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EXECUTIVE BRIEF

**Gorbachev and the Party Congress:
Triumphant Over the Right, Deserted By the Left**

- The outcome of the 28th CPSU congress will accelerate the decline in the party's prestige and authority. Reform of the party rules and the reduction of the authority of the Politburo and Central Committee will hasten the shift in decisionmaking power away from the party to state organs.
- The departure of Yel'tsin and other important members of the Democratic Platform creates the opportunity for a more concerted reformist challenge to the CPSU. Although a blow to Gorbachev, the defections will bolster the trend toward multiparty democracy.
- Gorbachev's victory over the traditionalists at the congress has enhanced his power over the party and increased his freedom of maneuver to pursue his reform agenda.
- Gorbachev's strengthened position in the party sets the stage for new initiatives, especially in the pressing areas of economic reform and redefining the Union. It undoubtedly was a factor in his willingness to accept a unified Germany in NATO and may allow for new foreign policy initiatives.

This Executive Brief presents the findings of Intelligence Community representatives at a meeting held on 16 July 1990. It was produced by the National Intelligence Officer for the USSR and coordinated with representatives of INR, CIA, DLA, and NSA.

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Buoyed by their apparent success at the Russian Communist Party gathering in June, the traditionalists—led by Yegor Ligachev—mounted a vocal challenge to Gorbachev and his reform policies at the 28th CPSU Congress. Gorbachev's political skills, his defiant stance on the need for reform, and the apparent reluctance of the right wing to challenge his leadership directly allowed the General Secretary to solidify his hold over the CPSU and significantly reduce its ability to stand in the way of his efforts at political and economic reform.

Gorbachev Demotes the Party

Gorbachev's success in restricting the traditionalists' influence in the CPSU degrades the party's ability to serve as a counterweight to his continuing efforts to shift executive authority to the Soviet presidency.

- The expansion of the Politburo to 24 voting members, including all 15 republic party chiefs but excluding all prominent state and government figures except Gorbachev, ensures that this body in the future will play little, if any, role in the day-to-day running of the country.
- Gorbachev succeeded in securing a moderate reformer, Vladimir Ivashko, as his deputy, decisively defeating Ligachev in the process. With Ivashko in charge of an expanded Secretariat, Gorbachev will be able to devote more time to overseeing state and government affairs without worrying about an obstreperous party organization on his flank.
- The Central Committee has been substantially renovated and purged of

a number of Gorbachev's traditionalist foes, including Ligachev; the Committee's size and sharply diminished role in selecting the party leadership significantly constrain its ability to obstruct Gorbachev's programs.

Composition of the New Central Committee

The composition of the new 412-member committee is dramatically different from that of its predecessor: only 45 full members were reelected. Many of the new members are relatively unknown workers and officials.

- *The number of all-union government officials has dropped significantly.*
- *Republic and local party officials make up slightly more than 26 percent of the total.*
- *Military representation is down, from 7.5 percent in 1986 to just over 3 percent in the new committee.*
- *The number of workers almost doubled; they now comprise almost one-fourth of the committee.*

Changes in the party rules, coupled with Gorbachev's stated intent to convert the CPSU to a parliamentary party, will also limit the party's influence.

- The weakening of "democratic centralism" will over time significantly erode the party's ability to exercise control over lower party organs, a development consistent with Gorbachev's efforts to decentralize and democratize decisionmaking.
- The rejection of the *nomenklatura* system will undermine the party's

ability to control personnel appointments. That power will continue to shift to the state and government organs at all levels.

Gorbachev's restructuring of the CPSU sharply circumscribes its traditional role as a "vanguard" party exercising broad control over the administration of the USSR's political and economic affairs. Unable to push the ultratraditionalists led by Ligachev along his reformist path, he has isolated them and limited their ability to use the party against him; at the same time, he has made the party less relevant to the process of change.

