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SPECIAL REPORT

KHRUSHCHEV AT 70: AN APPRAISAL OF HIS LEADERSHIP STYLE

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

OFFICE OF CURRENT INTELLIGENCE

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KHRUSHCHEV AT 70: AN APPRAISAL OF HIS LEADERSHIP STYLE

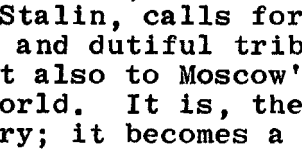
Khrushchev arrives at his 70th birthday on 17 April with more than ten years' experience as leader of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. During this period he has developed methods of operation, a certain style of rule, and a personal impact on policy which cannot easily be disregarded by those who eventually succeed him.

This week's occasion, like the later decennial birthdays of Stalin, calls for a gathering of the Communist clan and dutiful tributes not only to the man himself but also to Moscow's special place in the Communist world. It is, then, more than a personal anniversary; it becomes a natural landmark from which to assess Soviet policy as a whole.

Unfortunately for Khrushchev, however, April 1964 is not the most propitious time for doing this. There is very little in the recent record which can be hailed as vindicating his policies and providing a special cause for celebration.

Khrushchev the Leader

No matter how other Communist leaders may assess the situation, Khrushchev most certainly sees his setbacks and disappointments as only temporary discomfitures. In this respect he epitomizes the old-time Communist revolutionary--holding always to the idea that it is only the long-term prospect which really counts. And fortunately for Khrushchev personally, he enjoys a special status which can accommodate this unbounded optimism. His political primacy no longer depends upon his achieving a continuing string of policy successes.



For Khrushchev at 70, the important thing--other than the maintenance of this special power position--is that he should be recognized as the very antithesis of Stalin, the one person who, while retaining the basic Communist framework, could bring the party back into full power, reform the secret police, reorient the economy and military services, and make the Soviet Union a first-rate world power.

Certainly by his own reckoning there are still good years left to continue this work, and to complete his programs for chemistry and agriculture and start any number of new major projects.

Here again the natural Khrushchev optimism comes into play, and it may have been boosted by the feeling that he is more fit today than he was two or three years ago. In any case, by external appearances, he retains most of his stamina and drive, and his temperament--to the extent it has changed at all--seems more even than in earlier years.

As part of the process of maintaining his special seniority, there has been a steady effort, both by Khrushchev personally and by the propaganda machine, to refine the image he projects on the public scene. The picture intended is a composite of world statesman, benevolent father figure, and man of the people, with all traces of the party ruffian neatly erased. As a result, he has been elevated to become one of the great military leaders of World War II and currently the great hope for peace in the world. The crudities are edited from his speeches, and he is even shown to be merciful to old enemies such as Voroshilov and Bulganin.

Despite these various efforts to popularize the man, there are very few indications that he is in fact a respected leader. Although he is frequently credited with raising living standards or harnessing the police, it is more often Malenkov who is considered the real liberalizer. Even to the party hierarchs, Khrushchev is the "old man" who is both feared and distrusted. To the government bureaucracy, he often symbolizes the party agitator who forces through the temporary expedient in his quest for the short-term gain. To the proud army careerists he is the political commissar and military fraud. To many intellectuals he is an untutored tough. To the general public he is still essentially what is known in the Soviet Union as "one of them"--the bosses who impose themselves arbitrarily on the people from above.

The Uncertain Succession

In part it is because he maintains himself to a large degree by means of entrenched personal power that Khrushchev is seemingly disinclined to face the problem of his own succession. Although he made gestures toward a settlement by singling out first Kirichenko and later Kozlov, there are hardly any indications at all that he provided them with the opportunities to develop their personal networks of operation. The big impediment has always been the fear of starting something which could eventually impinge on his own control. Then there is Khrushchev's ego and optimism, telling him that there is really no rush and that he can outdistance an Adenauer or anyone else for that matter.

Thus it was only a half-hearted move--reminiscent more of Stalin than anyone else--when Khrushchev brought two of his closest followers, Brezhnev

and Podgorny, somewhat to the fore last summer, not only so that they could be assessed better, but probably also to compete at the highest operating levels. Perhaps one of them will be invested as second secretary at the party congress next year, but he is unlikely under Khrushchev to enjoy any major independent political power.

Yet even if Khrushchev decides to do nothing more about the succession, it is clear that he will leave behind him methods of operation and a certain style of rule which cannot be easily disregarded. He has brought the image of the leader out of the Kremlin and into the country and has made himself the continuing and almost sole spokesman on both foreign and domestic policy. He has fostered the impression that he is truly expert in his knowledge of practical problems and that he is actively engaged in improving the lot of the people. He has developed a system of rule which has succeeded in stabilizing the relative weights of the various power groups in Soviet society and he has been able to delegate day-to-day authority to free himself for long periods of rest, extensive trips abroad, and preoccupation with special problems when the need arises.

Party and State Administration

Khrushchev's efforts to reorder the Soviet system of party and state administration can be divided into two periods. The earlier one, ending with the fall of Marshal Zhukov in October 1957, was rooted in the fight to re-establish primacy of the party and to achieve Khrushchev's personal supremacy. It was during this time that Khrushchev--acting in the true Stalin fashion--allied himself first with one faction and then another, turning on each in due time, until the police had been neutralized, the governmental bureaucrats routed, and his rivals in the leadership sent into exile. The question of party supremacy seems to have been so well settled during this period that it is unlikely to reemerge as a major issue during a post-Khrushchev succession struggle.

