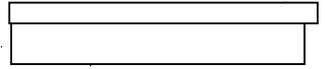




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Konstantin Chernenko: His Role in the Brezhnev Succession

An Intelligence Assessment

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PA 80-10250
June 1980

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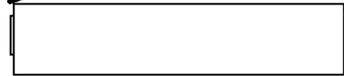
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The author of this paper is [redacted], Office of Political
Analysis. Comments and queries are welcome and
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[redacted] OPA, on
[redacted]

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USSR and Eastern Europe. [redacted]

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**Konstantin Chernenko:
His Role in the
Brezhnev Succession**



Key Judgments

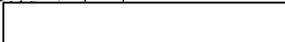
The political rise of Brezhnev's former aide and close confidant, Konstantin Chernenko, into the upper ranks of the leadership has been spectacular. After 10 years working behind the scenes as the leadership's top administrative officer, Chernenko was promoted three times between April 1976 and November 1978. During the process he became one of four in the Soviet hierarchy—Brezhnev, Andrey Kirilenko, and Mikhail Suslov are the others—who are both party secretaries and full members of the Politburo, the USSR's top policymaking body.

Brezhnev has given the 68-year-old bureaucrat many opportunities to improve his chances of becoming the next General Secretary. Although these efforts have met with mixed success, Chernenko remains a potential candidate to succeed Brezhnev.

Chernenko probably owes his rapid advance to Brezhnev's growing reliance on him, particularly when strains seem to have developed between Brezhnev and those who once had been his closest allies—namely, Kirilenko and Brezhnev's Ukrainian colleague, Vladimir Shcherbitskiy. The evidence suggests that at the root of this tension was Brezhnev's concern that his own political position might be threatened by the ambitions of these Politburo allies.

As Brezhnev's right-hand man on the party Secretariat, Kirilenko was able steadily to widen his own base of support within the party elite and, as Brezhnev's health became increasingly uncertain and his colleagues began to look beyond him, he was able to strengthen his claim as Brezhnev's heir presumptive. At some point Brezhnev probably realized that if he did not have a candidate of his own to counter Kirilenko, he would not just lose influence over the succession process, but encourage its early implementation.

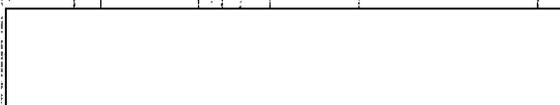
Once Chernenko acquired Politburo status in addition to his membership on the party Secretariat, he was in a strategic position to rival Kirilenko; signs of some slippage in the latter's standing were almost immediately evident in late 1978. In this respect, Chernenko's rise effectively helped to stabilize Brezhnev's political position and to check the drift of support to Kirilenko.



Brezhnev, however, does not seem to have made much progress in establishing Chernenko as heir apparent. In the final analysis, Chernenko's chance of success will depend on Brezhnev's ability and willingness to help Chernenko extend his authority throughout the vast party bureaucracy and to broaden his base of political support. This has always been Kirilenko's strength. It was only toward the end of 1979 that there was some evidence that Chernenko might have assumed significant new executive responsibilities in party affairs.

The invasion of Afghanistan, however, appears to have altered the Soviet political landscape. Brezhnev's firm public support of the Afghan incursion seems to have left Chernenko, the most stalwart supporter in the leadership of Brezhnev's policy of improved relations with the United States, out on a limb. While Chernenko may hope to become a focal point for a more moderate position on Afghanistan, such a position is not likely to prevail in the immediate future.

Chernenko could still emerge as a compromise candidate. If the Politburo cannot agree on who the next General Secretary should be, Chernenko might be perceived as the least threatening to the political fortunes of the principal contenders. Chernenko's biggest drawback is that the primary source of his current power and influence—Brezhnev—may no longer be on the scene when the selection process occurs.



Konstanin Chernenko: His Role in the Brezhnev Succession

Background: The Making of an Executive Officer

Early Associations With Brezhnev

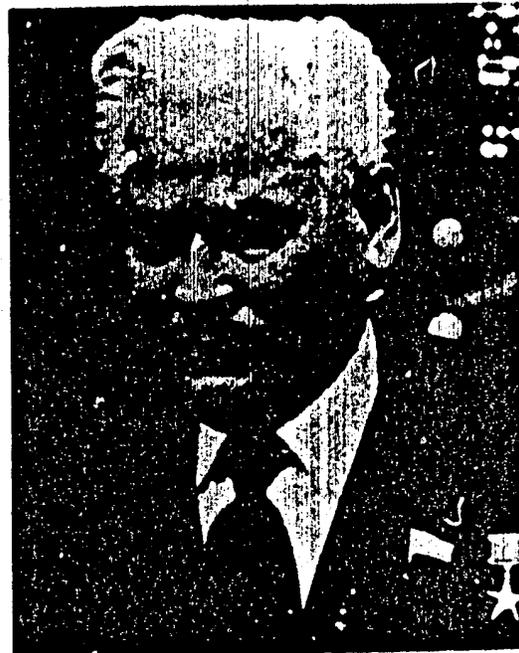
Chernenko first came in contact with Brezhnev in the early 1950s in the Moldavian Republic. Brezhnev headed the republic party organization and Chernenko was head of the propaganda and agitation department. Chernenko had held a series of regional party posts in the Russian Republic before going to Moldavia. From then on his career was closely tied to Brezhnev's.

Chernenko was transferred to the Central Committee apparatus in Moscow in 1956, the same year that Brezhnev returned to the Secretariat from an assignment in Kazakhstan. In 1960, when Brezhnev was appointed to the position of Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet (President), Chernenko was appointed chief of the Presidium's secretariat. In this position he served for four years as Brezhnev's executive aid.

In July 1965, after Brezhnev replaced Nikita Khrushchev as party First Secretary, Chernenko became head of the Central Committee's General Department. The department oversees the handling of all communications and correspondence generated by the Politburo, the party Secretariat, and other leadership bodies. One of its chief responsibilities is the shepherding of memoranda, draft speeches, and other important documents undergoing coordination in the party's decisionmaking machinery. The department also performs a number of other sensitive functions including the processing of citizens' complaints to top party officials and maintaining archival material.

Manager of the Paper Flow

As supervisor of the General Department, Chernenko essentially functions as the leadership's top executive officer. He is responsible for organizing the weekly meeting of the Politburo—the Soviet Union's top policymaking body—and is the authority on procedural aspects of the decisionmaking process. Even after



Konstantin Chernenko

his elevation to the top party bodies he continued to head the department. For instance, at a Supreme Soviet session in December 1977, soon after he became a candidate member of the Politburo, he was observed making sure that certain papers circulated only among the full members of the Politburo present at the session. He was listed as a "department head" in a party handbook as recently as 1979.

In a system where access to information is an important element of power, Chernenko's position clearly is of considerable influence and importance. According to [redacted] Chernenko has considerable discretion in routing documents, and thus can, to some extent, indirectly influence policy decisions.

