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## EXECUTIVE BRIEF

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### Gorbachev, Yel'tsin, and the CPSU: At a Crossroads

- The CPSU's 28th congress that is due to begin next week is likely to be one of the most contentious in the party's history. Whatever the outcome, it will not reverse the party's declining fortunes.
- Gorbachev sees the party's consolidation around a reformist platform as vital to his political strategy, but his consideration of postponing the congress indicated that he anticipates a strong challenge from party traditionalists.
- We believe that Gorbachev probably will obtain further reform of the party, but some important compromises with the conservatives appear likely.
- Even if Gorbachev carries the day, many radical reformers in the "Democratic Platform" (DP) probably will break away and form their own social democratic party. A resurgence of the traditionalists would hasten the breakup of the party and lead republic parties to distance themselves from the center.
- Although Gorbachev and Yel'tsin are rivals and have significant differences, their positions on some important issues are not that far apart. For the near term, they probably will make some tactical compromises, particularly if the threat from the traditionalists grows.

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*This Executive Brief presents the findings of Intelligence Community representatives at meetings held on 19 and 25 June 1990. It was produced by the National Intelligence Officer for the USSR and coordinated with representatives of INR, CIA, DIA, and NSA.*

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With politics in the country polarizing, the economy staggering, and the nationalities crisis mounting, the CPSU's 28th congress, which is due to open on 2 July, promises to be a watershed. Events of the past month--Boris Yel'tsin's election as Chairman of the Russian Federation's Supreme Soviet and the establishment of a Russian Communist Party--heighten the stakes.

Gorbachev is particularly concerned about preventing the traditionalists from using the party against him. This possibility appears to have convinced him to slow down the transfer of power from the party to the new legislature and Presidential Council. Although he will continue to move in that direction:

- He now sees the current weakness of those new institutions and the need to preserve the party as an important base of power.
- At a time of fragmenting power, the party--while severely weakened--is still the only institution with some ability to implement national decisions.

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#### Gorbachev's Objectives at the Congress

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Gorbachev wants further democratization of the party and hopes to forge a consensus upon which the vast majority of the party can unite. He is not likely to go far enough to satisfy many of the radical reformers, but the changes he favors are certain to produce strong opposition from the traditionalists. These include:

- Ending the *nomenklatura* system, abolishing or watering down "democratic centralism," and democratizing elections to party posts.
- Changing the Politburo into a Presidium, which would be a much larger and less important body.

- Replacing the post of general secretary with that of a chairman accountable to the CPSU congress rather than its Central Committee, giving him greater freedom of action.
- Replacing up to 80% of the Central Committee and removing several Politburo members, including Zaykov, Vorotnikov, Slyunkov, and possibly Ligachev.
- Endorsing more rapid movement toward a market economy.

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#### Possible Outcomes

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The traditionalists' show of strength at the Russian party congress and Gorbachev's consideration this week of postponing the national congress indicate that his success is by no means assured. We believe, however, that he will probably obtain further movement toward party reform. In the past, orthodox opponents have consistently been weaker in political showdowns than they appeared to be before the event.

- Even some of Gorbachev's most vocal critics on the right have said that he is the only leader who can bring the party out of its crisis.
- Although Russian Communist Party chief Polozkov is to the right of Gorbachev, there is evidence that in the recent past Gorbachev offered political support to him.
- Critics aside, most congress delegates will be mindful of the party's rapidly eroding support in the country and will not want to place the party in opposition to reforms that much of the country and many party members deem necessary.

If Gorbachev is able to neutralize the party's right wing yet again and achieve his objectives, he will have strengthened his control over the party and moved its

center of gravity further toward reform. He will then be in a position to take more radical steps in a reformist direction, with the party less of an impediment to--and perhaps even capable of becoming an instrument of--reform.

While less likely, there are some reasons to believe that the congress could produce a less favorable outcome for Gorbachev.

The "Democratic Platform," which favors radical reform, will not have as much clout at the party congress as we had earlier believed. The DP will only have 100 or so delegates at the congress (approximately two percent), and its members are divided over whether to split from the party. The majority of DP members will not be satisfied with the reforms Gorbachev has in mind, and some will break from the CPSU and form their own social democratic party.

Even more important than the radical reformers' weakness, however, is the new assertiveness of party conservatives. They seem determined to rein in reform and may be able to force Gorbachev to compromise on critical elements of his program.

- They will fight hard to retain democratic centralism and are likely to attempt to enforce ideological conformity in the party along the lines of the April Central Committee letter criticizing the Democratic Platform.
- Polozkov has a record of strong opposition to cooperatives and firm support for collective farms. Backing from people like Polozkov might aid Ligachev's attempt to slow the move toward a market economy.
- Although the traditionalists may attempt to replace Gorbachev as party leader, he probably has the political strength to counter the move. But we cannot rule out that he might decide under such circumstances to quit,

concentrating his efforts on the presidency and the Supreme Soviet where support for reform is greater.

However the congress plays out, it will do little to reverse the party's rapidly declining fortunes. A traditionalist resurgence will increase the number of Democratic Platform members who leave and only make the party more irrelevant to the solution of the country's daunting and growing problems. It could also hasten the disintegration of the Union by leading more non-Russian Communist parties to pull away from the CPSU.

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### The Yel'tsin Factor

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Beyond the congress itself, an emerging key to the future of the party and the country will be Gorbachev's relationship with Yel'tsin. Whether Yel'tsin stays in the CPSU or leaves, his new RSFSR post and widespread popular support give him a power base independent of the party, both in Russia and nationally.

Power, ultimately, is the issue on which the Yel'tsin-Gorbachev relationship centers and on which they will clash. Their competing desires for power and the personal animosities they carry from past battles argue against their developing a long-term working relationship. Even in the near term, Yel'tsin will continue to press Gorbachev for rapid movement to a multiparty system in which the CPSU would compete as one among equals.

Yet both Gorbachev and Yel'tsin have shown in recent weeks a willingness to make at least some gestures toward conciliation. On some important issues we believe that they can work for common objectives.

- **Party reform.** Yel'tsin would go much further than Gorbachev in democratizing party practices, but his views are closer to Gorbachev's than are those of the party traditionalists.

- **Economic reform.** Gorbachev's latest shift toward market reform narrows the gap between his position and Yel'tsin's. Where Yel'tsin differs most is on his support for rapid privatization and crowd-pleasing opposition to any price hikes in the move toward a market.
  
- **The Union.** Yel'tsin's quick moves to assert the Russian republic's sovereignty and to meet with Lithuanian leader Landsbergis openly challenged Gorbachev. But their positions on Lithuania, at least, have since narrowed as Gorbachev has shown a willingness to deal with the Lithuanians and Yel'tsin has urged them to suspend their independence declaration and negotiate on the basis of the secession law.

The strength of the party hardliners will figure prominently in the Yel'tsin-Gorbachev relationship over the next six months. Both will suffer if the hardliners stage a comeback. Thus, the greater the threat, the more likely that the two leaders will strike tactical compromises.