These developments will move the CPSU in the direction of becoming a parliamentary party which would have to earn popular support by competing successfully with other parties. Even so, it is doubtful this will save the CPSU. The party is now viewed as increasingly ineffective by large segments of Soviet society. Gorbachev's moves will probably accelerate the decline in its prestige and authority and hasten the shift in decisionmaking authority away from the party to the state and government organs.

The Democratic Platform Bolts

Yel'tsin's dramatic resignation from the party and the subsequent withdrawal of the key Democratic Platform (DP) leaders tarnished Gorbachev's victory.

- The net effect of Yel'tsin's defection will be a further weakening of the CPSU's authority and a hastening of the shift to a multiparty democracy, a two-fold process which Gorbachev strongly endorses.

- Although we cannot project with certainty, a significant minority of the party's 19 million members may vote with their feet for the DP and other emerging political parties.
- At the same time, the differences among the various groups on the left will inhibit their ability to organize a unified opposition capable of pushing more radical reform.

Yel'tsin's role as chairman of the Russian Republic's Supreme Soviet and his departure from the party place him in a position to challenge Gorbachev.

- His decision to convene the Russian Republic's Supreme Soviet while the CPSU Congress was still in session--in a successful effort to secure the appointment of allies to key positions--indicates his growing political adroitness.
- His approach to securing the Russian Republic's independence in economic, political, and foreign affairs--while popular among large segments of the population--places him squarely at odds with Gorbachev.

Yel'tsin's defection gives him the opportunity to rally reformist elements in Soviet society into a party that can challenge the CPSU. His radical approach to reform is viewed increasingly as an alternative to Gorbachev's presently more moderate course.

- Whether Gorbachev and Yel'tsin can overcome their animosity will depend on how quickly Gorbachev moves out on reform now that he has secured his right flank.

- Although the two men may be able to reach tactical compromises on a number of reform issues, their power aspirations and the recent difficult relations between them suggest that a clash over policies may be inevitable.

Gorbachev Unbound

We believe that the evolution towards multiparty democracy, the popularity of Yel'tsin's more radical approach to reform, and Gorbachev's elimination of any significant threat to reform from the CPSU's leading conservatives will push him further to the left.

During his speech to the Congress on 10 July Gorbachev witheringly rejected the conservatives' critique of his policies and indicated his intent to pursue a reformist agenda; following his reelection as party leader, he told the party delegates they had given him a mandate for his reform program.

That Gorbachev felt less constrained by the party conservatives was revealed quickly after the conclusion of the congress.

- Ignoring a party resolution calling on the media to improve their support to the party and reject "antisocialist" ideas, Gorbachev promptly issued a presidential decree considerably expanding the borders of *glasnost*' by condemning the party's monopoly of air time and granting nonparty organizations the right to open or lease television and radio facilities.
- This decree should assist the development of a multiparty democracy by facilitating the organization of competing parties and

the propagation of their platforms.

We believe the decree on the media is a harbinger of what is likely to be a series of new policy initiatives by Gorbachev now that he has weakened the party's right wing.

- Gorbachev's early acceptance of a united Germany's membership in NATO represents a strong rejection of conservative criticism.
- Gorbachev may well be prepared to move beyond past Soviet positions in arms control and other foreign policy issue areas. He will be eager to reach agreement on a number of outstanding negotiations, including CFE. He may also demonstrate greater flexibility in other areas, such as the dispute with Japan over the Northern Territories. Although he will continue to listen to the concerns of the military, he will not allow such concerns to stand in the way of agreements he feels are in the Soviet national interest.
- Gorbachev's focus during his remarks to the congress on the need to move ahead on reforms suggests a new willingness to implement broader economic and political reforms.

Although the congress failed to come to grips with the country's still formidable economic, political, and social problems, Gorbachev has interpreted the congress' documents as giving him a mandate to pursue his policy agenda more rapidly and decisively. Whether his approach to reform will prove timely enough or go far enough to overcome the USSR's troubles remains in doubt.