[redacted] claim, for instance, that on occasion Chernenko has deliberately slowed down the decision process as a means of burying proposals that Brezhnev opposed. [redacted]

Evidence of blatant partisanship by Chernenko in Brezhnev's behalf has been scant, however, and there have been many contrary indications of scrupulous attention to collegial procedures. Even though Chernenko's relationship to Brezhnev is close, he has not served strictly as a personal aide; his department is at the service of the entire leadership. Chernenko probably could not have held such a sensitive post so long had he not fulfilled his executive duties in a competent and generally impartial way. Although he has not impressed most foreign observers, he has been described by one [redacted] Soviet [redacted] as a dynamic and intelligent administrator, capable of grasping new ideas. [redacted]

Chernenko's Ascendancy, 1975-78

An Ailing Brezhnev Leans on Chernenko

Chernenko's rapid political rise began after Brezhnev's first extended illness during the winter of 1974-75. Fragmentary evidence suggests that it was Brezhnev's growing reliance on Chernenko during this period that accounts for his sudden emergence into national prominence after 10 years in the back rooms. From late December 1974 through April 1975 Brezhnev made few public appearances and was evidently hospitalized for varying periods of time. The full nature of his illness is not known, but it may have been partly political. Criticism of Brezhnev's policies was reportedly voiced at the December 1974 Central Committee plenum. [redacted]

For a period of time afterward, Brezhnev seemed to isolate himself somewhat from political life. He evidently attended few of the weekly Politburo meetings held in the first three and a half months of 1975, and he began to use Chernenko as an intermediary with his Politburo colleagues. Brezhnev's deteriorating health has probably made it difficult for him to conduct business with his colleagues in the same personal informal manner that previously marked his



Brezhnev, Gromyko, and Chernenko at Helsinki meeting [redacted]

style of leadership. This has contributed to the introduction of more bureaucratic procedures; Chernenko's authority has grown correspondingly in recent years. [redacted]

Chernenko first gained public prominence in July 1975 when he accompanied Brezhnev to the Helsinki summit meeting culminating the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE). This was followed by additional forays into the foreign policy field. Brezhnev appeared to be not only relying on Chernenko, but to be looking for new ways to give him broader experience and thus to enhance his leadership credentials. [redacted]

The following March, Chernenko was awarded the Order of Lenin "for services to the party and state." The award, unrelated to any anniversary or event, was announced just days before Chernenko was elevated to the party Secretariat at the conclusion of the 25th Party Congress and appears to have been an effort by Brezhnev to guarantee support for Chernenko's promotion. Brezhnev subsequently presented the order to Chernenko personally, rather than leaving that function to President Podgornyy, as protocol dictated. Brezhnev's gesture publicly conveyed his personal regard for Chernenko in a way few actions could. [redacted]

Checks and Balances Within the Leadership

The importance that Brezhnev seems to have attached to advancing Chernenko into the top ranks of the leadership is understandable in light of the delicate balance that has existed in the leadership since the time of the 25th Party Congress in early 1976. Despite Brezhnev's ever-growing prestige and his steady acquisition of the trappings of power, he has not always been able to translate this authority into greater power to dictate personnel actions.

Indeed, there has been a far greater degree of compromise in leadership appointments over the past few years than is evident on the surface. Brezhnev's majority in the Politburo, in terms of solid political support, continues to be narrow and fluid. Brezhnev has had to exercise great political skill to maintain this majority; he appears to have been assisted in this task by a measure of good luck and by the general political standoff in the leadership. Brezhnev's senior colleagues apparently believe that their own individual interests are best served by the maintenance of the status quo, and they are therefore just as reluctant to see any younger challenger threaten Brezhnev as they are to allow Brezhnev himself to gain total political control.

Chernenko's promotion to the Secretariat came at a time when Brezhnev's margin of political support was narrow, especially within the Secretariat. At that time Brezhnev had to contend with three powerful secretaries who were full members of the Politburo; Mikhail Suslov, Fedor Kulakov, and Andrey Kirilenko. As the principal guardian of collectivity, Suslov had long acted as a counterweight to Brezhnev in the leadership; Suslov's role, however, was a balancing one. Numerous reports suggest that he has supported moves to enhance Brezhnev's authority while at the same time giving aid and comfort to those younger leaders seeking to push Brezhnev into retirement.

Kulakov's allegiance to Brezhnev also seems to have been ambiguous. Although he had worked closely with Brezhnev on agricultural matters for years, rumors before and after the 25th Party Congress linked him with efforts to force Brezhnev out. (In at least one

instance, Kulakov is said to have had Suslov's blessing.) In any event, signs of discord between Brezhnev and Kulakov were clearly visible by 1978. Kirilenko was the only senior secretary who could fairly be described as a member of Brezhnev's political machine.

Chernenko's appointment to the party Secretariat at the 25th Party Congress also occurred within the context of continued careful balancing among various Politburo groupings with no appreciable increase in Brezhnev's strength. Brezhnev's success in promoting Chernenko was offset by the appointment to the Secretariat of Mikhail Zimyanin, former *Pravda* editor and a presumed Suslov ally. The same kind of pairing was evident in the addition to the Politburo of party Secretary Ustinov and Leningrad party boss Grigoriy Romanov. Although Ustinov had had a close and mutually supportive working relationship with Brezhnev, he also had long worked closely with Kosygin and other independents. Romanov, while he has backed Brezhnev on certain issues, seems politically and ideologically closer to Suslov. Furthermore, Romanov's elevation put him in direct rivalry for the succession with Politburo member Vladimir Shcherbiatskiy, who was thought at the time to be Brezhnev's Ukrainian protege.

Chernenko's elevation as one of 10 secretaries thus brought no immediate benefit to Brezhnev in dealing with the senior independents in the Secretariat, nor did it seem to result in any major expansion of Chernenko's responsibilities. Nonetheless, it placed a trusted Brezhnev ally on the first rung of the leadership ladder. Chernenko continued, as he always had, to operate largely behind the scenes. As a result of his enhanced political standing, the General Department evidently gained in prestige. Articles that he wrote in the next year suggest that he had begun to deal more broadly with party management questions—not only questions of management technique but how better to ensure the fulfillment of party decisions. The need to pay more attention to rank-and-file complaints and suggestions expressed in letters to the Central Committee was an ever-present theme that reflected one of the responsibilities of his department.

