector.

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Despite this increase in authority, Gorbachev will probably require some seasoning and broadening before his elders would consider him a serious candidate for the highest party post. Agriculture has been the graveyard of many a political career in the Soviet Union. Gorbachev's prospects for advancement will be limited unless he is able to expand his portfolio further. His age may actually handicap him in the current gerontocracy.

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[redacted] a portrait of Gorbachev displayed during the Bolshevik Revolution celebrations in November had been altered to give him an older appearance, suggesting that his Politburo seniors find his relative youth embarrassing.

The ability of senior Party Secretary Andrey Kirilenko to mount a challenge to Brezhnev, should he be so inclined, probably has suffered as a result of Kosygin's departure. In the late 1970s, when Brezhnev seemed wary of Kirilenko's growing influence and began promoting Party Secretary Konstantin Chernenko as an apparent counterweight, Kirilenko and Kosygin drew closer on issues that had previously divided them. In particular, whereas Kosygin in earlier years had associated himself with the interests of light industry and Kirilenko with heavy industry, both men had begun to favor more balanced development than previously. With Kosygin's retirement, the potential threat that such a formidable alliance might represent to Brezhnev was eliminated.

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Shake-up in the Government

Kosygin's resignation provided the impetus for the most extensive changes in the Council of Ministers in 15 years. In the process, several relatively young men--some with demonstrable ties to Brezhnev--have moved into positions of importance in the Council of Ministers, which under Kosygin had become a preserve for septuagenarians. [REDACTED]

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Although both Tikhonov and Arkhipov are in their seventies, at the deputy premier level several younger men have been promoted. The average age of the five new deputy premiers (out of thirteen) is under 60. There are also twelve new ministers or chairmen of state committees, most of whom are younger than the men they replaced. The Council of Ministers, which had become a progressively older body since 1952, has thus been somewhat rejuvenated. [REDACTED]

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While these personnel changes have cleared out some deadwood, continuity in promotions has largely been preserved. Most of the new ministers were first deputy or deputy ministers. Three of the new deputy premiers were ministers with specific technical expertise, although the other two new men are party officials with career ties to Brezhnev. [REDACTED]

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Toward the Congress

The cycle of party congresses of the union republics, preparatory to the opening of the 26th Congress, began on schedule in mid-January and will continue until mid-February. These meetings provide the final opportunity for promotions and demotions at the republic level before the election of the new CPSU Central Committee at the end of the congress. The regional party conferences, which are just ending, have produced very little turnover in key positions. In general, the number of changes in jobs that merit Central Committee membership has been extremely limited during the five years since the last congress. As a result, the new Central Committee will probably contain a higher percentage of returnees from the previous Central Committee than ever before. Only in the Council of Ministers have personnel changes taken place that will significantly affect the composition of the Central Committee. [REDACTED]

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Nor is there reason to expect far-reaching change in the Politburo itself. Arkhipov may be promoted to the body, and there is always the possibility that someone will notice that Arvid Pelshe has passed retirement age. But Arkhipov has no political future beyond Brezhnev, and Pelshe is in the never-will-be-missed category. Nothing in Brezhnev's December birthday speech suggested that he himself is contemplating retirement. He promised to devote his energy to the tasks confronting the party "in the years ahead."

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The one force for change that Brezhnev cannot ignore is the passage of time and the inevitable aging of old warriors. Death could claim another leader at any time. Defense Minister Ustinov's uncertain health perhaps makes him the prime candidate for the next niche in the Kremlin wall, but Brezhnev's health remains precarious as well, and he faces several winter months--the time when he is most vulnerable to illness.

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Economic Affairs

As the USSR begins a new Five-Year Plan period, Soviet leaders appear to have a realistic picture of economic problems in the 1980s. They see a convergence of constraints that defy easy solution--relatively new ones such as raw material scarcities, a manpower shortage, the slowdown in capital formation, and smaller growth in consumer welfare, as well as old ones such as lagging agricultural and transportation sectors and poor organization and management. Defense spending is acknowledged as an added burden. Moreover, they realize that gains in productivity have not been large enough to counter the slowdown in input growth, resulting in a continuing slide in economic growth.

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Soviet leaders know they must shift to a strategy of intensive growth--the more efficient use of inputs--and are alarmed that the economy is not making this transition successfully. Their public statements indicate particular anxiety over the energy crunch, the slow pace of economic reform, and the effect on worker productivity of lowered expectations. An examination of Soviet words and actions on individual problem areas reveals that a quick turnaround in fortunes is not expected. The regime appears to believe that there are no panaceas, only palliatives.

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