

SPECIAL ANALYSES

USSR: Candidates for the Succession

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(b) (3)

[REDACTED]

*The deteriorating health of President Brezhnev, the death of party ideologue Mikhail Suslov, and the political decline and illness of party secretary Kirilenko have combined to destroy the equilibrium of the leadership and cloud the succession picture. The prospects of some leaders have been strengthened while others apparently have been removed from serious contention. Uncertainty about the post-Brezhnev era has been heightened by the erosion of the party Secretariat, the pivotal institution in previous successions.* [REDACTED]

Party secretary Chernenko has profited most from recent events. His role in supervising appointments to party jobs has expanded, making it easier for him to place his supporters in important positions. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

In addition, Chernenko has no background in economic management and limited experience in foreign affairs. Some of his views--on national security issues, investment in the consumer sector, and reforms to increase party responsiveness to public opinion--are out of the mainstream of Politburo opinion. [REDACTED]

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Key Players in the Succession



Left to right: party secretary Konstantin Chernenko, Premier Nikolai Tikhonov, President-General Secretary Brezhnev, Moscow party chief Viktor Grishin, party secretary Andrei Kirilenko



KGB chief Yuriy Andropov.



Kingmaker: Defense Minister Dmitriy Ustinov.



Agriculture secretary Mikhail Gorbachev.



Ukrainian party boss Vladimir Shcherbitskiy.



Leningrad party chief Grigoriy Romanov.

~~Confidential~~

Challenge From Andropov

KGB chief Andropov, in particular, appears to be attempting to prevent Chernenko from accumulating more power, and, in doing so, may be trying to undermine Brezhnev's authority. [redacted]

[redacted] Andropov's long experience in foreign policy, both as a secretary in the 1960s and as KGB chief, qualifies him to assume the responsibilities formerly exercised by Suslov. [redacted]

Other Politburo members might be wary of a former KGB chief amassing too much power in the Secretariat. Andropov is not a career police official, however, and--at least until recently--he has taken pains to keep his organization out of politics. [redacted]

Andropov is said to be pragmatic, with moderate views on economic reform and other policy issues, and he has good relations among intellectuals. Nevertheless, his earlier work under Suslov's guidance imbued him with a high regard for Soviet primacy in the international Communist movement, and his long years in the KGB have increased his preoccupation with internal control and the threat of Western ideological penetration. The considerable sentiment in party circles for a return to strong leadership to ensure internal discipline at a time of economic stringency could help Andropov's prospects. [redacted]

Kingmaker Ustinov

The positions of other leaders in succession maneuvering will depend partly on their assessment of Brezhnev's staying power and his ability to influence the outcome. The support of Defense Minister Ustinov will be especially important, because of his institutional position. [redacted]

Ustinov, who commands considerable respect from other leaders, will play the most important role. During Brezhnev's tenure, the military's prestige has increased along with the expansion of the USSR's international role. The military hierarchy's influence in policy deliberations has traditionally grown stronger during succession periods. [redacted]

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Moreover, Ustinov's associates on the Politburo probably are less suspicious of his ambitions and less resistant to his influence than would be the case if he were a professional military man. Ustinov has lengthy experience in managing the defense industry, and some limited experience in party organizational affairs. He himself could be returned to the Secretariat, where he served from the mid-1960s until the mid-1970s. [redacted]

Other Candidates

At this stage, opposition to Chernenko probably is stronger than support for Andropov. The fact that both have liabilities as succession contenders could impel the leadership to turn to a third choice. [redacted]

Moscow party head Grishin has had closer relations with other leaders in Moscow and greater exposure to foreign policy than any of the provincial party heads. Grishin, a blander figure who moved up in the protocol rankings on May Day, could be a compromise candidate acceptable to most other senior figures. [redacted]

Agriculture secretary Gorbachev's age could give him an advantage. At 50, he is by far the youngest Politburo member. His narrow job experience may limit his role, but he recently has become more active in non-agricultural areas. [redacted]

Although Kirilenko may retain considerable support within the Politburo, his health and loss of status are likely to prevent him from making a full political comeback. If he should lose his seat on the Politburo, it would create an opportunity for the head of one of the regional party organizations to move into the Secretariat, or for one of the regional party bosses to be promoted to the Politburo. [redacted]

Ukrainian party boss Shcherbitskiy has been particularly prominent of late. His Ukrainian nationality, however, could rule him out as a successor in a period when the regime is moving toward closer identification with Russian nationalism. [redacted]

Leningrad party chief Romanov probably has better ties with the military and with conservative ideologues than any other regional leader. [redacted]

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