Senior Politburo members
Kosygin, Brezhnev, Suslov, and
Kirilenko



Chernenko also continued to gain broader experience in the foreign policy field. He wrote several articles on the Helsinki meeting in support of Brezhnev's policies, and in the summer of 1976 began occasionally appearing at Brezhnev's annual summer meetings with East European leaders in the Crimea. Brezhnev's quiet grooming of Chernenko paid off when strains began to develop in Brezhnev's relationship with those who had long formed the mainstays of his political support—Kirilenko and Shcherbitskiy. [redacted]

Succession Politics

Brezhnev Cools Toward Kirilenko

Evidence indicates that Kirilenko was long a loyal ally of Brezhnev and, at least outwardly, remains so to this day. He has never been linked [redacted] with any grouping challenging Brezhnev and he has been consistently portrayed as a promoter of Brezhnev's authority. By working to inflate Brezhnev's position, however, Kirilenko has steadily increased his own political standing and furthered his own claim to inherit Brezhnev's mantle. Many [redacted] have called attention to Kirilenko's political ambitions.

[redacted]

As Brezhnev increasingly concentrated his energies on foreign policy questions during the 1970s, Kirilenko's influence in the party bureaucracy grew. The appointment of Dmitriy Ustinov as Minister of Defense in April 1976, together with the assumption in October of Ustinov's former responsibilities within the party Secretariat by Kirilenko's protege Yakov Ryabov, marked a major increase in Kirilenko's power base. In September, even before Ryabov's appointment, a

[redacted] asserted that Brezhnev was becoming fearful of Kirilenko's ambitions. [redacted]

Despite his reported suspicions, Brezhnev probably felt compelled to back Ryabov, Kirilenko's choice, because of increased pressure from Suslov and Kulakov among others. This was a politically troubled period, marked by sporadic unrest over food shortages and increased rumors of maneuvering with the leadership against Brezhnev, who thus needed Kirilenko's support. Kirilenko, for his part, reportedly helped organize an outpouring of praise for Brezhnev on his 70th birthday in December 1976 which, according to one Soviet [redacted] was carefully orchestrated to convey the

message to the party elite that the Brezhnev camp was fully in charge. Kirilenko's backing was also reported to have been invaluable in bringing off the ouster of President Podgornyy in May 1977 and Brezhnev's assumption of the post of chief of state in June. Cynical

[redacted] were prompted to comment that Kirilenko was trying to push Brezhnev up and out. While probably an exaggeration, comments began to be voiced that Kirilenko was now the "real power" in Moscow. [redacted]

At some point, Brezhnev probably felt that he could no longer be certain that Kirilenko would fail should he be tempted to make a bid for the top job. Brezhnev's apparent dependence on Kirilenko, the absence of a clear case against him, and the lack of means to undercut his position readily may very well have made Brezhnev feel somewhat vulnerable. Although Brezhnev could count on the built-in rivalry between Kirilenko and Suslov, the latter's advanced age and political independence made him a weak reed to lean on. [redacted]

Shcherbitskiy Wins, Then Loses Favor

Following Podgornyy's ouster, rumors circulated that Ukrainian party boss Vladimir Shcherbitskiy, described by one Brezhnev aide as being "like a son" to Brezhnev, was soon to be transferred to a post in Moscow. This was not the first time that such rumors had made the rounds, but this time they had a greater ring of authority. With Podgornyy's departure the Ukrainians were left with no Moscow-based representatives on the Politburo, a strong argument in favor of Shcherbitskiy's transfer to Moscow. The new post of First Deputy Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, which was created in June to provide the new President, Brezhnev, with an assistant, was viewed in Kiev as a possible slot for Shcherbitskiy. It would have given him needed experience at the national level and a good start in the succession race. [redacted]

There were reports at the same time that the other "young" member of the Politburo, Leningrad party boss Romanov, also was slated to assume a position in Moscow. Indeed, it is possible that Romanov's candidacy was under consideration, either in opposition to or



Vladimir Shcherbitskiy [redacted]

as a counterbalance to a move planned for Shcherbitskiy. The evidence suggests that if Brezhnev was interested in a trade-off, it was only to gain Shcherbitskiy's transfer to Moscow. Several days before the October 1977 Central Committee plenum and Supreme Soviet session, a ceremony was held in the Kremlin to present Shcherbitskiy with the Order of Lenin, which had previously been awarded to him for harvest successes in the Ukraine. In the presence of all other top leaders, Brezhnev lavishly praised Shcherbitskiy's leadership abilities and pointedly called attention to their work together in the early days in Dnepropetrovsk. Some [redacted] interpreted this as a sign that Shcherbitskiy's day had arrived. [redacted]

The plenum came and went, however, without any change in either Shcherbitskiy's or Romanov's status. The leadership evidently had sought and taken the least disruptive course. The 76-year-old First Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Vasily Kuznetsov, was named Brezhnev's deputy in the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, thus effectively blocking a position that could have been advantageous to one of the younger succession hopefuls, particularly one who had

Brezhnev's blessings. What little evidence there is regarding Kuznetsov's political ties suggests a link to Kosygin. Kuznetsov was also made a candidate member of the Politburo at that time. Brezhnev was able, however, to win the elevation of Chernenko to candidate membership on the Politburo. Because candidate members do not have voting privileges, this may not have been a particularly difficult compromise to engineer, but it did move Chernenko one step closer to the innermost circle of the leadership. []

According to [] in [] Brezhnev had pushed for Shcherbitskiy's transfer to Moscow but had backed down in the face of opposition. It can be assumed that all independent members of the leadership and any succession hopeful would have objected. In addition, Brezhnev himself may have been somewhat half-hearted in Shcherbitskiy's behalf, fearing that old ties between Kirilenko and Shcherbitskiy, formed when the two worked together in the Ukraine, might outweigh Shcherbitskiy's loyalty to Brezhnev. []

In any case, relations between Brezhnev and Shcherbitskiy seemed to deteriorate following the plenum. Shcherbitskiy avoided all but perfunctory reference to Brezhnev in his first speech on returning from Moscow to Kiev, and the following spring he began to voice reservations about detente. If he had harbored these reservations all along, he had kept them to himself. He now probably realized that he could no longer count on Brezhnev's patronage and would have to look to other constituencies for political support. For Brezhnev's part, when in July he finally got around to presenting Shcherbitskiy with an award honoring his 60th birthday (which occurred in February), he had only a few terse words to say—a sharp contrast with his extravagant praise only nine months earlier []

The outcome of the October 1977 plenum appeared not only to have soured relations between Shcherbitskiy and Brezhnev, but to have convinced other hopefuls in the leadership that Brezhnev's control of the succession process was marginal. Such a perception could only further strengthen Kirilenko's position; indeed, the assumption began to take hold among the party elite that Kirilenko would automatically succeed Brezhnev when the latter stepped down. []



Mazurov and Kirilenko at industrial exhibition []

The "Juniors" Assert Themselves, But Brezhnev Makes His Move

Brezhnev's political problems were compounded during the winter of 1977-78 by personal illness and by growing strains in the economy. The December meeting of the Central Committee devoted to the next year's economic plan and the budget was reportedly stormy. Brezhnev attended the plenum but, according to one account, was too ill to give his report, which Kirilenko read for him. Brezhnev was absent from the subsequent Supreme Soviet session and was out of sight with a number of health problems until early February 1978. []

The December plenum apparently formed special commissions to investigate aspects of the economic problem. Kirilenko reportedly was named to head one commission, with First Deputy Premier Kirill Mazurov as his deputy. A separate agricultural commission, whose recommendations were approved at a later July plenum, probably was set up at the same time; party Secretary Kulakov would have been heavily engaged in its work. []

During early 1978 Kirilenko and Mazurov were unusually active in economic affairs, giving credence to the report of their involvement in a special commission. Both addressed a Council of Ministers meeting in January—the first time Kosygin had been absent from such an affair in many years. And although Kirilenko had attended meetings of the Council before, he had never addressed one. Mazurov was particularly active, addressing another meeting of the Council of Ministers in July.

