

At the same time, sickness, death, and the consequences of earlier political battles have so reduced leadership ranks that the regime appears less prepared for a new succession than it was when Brezhnev died last year. The party now has the smallest Politburo since the early 1950s, and there is no leader in the Secretariat who has experience comparable to that of Khrushchev, Brezhnev, or even Andropov. [redacted]

As in the past, the succession decision is most likely to be made in the Politburo by the senior corps of remaining leaders. At present, no new succession candidate seems to have a better than 50-50 chance to be selected. This situation strongly suggests that the next succession, if it should occur in the near future, will be more controversial than the last one. [redacted]

The best placed prospects are in the Secretariat. Even candidates in this category—senior secretaries Chernenko, Gorbachev, and Romanov—have significant political liabilities. The lack of ideal candidates could lead the Politburo to turn to others outside the Secretariat, such as Defense Minister Dmitriy Ustinov. [redacted]

It will be in the Politburo's interest to move quickly in order to avoid conflict and political paralysis and to project an image of decisiveness abroad. Only if the Politburo is unable to reach a consensus would the decision shift to the more than 300-voting-member Central Committee, but this appears unlikely. [redacted]

A new leader would emerge within a matter of days, but he probably would not have the power, authority, and prestige that Andropov had when he gained the post. He would be likely to encounter more difficulty in consolidating his position. As a result, the possibility of protracted turmoil within the leadership cannot be ruled out. [redacted]

After Andropov

Even if the next leader could positively be identified—and Gorbachev and Romanov seem to be frontrunners—his present views insofar as they could be discerned probably would provide only a general sense of the direction Soviet policy would take in the immediate post-Andropov period. These views probably would be modified as he attempted to gain support and even further altered by political calculations, the exigencies of events, and the broader perspective of his new post. Foreign policy specialist Andropov, for instance, has concentrated on economic problems. [redacted]

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Succession Frontrunners



Mikhail Gorbachev

Position:
Central Committee
Secretary

Responsibilities:
Personnel appointments
and agro-industrial sector

Age:
52

Advantages: Andropov's choice, high visibility, recently expanded responsibilities, Central Committee clout

Liabilities: Junior, limited experience, probably lacks military and defense-industrial support

Prospect: Andropov's continuity candidate



Grigoriy Romanov

Position:
Central Committee
Secretary

Responsibilities:
Heavy and defense-related
industry

Age:
60

Advantages: Administrative experience, probable support of defense sector, image of toughness

Liabilities: Ambitions threaten other leaders, lacks central party experience

Prospect: Ideologically conservative candidate



Konstantin Chernenko

Position:
Central Committee
Secretary

Responsibilities:
Ideology

Age:
72

Advantages: Unofficial second in command

Liabilities: Passed over once before, not fully trusted, ill health

Prospect: Compromise candidate



Dmitriy Ustinov

Position:
Defense Minister

Responsibilities:
Military Affairs

Age:
75

Advantages: Past experience in Secretariat, military backing

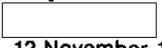
Liabilities: Age and ill health

Prospect: Interim leadership candidate



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Emphasis on Collective Leadership

If another succession occurs soon, no new leader is likely to have the power, authority, and prestige that Andropov had when he gained the post. Any of the candidates would probably encounter more difficulty in consolidating his position. 

The presence of strong political rivals from the outset—not a problem for Andropov—would make the maneuvering in the Politburo intense and the new general secretary's position more vulnerable. The age structure of the Politburo might allow a younger candidate to consolidate power sooner, as older members die off, but rivalry among younger leaders would intensify. 

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12 November 1983

Special Analysis

USSR: Problems and Prospects of a New Succession

General Secretary Andropov's absence from the anniversary ceremonies in Moscow this year—no general secretary has missed them in 30 years—has given rise to speculation that the regime could face a new succession at any time. [redacted]

The Soviets have good reason to be concerned over the issue. Although Yuriy Andropov has been party chief for only a year, his advanced age and uncertain health have raised questions among Soviets and Westerners alike about the length of his tenure. The illness that prevented Andropov from attending the revolution ceremonies early this month points to the Soviet leadership predicament. [redacted]

Andropov took office at age 68, almost 10 years later in life than any of his predecessors. Concern about his physical status began the day of Brezhnev's funeral and has heightened since. [redacted]

Last June, Finnish officials were surprised that Andropov was permitted to make an appearance before the foreign press that highlighted his poor condition. A long-scheduled meeting with West German Chancellor Kohl had to be delayed. His 12-week absence from public view since late summer, and the postponement of a planned trip to Bulgaria, a Warsaw Pact summit, and the fall meetings of the Central Committee and Supreme Soviet all contributed to doubts about Andropov's health. [redacted]

The official explanation that Andropov has a "cold" is clearly an understatement of the problem, but the specific nature of his ailment remains carefully concealed. A Soviet Embassy officer in Belgrade passed along a story that Andropov had diabetes. At another time, however, the source said Andropov had kidney trouble. [redacted]

A Radio Moscow official told US Embassy officers that Andropov's health was not good and that he had kidney trouble. This week a US Embassy source in Rome said Andropov had a heart seizure during kidney surgery, and that he is on dialysis. [redacted]

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As of now, the younger candidates to succeed Andropov—Gorbachev and Romanov—seem to share Andropov's basic domestic policy views. Both men probably view Soviet economic problems as the most important on the domestic agenda. Both are strong advocates of discipline and greater efficiency in labor and production, and both are vigorous leaders who seem open to innovation, experimentation, and change, although within strict ideological bounds. []

Romanov, an inveterate ideological conservative, cracked down on dissidents as Leningrad leader. Gorbachev, in contrast, at least appears to be more pragmatic and could be more flexible on ideological and social matters. []

Chernenko's views on Soviet domestic issues are more widely known than those of his younger colleagues in the Secretariat. He has long advocated investment in consumer goods sectors, greater attention to the social factor in domestic affairs, and traditional solutions to economic problems. In recent pronouncements on ideology, however, he has taken a more conservative line. []

On foreign policy, certain stylistic differences seem apparent within the party Secretariat. Gorbachev, although lacking in foreign policy experience, gave an impression of quiet self-assurance, flexibility, pragmatism, and intelligence during his recent trip to Canada. He hewed closely to the established foreign policy line in both public and private remarks. []

Romanov, with over 20 trips abroad and fairly wide contact with foreign diplomats over the years, has far greater experience in foreign affairs. He has taken a harder line than Gorbachev in their published statements on foreign policy issues. []

Romanov's remarks in the foreign policy area have tended to focus on arms control issues, and he seems to take a special interest in US-Soviet relations. While most of his public remarks reflect a hardline, ideological position, in private he has posed on occasion as a partisan of better relations with the US. []

Chernenko's public remarks during the Brezhnev era were more enthusiastic than those of most other Soviet leaders in his support of improved relations with the West, particularly the US, and of arms limitation. In the crisis atmosphere of an early Andropov succession, however, no new leader could afford to look weak or indecisive, nor could he retreat from any challenge, real or imagined, to Soviet interests abroad. []

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OCPAS/CIG

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National Intelligence Daily

Saturday
12 November 1983

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OCPAS/NID/83-285/JX

12 November 1983

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