Mazurov, a political opponent of Brezhnev, had been a forceful advocate of consumer interests at home and an assertive policy abroad. He reportedly lost out in a fight to give the development of consumer goods priority in the 1976-80 five-year plan, and he had not had an article or speech published—or even had ever been reported to have given a speech—in more than a year. His last published article—a kind of swan song in defense of the consumer—appeared in the October 1976 issue of *Kommunist*. His activity in early 1978 thus marked something of a comeback, although a brief one.

Kulakov was also prominent during this period and was the recipient of unusually high honors on his birthday in February 1978—honors usually reserved for only the most senior members of the leadership. Yet it was clear from Brezhnev's remarks at the presentation ceremony in February that he did not share his colleagues' high regard for Kulakov. In what appeared to be a slap at Kulakov's political ambitions, Brezhnev rather pointedly stressed Kulakov's lifelong concentration on agriculture, calling attention to chronic problems in this area in a way that suggested Kulakov should stick to his work.

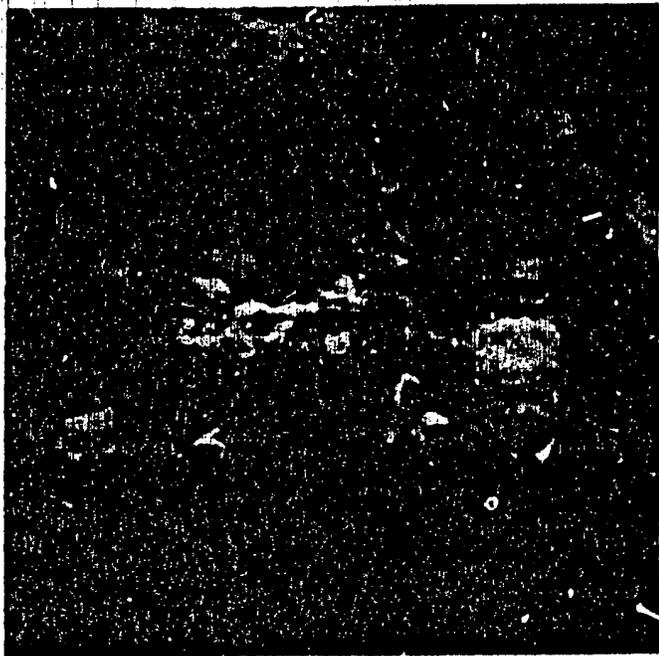
By late February Brezhnev had recovered from his illness and set out to regain the political initiative lost during the winter. His strategy appears to have relied heavily on efforts to wrap himself in a cloak of military authority. At the end of February, Brezhnev received the Order of Victory—the only civilian recipient of this order since Stalin—and a month later set off with Defense Minister Ustinov on an arduous two-week trip along the trans-Siberian railroad, visiting military units and industrial sites on the way. The trip was

largely successful in projecting the image of a vigorous leader and talks of a post-Brezhnev era, which had become common, ceased.

The death of Kulakov in July 1978 was, from Brezhnev's point of view, fortuitous. It had been clear from Brezhnev's veiled criticism of Kulakov—not only at the birthday award ceremony but in his speech at the July plenum on agriculture just days before Kulakov died—that relations between the two were strained. At the plenum Brezhnev singled out for criticism both Kulakov's political bailiwick of Penza and the Central Committee's Agricultural Department, which Kulakov supervised. Despite the criticism, however, Kulakov was active until his death, and there was even some evidence that he was taking on additional responsibilities in the light industry field.

The official handling of Kulakov's funeral highlighted a problem Brezhnev seemed to be facing—the possibility of growing cohesion within the ranks of the “second-string” leaders. Two provincially based leaders, Masharov and Romanov, made the effort to be on hand for the funeral, although Brezhnev and the two other senior leaders, Kosygin and Suslov failed to interrupt their vacations to attend. Kirilenko added an unusually warm personal touch to the funeral eulogy, and Mazurov's consolation of the grieving Kulakov family, as shown on Moscow television, suggested a particularly close relationship. All that would have been needed to complete the picture was the presence of Shcherbitskiy. By this time Brezhnev must have become aware that if he was to stem the flow of power to Kirilenko, he would have to advance to a position of power a trusted political ally of his own.

Kulakov's death, leaving as it did a political vacancy in the line of succession after Kirilenko, provided such an opportunity for Brezhnev. Rumors again circulated that Romanov or Shcherbitskiy might be transferred to Moscow, but their continued expressions of reservations concerning detente seemed enough to assure Brezhnev's opposition. Chernenko was clearly established as Brezhnev's favorite when he accompanied



Mazurov and Kirilenko at Kulakov funeral

Brezhnev on a ceremonial trip to Azerbaydzhan in October. During the trip Chernenko was given unprecedented media billing, almost as Brezhnev's co-equal—a sign that the party elite undoubtedly interpreted as indicative of Brezhnev's special regard for Chernenko. The event foreshadowed Chernenko's promotion to full membership in the Politburo at a party plenum a month later. []

The Politics of the November Plenum

Personnel actions taken at the November 1978 plenum marked significant gains for Brezhnev. Not only was Chernenko promoted from a candidate to a full member of the Politburo, but Mazurov was dropped. This represented a double gain for Brezhnev in terms of improving his margin of support. In addition, Brezhnev's old crony from Dnepropetrovsk, Nikolay Tikhonov, who with Mazurov's departure became Kosygin's leading deputy, was named a candidate member of the Politburo. []

Beneficial as these changes were to Brezhnev, however, they were not all the result of his political clout. Continuing restraints on his power were evident in some of the appointments made, and compromise and

good luck again played their part. As in the case of Vasilii Kuznetsov's earlier elevation, Tikhonov probably would not have been selected to replace Mazurov had he not been 73 years old or in some other regard disqualified for more than an interim role in the succession. As it was, he had been passed over once for promotion to the Politburo, suggesting opposition to the move. []

Furthermore, Mazurov probably did what the official announcement said: "resigned for reasons of health and at his own request." Official announcements of this sort generally stay as close to the truth as is politically realistic. []

[] Because he faced a bleak political future as long as Brezhnev was on the scene, he may have decided not to deplete his health in a futile political struggle. []

Finally, the transfer of the Stavropol Kray party boss, Mikhail Gorbachev, to the party Secretariat to take over Kulakov's former responsibilities for overseeing the agricultural sector was, according to [] a reflection of Suslov's influence. Suslov once worked as party Secretary in Stavropol, and other evidence has suggested that he retains patronage over major appointments in that region. []

Suslov's support probably was necessary to Brezhnev's success in advancing Chernenko, and the Gorbachev appointment may have been the price that Brezhnev had to pay. In any event, since Suslov probably would have wanted to support a move that stood to weaken Kirilenko's position and did not seem to have a viable candidate of his own at that moment, he probably found it expedient to go along with Chernenko's elevation. []

Brezhnev's success in doing for Chernenko what he had evidently earlier failed to do for Shcherbitskiy may also have been helped by a general perception among the top leaders that Chernenko was the least threatening of all possible choices because he had served almost entirely in staff positions and lacked a power base. Chernenko's increasingly indispensable role in the



Brezhnev and Chernenko with Bulgarian leaders

smooth running of the Politburo—something all of its members may have felt they benefited from—may also have helped Chernenko gain membership on the Politburo. [redacted]

The elevation of Chernenko greatly enhanced the security of Brezhnev's political position, making it possible for him to continue functioning in office despite failing health. It gave a trusted associate clout to speak and act in Brezhnev's name, and in one stroke it seemed to neutralize a number of potentially dangerous political problems. It brought an end, at least for a while, to the maneuvering of the more ambitious junior members of the leadership with whom Brezhnev seemed increasingly at odds. Shcherbitskiy is reported by [redacted] to have been extremely bitter over the elevation of Chernenko, feeling that it put Chernenko in a position to advance his own political interests. As the year came to an end, Romanov became bogged down in local scandals—one involving the alleged extravagance of his daughter's wedding and the subsequent defacement of statues by vandals in the garden of the Summer Palace in Leningrad. According to [redacted] Brezhnev has actively sought to keep Romanov's embarrassments alive. [redacted]

More important, Chernenko's elevation to the Politburo, and thus to the rank of a Senior Secretary, made it possible for Brezhnev to undercut Kirilenko's grow-

ing strength. Signs of softness in Kirilenko's protocol ranking began to show in the Supreme Soviet election campaign beginning in late December 1978. Whereas others, including Chernenko, were referred to as both party and state leaders, Kirilenko was cited only as a party leader. The abrupt demotion of Kirilenko's protege, Yakov Ryabov, the following spring clearly conveyed the message that no longer was Kirilenko's position unassailable or his ascension to the top party post inevitable. [redacted]

Chernenko's Candidacy, 1979

Brezhnev Promotes Chernenko But Kirilenko Keeps His Role

Evidence soon began to mount that Brezhnev was not content merely to use Chernenko as a counterweight to Kirilenko, but that he was bent on upsetting the existing leadership ranking by favoring Chernenko over Kirilenko. A clear instance of favoritism occurred during a working vacation trip that Brezhnev and Chernenko took to Bulgaria in January 1979. As on the earlier Baku trip, Soviet media featured Chernenko as Brezhnev's near equal. Bulgarian party boss Zhivkov added his own boost with a special dinner toast to Chernenko. The trip itself and the media treatment given Chernenko were quite obviously engineered by Brezhnev and appeared designed to convey the word that Chernenko was his intended heir. [redacted]

Despite Chernenko's obvious weakness as a candidate for the top party post, Brezhnev probably felt he had few options at that time. Chernenko's loyalty seems to have been the main consideration, given Brezhnev's continued priority concern for the security of his own position.

At the same time, Brezhnev probably was concerned about his own future reputation, particularly in the field of foreign policy. At least until the Afghan crisis, Brezhnev had a large political investment in detente and in improved relations with the United States. Even in the halcyon days of detente he had some reason to doubt the commitment of Kirilenko and younger succession candidates to a policy, in which they had no personal involvement or stake. He probably could not be sure that they might not be tempted to try to make Brezhnev a scapegoat in the event of a serious deterioration of relations with the United States. Brezhnev's efforts to enhance Chernenko's foreign policy experience—for example, his inclusion of Chernenko on the Soviet delegation to the US-Soviet Summit meeting in Vienna in June 1979—seemed aimed at showing that Chernenko could and would provide continuity in this area, thus ensuring that Brezhnev's good name would be protected.

A pattern of rivalry between Kirilenko and Chernenko developed that continued throughout much of 1979. Various status symbols and other public indicators of prestige suggested, however, that neither gained decisive advantage. Although Chernenko benefited from the additional exposure that he began to receive and his candidacy gradually took on a measure of credibility, it soon became evident that Brezhnev's endorsement, which seemed implicit in his public treatment of Chernenko, would not automatically ensure him a smooth or rapid rise to the top.

After the high point of the Bulgarian trip in January, some of the momentum seemed to go out of Chernenko's campaign. His inexperience showed in public appearances, and signs of resistance to his candidacy emerged. Brezhnev was able to arrange Chernenko's inclusion in the Soviet delegation to the Vienna summit, but only in a support capacity. Chernenko played no role in the substantive talks and

seemed to command little respect from the two other Politburo members on the delegation, Defense Minister Ustinov and Foreign Minister Gromyko.

At the same time, there was growing evidence that Kirilenko had been able to protect his political position from deteriorating further after the demotion of his protege, Ryabov. Despite this setback, Kirilenko continued to carry out the same duties as before and, as in summers past, remained in Moscow to deputize for Brezhnev while the latter was on vacation in the south.

As 1979 wore to an end, the public rivalry between Kirilenko and Chernenko settled into a rut, with any gain in prestige by one quickly matched by some gain for the other. For instance, Chernenko received a boost when he accompanied Brezhnev to East Germany in early October and was given an award by party chief Honecker, who called him one of Brezhnev's "close comrades in arms." (*Pravda* further inflated Chernenko's status, characterizing him as Brezhnev's "closest comrade in arms.") Yet it was Kirilenko who was given the honor for the second time of delivering the October Revolution anniversary address, despite the fact that other Politburo members—including Chernenko—had never given the speech before.

Chernenko Seeks a Power Base

As has been shown, Brezhnev can to a certain extent arrange events to give Chernenko public exposure and manipulate the media to enhance his status. In the final analysis, however, Chernenko's chances of succeeding Brezhnev in the top party post will depend heavily on the extent to which he has been able to extend his authority throughout the vast party bureaucracy, at both the national and the regional level, and to broaden his base of political support. This has always been Kirilenko's strength. Recently Chernenko has made some gains in this respect, but his overall progress has been quite slow.

Domestic Affairs. Following Chernenko's elevation to full membership in the Politburo in November 1978, there were reports that he would be assigned important new responsibilities in the domestic sphere. A Soviet



East German party boss Honecker presents Chernenko with medal

[redacted] reported that Chernenko was named to head a major effort to get the party and government officials at the middle and lower levels to carry out the leadership's decisions—an assignment that implied dissatisfaction with the way Kirilenko was supervising economic management through the party Secretariat. Moreover, another Soviet [redacted] claimed that Chernenko was taking over Kirilenko's function of maintaining ties between the Central Committee and regional party leaders around the country. ([redacted])

Yet, little evidence emerged to support these reports. There were no subsequent public signs that Chernenko had added any significant new executive activities to his portfolio, and a Soviet [redacted] official told a [redacted] in April 1979 that Chernenko's responsibilities were unchanged—that is, overseeing the Central Committee's General Department and handling the agenda and briefing material for the Politburo. As in the past, Chernenko has continued to accompany Brezhnev on his vacations—

[redacted] he was with Brezhnev, for example, at his Black Sea resort during a vacation in February 1979 and again for two months during the summer. [redacted]

With Brezhnev's assistance, Chernenko clearly has been seeking to expand his authority into key areas of party organization and personnel work. A collection of documents on party cadre policy, edited by Chernenko, appeared in the summer of 1979. Chernenko's supervision of the General Department, which serves as the party archives, has permitted him to edit numerous collections of documents and thus to pose as an authority on various subjects. On this occasion, however, he received an unusual boost when a review in *Pravda* described the collection as a "definitive work in the field" and a necessary "handbook for all party officials at every level." This collection also made it possible for the October 1979 issue of the party journal *Partiynaya zhizn'* to carry Chernenko on its reading list of recommended writers on cadre matters, along with Lenin and Brezhnev. Despite such promotional efforts, however, there is no firm evidence that Chernenko has gained significant authority over cadre assignments. [redacted]



Chernenko in Crimea with Brezhnev and Polish leader Gierek

One bureaucratic gain for Chernenko was the upgrading in April 1979 of the General Department's Letters Sector into a new Central Committee Letters Department. The change was a pedestrian one, however; it did not directly encroach on the institutional or functional territory of any of Chernenko's colleagues and did not add measurably to Chernenko's own authority. □

Nonetheless, with the creation of the new department, a general drive against bureaucratism—with which Chernenko had been long associated—developed into a full-fledged campaign for improved handling of letters and complaints. In the process, Chernenko's success in developing a political base in at least one republic was demonstrated in 1979, when he arranged for a former official from Kirgizia to become head of the Central Committee's new Letters Department in Moscow. The republic's leaders then led the way in pushing Chernenko's letters campaign. Chernenko paid a visit to the republic in the fall to present an award, during which the Kirgiz party boss praised him as "highly regarded by all" and described Chernenko's speech as "brilliant and deeply meaningful." Kirgizia, however, is a Central Asian backwater, and Chernenko does not appear to have enough time to parlay his modest success in power-base building in Kirgizia into a nationally significant phenomenon. □

Moreover, Chernenko's success in Kirgizia only seemed to call attention to his lack of success elsewhere. An article that he wrote in September 1979 contained indications that his letters campaign had been largely ignored by all the main regional party organizations, except Kirgizia and its neighbors. Of the four republics and 17 districts Chernenko listed as having held party plenums to push the letters campaign, three of the republics and eight of the districts were Central Asian. □

Foreign Affairs. There has been the same element of illusion to Chernenko's role in foreign policy as well. Over the past three years, Chernenko has accompanied Brezhnev abroad with increasing frequency. Chernenko has been present every summer at some of Brezhnev's meetings in the Crimea with Warsaw Pact leaders and twice has represented the Soviet party at Communist party congresses in Europe. Although Chernenko has gained considerable public exposure from this experience, Brezhnev seems to have been unable to carve out for him any significant substantive foreign affairs responsibilities beyond Warsaw Pact matters. □

When Chernenko first participated in one of the Crimean meetings in the summer of 1976 following his election to the party Secretariat, it was seen as a sign that he might assume specific duties in this area—an area Brezhnev closely controlled. As General Secretary of the party, Brezhnev has primary responsibility for bilateral dealings with his Warsaw Pact counterparts. Since 1977 the Central Committee department that oversees relations with Warsaw Pact parties has been headed by Brezhnev's former staff aide, Konstantin Rusakov. []

Nonetheless, despite Chernenko's involvement in East European affairs he has never appeared in any capacity that suggested that he had been assigned any independent authority in the area. For instance, he has never substituted for Brezhnev in meetings with any East European party leader, nor has he chaired any conferences concerned with Soviet-East European affairs. []

Furthermore, he has only appeared with Brezhnev in an out-of-town setting—in the Crimea or abroad, never in Moscow. This raises the possibility that Brezhnev may justify Chernenko's presence by arguing the need for his top executive officer to maintain liaison between himself and his Politburo colleagues at home. This could explain, for example, Chernenko's appearance at the Vienna summit. []

Late 1979 Gains. Toward the end of 1979—before the final decision was taken to invade Afghanistan—some solid signs finally appeared that Chernenko might be assuming significant new executive responsibilities.

According to [] Chernenko chaired several Politburo meetings in the fall of 1979. Perhaps even more important, in mid-November Chernenko presided over Militia Day festivities, thus raising the possibility that he has now acquired the responsibility for internal security affairs that had belonged to Kirilenko's protege Ryabov. []

Brezhnev has, of course, always kept a close personal watch over the Committee for State Security (KGB), and a number of its top officials are his appointees. Chernenko himself is probably on close personal terms with at least one of these, KGB first deputy chairman

Tsvigun, who worked in the Moldavian Republic at the same time at Chernenko. The assumption of some responsibilities for overseeing the security organs would mark a major advance for Chernenko. This evidence, however, dates from before the decision to invade Afghanistan, which probably has altered the leadership picture. Since then, no further indication of Chernenko's assumption of such responsibilities has appeared. []

Changing Political and Policy Alignments

The Seniors Rally

An important factor affecting the rivalry between Kirilenko and Chernenko during 1979 was the enhanced status of the senior members of the leadership, Kosygin and Suslov in particular. This was especially noticeable following Brezhnev's illness in late February and early March. According to [] contingency plans were made to establish—in the event that Brezhnev did not recover—an interim "trotka" leadership comprised of the more senior members. Such a plan, although said to have been dropped when Brezhnev was out of danger, would have served to increase the influence of Brezhnev's senior colleagues and more firmly establish their voice in the succession process. []

Kosygin and Suslov, indeed, were notably prominent in 1979. Despite predictions of an imminent retirement, Kosygin and his entire government were reconfirmed at the first meeting of the new Supreme Soviet in April. Kosygin gradually shouldered more of the burdens of state as Brezhnev was forced to cut back his activities because of mounting physical problems—that is, until Kosygin himself fell ill in October. Suslov shared the limelight with Brezhnev at the party plenum that preceded the Supreme Soviet session in April, and he continued to exercise strong influence in party affairs in subsequent months. With this resurgence of the seniors came signs of some realignment of groupings within the leadership. []

One major feature of the realignment was a growing commonality of views among Brezhnev, Suslov, and Chernenko. As noted earlier, Suslov probably found it

Soviet leaders at Supreme Soviet meeting Front row (left to right): Chernenko, Kirilenko, Suslov, Kosygin, and Brezhnev



politically expedient to support Brezhnev at the November 1978 plenum. In any case, a gradual, mutually beneficial warming in their relations became perceptible. For example, differences that had seemed to exist between them on the crucial issue of detente, faded. This was partly because Brezhnev himself began to express less optimism concerning the future of detente as problems with the United States grew, but also because Suslov in his speeches softened his previously critical stance. □

Moreover, Suslov has given strong backing to Brezhnev's agricultural policies. In a speech in September 1979 and again in an election speech in February 1980, Suslov forcefully backed three policies directly associated with the General Secretary: high investments in the agricultural sector, development of the Non-Black Soil region, and greater assistance to the farmers' private agricultural plots. Such unusual attention to agriculture's needs on Suslov's part may have been prompted partly by a desire to bolster the position of his presumed protege, the fast-rising party Secretary for Agriculture Gorbachev. □

The most noticeable development has been the avoidance of what appeared to be a head-on collision between Suslov and Chernenko. At the November 1978 plenum Brezhnev had sharply criticized the work

of the propaganda apparatus—Suslov's area of responsibility—and announced the forming of a commission to draft a decree on ways of improving ideological indoctrination and mass propaganda work in general. Chernenko picked up on this theme in an article published the following April, stressing the need for candor and the importance of providing the public with "information" rather than "propaganda." He thus left the impression that the decree would be strongly innovative in its approach. When the decree was published several weeks later, however, any reformist language was all but buried by the familiar orthodox strictures. That Suslov had ideology firmly in hand became clear when he addressed a Central Committee conference to inaugurate the decree and addressed a followup conference in October. He used the decree primarily to justify greater ideological vigilance and indoctrination of the population. When Chernenko addressed the subject again in an article published in September, all the former bite was gone, and his remarks appeared to be largely a rehash of Suslov's ideas. □

At the same time, the conflict that had appeared to exist between Premier Kosygin and Kirilenko became less evident. This was partly because Kirilenko no longer attended meetings of the Council of Ministers

as regularly as he had in 1978 and before, leaving this watchdog assignment to junior party secretaries. Most significantly, Kosygin and Kirilenko seem to share a relatively pragmatic attitude toward economic specialists, and Kirilenko seems to have emerged as a proponent of a number of ideas that underlay Kosygin's 1965 economic reform. The first sign of this came in 1978 when the publication of a collection of Kirilenko's speeches revealed previously unpublished words of praise for the 1965 experiment. This praise was all the more significant because it came at a time when the experiment was fast losing official favor. □

More recent and stronger evidence of a rapprochement with Kosygin was provided in an article by Kirilenko in the September 1979 issue of *Partynaya Zhizn'* that was devoted to the July 1979 party-state decree on improving planning and the economic mechanism. Not only did the article establish Kirilenko as an authority on the formulation and execution of the decree, but it stressed the importance he attached to economic incentives. In doing so, Kirilenko seemed to be identifying himself with those aspects of the decree which seek to combine tighter central planning with elements of a self-regulating mechanism—innovations derived from Kosygin's 1965 reform. □

Chernenko Develops a Policy Alternative

Alternative policy orientations appeared to be evolving in the Chernenko-Kirilenko rivalry as 1979 came to an end. Although this apparent divergence may merely reflect the differing functional responsibilities of the two leaders, their public statements provide clues as to their personal views on the many problems facing the country. □

On the domestic front, Kirilenko has seemed to favor some basic changes in the way the economic system operates, while Chernenko has tended to stress nonsystemic solutions. For instance, Chernenko sees improvement in the quality of leadership at all echelons of the party and state bureaucracies as the key to bolstering the economy. Chernenko's frequent criticism of "bureaucrats" and his constant admonition that letters from the rank and file be given careful attention have given him a populist image. While he seems to have pulled back somewhat from this controversial stance, specifically in his accommodation

to the ideological decree, Chernenko still appears to be identified with a movement to introduce more "glasnost," a freer flow of information, into the public and official life of the country. □

On the foreign policy matters, Chernenko early emerged as a staunch supporter of improved relations with the West, particularly with the United States. In his election speech in February 1979, he went further than any leader other than Brezhnev in stressing the importance of the next stage in strategic arms talks (SALT III) and in calling attention to the potential economic benefits to be derived. Chernenko again forcefully defended Brezhnev's foreign policies in a speech in Frunze in August 1979. □

In contrast, Kirilenko has long had the reputation of being an ideological hardliner on foreign policy issues. In these matters he shares the outlook of Suslov and the younger, regionally based Politburo members. Kirilenko, however, seems to have avoided being drawn into a debate with Chernenko on these issues. In his speeches during 1979, Kirilenko took a middle-of-the-road stand on foreign policy, and differences with Chernenko did not stand out. □

It seemed unlikely in 1979 that divergent policy orientations on these and other issues would come into focus as long as the leadership was able to muddle along and was not forced to reexamine existing policies. The Afghan invasion in late December, however, seems to have changed this situation, bringing in its wake the possibility of a greater polarization of views within the leadership and, in the long run, perhaps, encouraging a sharper debate on foreign policy issues. □

The Afghan Adventure

Chernenko Initially Undercut

The incursion of Soviet troops into Afghanistan seems to have altered the Soviet political landscape, changing the context in which the succession process was playing itself out and, at least initially, undercutting Chernenko's position. □

Interlocking Directorate of the Soviet Leadership

PARTY		GOVERNMENT	
Full Member	Birth Election	Secretariat	Council of Ministers
Brezhnev	12/19/06 6/29/57	Brezhnev-General Secretary	Presidium of Supreme Soviet Members = •
Andropov	6/15/14 4/27/73	Chernenko-Politburo Administration	Members = •
Chernenko	9/24/11 11/27/78		• Andropov-KGB
Grishin	9/18/14 4/09/71		• Grishin
Gromyko	7/18/09 4/27/73		• Gromyko-Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Kirilenko	9/08/06 4/25/62	Kirilenko-Industry, Cadres	
Kosygin	2/21/04 5/04/60		Kosygin-Chairman
Kunayev	1/12/12 4/09/71	Kazakhstan party boss	• Kunayev
Pelshe	2/07/99 4/08/66	Party Control Committee	• Romanov
Romanov	2/07/23 3/06/76	Leningrad party boss	
Shcherbatskiy	2/17/18 4/09/71	Ukraine party boss	• Shcherbatskiy
Suslov	11/21/02 7/12/55	Suslov-Ideology, International Communism	
Tikhonov	5/14/05 11/27/79		Tikhonov-1st Dep. Chmn.
Ustinov	10/30/08 3/06/76		• Ustinov-Ministry of Defense
Candidate Member			
Aliyev	5/10/23 3/06/76	Azerbaydzhan party boss	
Demichev	1/03/18 11/01/64		• Demichev-Ministry of Culture
Gorbachev	3/02/31 11/27/79	Gorbachev-Agriculture	
Kuznetsov	2/13/01 10/03/77		Kuznetsov-1st Deputy Chairman
Masherov	2/13/18 4/08/66	Belorussian party boss	• Masherov
Ponomarev	1/17/05 5/19/72	Ponomarev-Non-ruling Communist Parties	
Rashidov	11/06/17 10/31/61	Uzbek party boss	• Rashidov
Shevardnadze	01/25/28 11/27/78	Georgian party boss	
Solomenitsev	11/07/13 11/23/71		• Solomenitsev-RSFSR Premier
Kapitonov-Cadres			
Dolgikh-Industry			
Zimyanin-Propaganda, Ideology			
Rusakov-Ruling Communist Parties			



Available evidence suggests that the decision to use military force in an attempt to salvage the Soviet political stake in Afghanistan was undertaken by the leadership with varying degrees of enthusiasm and differing motives, although most leaders probably agreed on the need for action. The initial crucial process of weighing options, however, probably did not involve more than a small group of top leaders, who seem not to have anticipated all the problems that subsequently arose. Brezhnev seems to have been involved in the planning process at all stages along the way, and publicly identified himself firmly with the venture once it was launched. Whatever his strategic goals, he almost certainly was acting partly out of domestic political considerations. []

After his October 1979 initiative to withdraw Soviet troops unilaterally from Europe failed to slow NATO modernization plans, and as prospects for ratification of SALT II faded, Brezhnev was in an increasingly exposed position. He was identified with a policy of improved relations with the United States that stood to bear little fruit and that was becoming increasingly unpopular with important elements in the leadership. He probably saw a military solution in Afghanistan as a relatively low-risk venture that would not only arrest the deterioration of the situation in Afghanistan but would mollify his hardline political critics at home. []

A number of Soviet officials have subsequently insisted—although probably overstating the case—that a group of younger and tougher leaders had long hoped for the collapse of detente, a policy they viewed as sapping Soviet resolve, and saw the Afghan invasion not only as necessary on its own merits but as a way of promoting such a collapse. Not stated, but presumably part of such a calculation, was the hope that Brezhnev's position and certainly Chernenko's might be weakened in the process. While Brezhnev's support of the move into Afghanistan may have served to outflank his critics, it left his detente policy in a shambles. Chernenko, as his most loyal spokesman on improved relations with the West, was out on a limb. []

Chernenko, Loyal Opposition?

As the Soviet incursion encountered mounting political and military problems in Afghanistan and strong reaction worldwide, reports began to circulate that

some elements within the leadership, concerned about the high costs of the venture, were beginning to have second thoughts, and from this followed the possibility that Chernenko's isolation might not be complete. []

In fact, Chernenko appeared to take the offensive in his mid-February election speech. He stuck firmly to his former defense of improved relations with the United States, and in a highly polemical vein warned his colleagues not to overreact to the West's alleged provocations. It was important to "keep a cool and calm head," he said. "The aggressive forces could very much wish us to respond in kind." Chernenko prefaced this warning with a reminder—so seemingly elementary as to be provocative—that wanting peace and progress "for ourselves," means "acknowledging other peoples' right to the same." Chernenko seemed to be directing his remarks at certain members of the leadership who—judging by the defiant rhetoric in their election speeches—seemed almost to welcome a downward turn in US-Soviet relations resulting from the Afghan crisis. []

Furthermore, Chernenko's speech suggested that he might hope to become a focal point, if Soviet efforts in Afghanistan faltered, for an eventual reassessment of Soviet policy there. Significantly Chernenko avoided any direct endorsement of the Afghan invasion in his speech. Premier Kosygin, who had been hospitalized while decisions concerning Afghanistan were being made, was the only other leader who seemed to be trying to dissociate himself from the decision. []

Chernenko's remarks—aside from their polemical tone—anticipated much of what Brezhnev said in his speech ending the election campaign. But in avoiding an endorsement of the Afghan invasion, Chernenko seemed to be trying to distance himself somewhat from his patron. It seems unlikely that Chernenko would seek to break with Brezhnev, having little independent power of his own. He might hope, however, to stake out a position that would work to his favor—and also to Brezhnev's—when and if detente with the United States got back on the track. In any event, such reservations about current Soviet foreign policies, as expressed by Chernenko and a few others, probably are tolerated by Soviet policymakers because they tend to encourage optimism in Western circles, particularly in Europe, that some policy reappraisal within the Soviet leadership is possible. []

Conclusion: Chernenko's Prospects

Chernenko's prospects as heir apparent to Brezhnev do not appear bright at present. Even if the Soviet venture into Afghanistan bogs down, a reappraisal of Soviet policy there is not likely to take place any time in the near future—nor does it necessarily follow that Chernenko's fortunes would look up as a result. As times pass, Chernenko's chances to establish his position as Brezhnev's successor will, like Kirilenko's chances, diminish. It is perhaps significant that as early as 1979 some Soviets were commenting privately that both Kirilenko and Chernenko were too old and that attention had turned to a younger group of leaders. []

If Brezhnev is indeed intent on establishing Chernenko as his heir apparent, he probably must transfer a good portion of the responsibilities of the top party post to Chernenko. That Brezhnev may have had this in mind is suggested by the rumor in 1979 that Chernenko would be named at the next party congress to a new deputy general secretary post. There was said to be opposition to this idea at the time. There seems even less likelihood that Brezhnev could engineer such a move now. Events in Afghanistan seem to have reduced his room for political maneuvering. []

In addition, the views of the other senior members of the leadership continue to weigh heavily in any succession decision. An East European [] claimed recently, for instance, that Suslov had only two interests: to maintain the status quo in ideology and to play a key role in the succession—a right, [] insisted, that everyone concedes to him. While Suslov seems to have lent some support to Chernenko's candidacy, the Afghan invasion may have strained their relationship. In any event, Suslov is likely to drop his support if and when he is able to advance a protege of his own, such as Gorbachev. It is always possible that Brezhnev might find it politically expedient to do likewise, particularly if he comes to view his ties with Chernenko as a political liability. []

Perhaps Chernenko's best chance would come in a situation of continued political stalemate when he might be viewed as an acceptable compromise candidate. His greatest asset may be that he is seen by his Politburo colleagues as a weak leader—the least threatening choice available. This was reportedly how Brezhnev was perceived by his colleagues at the time of Khrushchev's ouster and continued to be perceived long after. This reputation allowed Brezhnev to win out over his more dynamic, more obviously ambitious rivals. In the right circumstances, this could also work for Chernenko. Chernenko's biggest drawback is that the primary source of his current power and influence—Brezhnev—may no longer be on the scene when the selection process occurs. []



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