The more recent period has seen Khrushchev attempting

Khrushchev, in World War II lieutenant general's uniform, at Kremlin meeting with Defense Minister Malinovsky, February 1963

gradually to reshape the administrative mechanism to fit the political and economic exigencies of the time and to increase the effectiveness of his own command. Various efforts have been made to sharpen the decision-making process, and as a result small working groups are often preferred to meetings of the larger, formally constituted organizations. Issues of special sensitivity are handled by a senior "inner presidium"--Khrushchev, Mikoyan, Kosygin, Brezhnev, Suslov. This team, which at one time included Kozlov, apparently served as a special task force during the Cuban crisis, for instance.

Preference for these smaller groups was bound to alter somewhat the character of the party presidium. Currently it comprises an odd assortment of real leaders, second-echelon administrators, elderly retainers, and assorted aspirants from the provinces. Gone is the idea of a committee of equals or even near equals. Instead, presidium membership in itself has taken on more of an honorific meaning than it ever did in the past. As for the party central committee, it is used almost exclusively as a sounding board for pronouncements from the leadership and not as an organ of decision making or debate.

Khrushchev in addition has engineered several moves intended to prevent concentrations of power below him. The marked expansion of the party secretariat and the concomitant proliferation of responsibilities for day-to-day party administration was a move in this direction. He has also developed a network of geographic bureaus and functional committees in the party --each with ample rights in its own field, but structured in such a way that they cannot become a special tool of any one of the senior secretaries. In the governmental bureaucracy several economic overlords have been appointed, but they are assigned exclusively to management functions and have not been brought into the policy-making councils of the party.

In other areas of administration, Khrushchev's training and experience and the dictates of the system itself have worked together to frustrate his efforts. He realizes the need for real decentralization in economic planning, for instance, but in practice is unwilling to forsake the time-honored principle of party control. He acknowledges the importance of material incentives but thus far has shied away from any major effort which would significantly alter the rate of production of producer goods. He refuses to admit that there are permanent and critical drawbacks in the collective farm system and makes only desultory moves against the vested interests and entrenched bureaucracy which abound in the planning system. He has in fact tried remedies, but usually has resorted only to organizational shuffling and reshuffling and to selective personnel changes. In effect,

there remains the dichotomy between Khrushchev's conditioned "common sense" approach and the needs for the scientific ordering of the stystem.

The Economy

The contrast between Khrushchev's extensive personal involvement in the operation of the economy, particularly agriculture, and the remote control Stalin exercised from the confines of the Kremlin is particularly sharp. Khrushchev himself once explained that Stalin refused to listen to his lieutenants concerning the poor state of agriculture and "knew the country and agriculture only from films. And those films had dressed up and beautified the existing situation in agriculture. Many films so pictured farm life that the tables were bending from the weight of turkeys and geese. Evidently Stalin thought that it was actually so. The last time he visited a village was in January 1928, when he visited Siberia in connection with grain deliveries."

Khrushchev, by comparison, believes firmly in the necessity for personal intervention and direct command. He can argue a firsthand knowledge of Soviet agriculture derived from numerous junkets through the rural districts of the country, talks with farmers and agronomists in the field, and careful study of Western agricultural practices.

Just how much Khrushchev really understands about agriculture is hard to tell. He often puts on impressive performances, displaying knowledge of vast amounts of detail, dispensing advice freely, and doggedly ferreting out mistakes and weaknesses. Despite his claim to a special grasp of agricultural matters, however, he has no formal agronomic education and no "in-the-fields" experience. Moreover, he has tended to accept the advice of whichever scientist--including the biological sciences quack, Trofim Lysenko--promised the greatest immediate results. On the other hand, Khrushchev has become increasingly receptive to Western practices, particularly since the disastrous long-run effects of his earlier policies have become evident.

Khrushchev's personal style of leadership in agriculture has

led him to lean more heavily on personal advisers and unofficial channels than on established agencies. Not long ago, Khrushchev, talking with Westerners, made a show of forgetting Agriculture Minister Volovchenko's name, as though he were just too unimportant to be remembered. Andrey Shevchenko, long one of the Soviet leader's personal team, now is the most powerful influence on Khrushchev in agricultural matters. Nevertheless, Shevchenko, a gifted agronomist who has twice visited the United States to study agricultural techniques, must still contend with Lysenko and others for Khrushchev's ear. This reliance on extragovernmental agencies and personnel in agriculture contrasts sharply with his strong dependence on the regular government bodies in the industrial field.

Khrushchev's horizons in solving Soviet agricultural problems have been limited by his Socialist convictions and by the need for continued rapid development of industry. By Western standards, therefore, his agricultural policies have smacked more of temporary expedients than basic solutions. Nevertheless, as a result of his incessant prodding, imaginative gambles (such as the New Lands Program), organizational gambits, and publicity programs, the level of net agricultural production has been raised by about 50 percent since 1953. Although hopelessly below the increase planned by 1965, this is enough to increase per capita consumption significantly. Thus some progress has been made toward his long-term goal of making Soviet agriculture as efficient and productive as any in the world, and proving that the Soviet system can be made to work in agriculture as well as in industry.

In addition, Khrushchev's personal interest and attention have elevated agriculture to a level of respectability--although not yet of material satisfaction--approaching that of the industrial sector; and he has imparted some feeling that the regime has an interest in and concern for the welfare of the rural population.

Control of the Intelligentsia

Khrushchev is not equipped, either by inclination or by training, to understand the aspirations of the Soviet creative intelligentsia. He likes singable tunes and righteous heroes who win their battles. Artistic struggles to communicate complex inner worlds are irrelevant to his own concern to shape the external world. Nevertheless, he feels his responsibility as

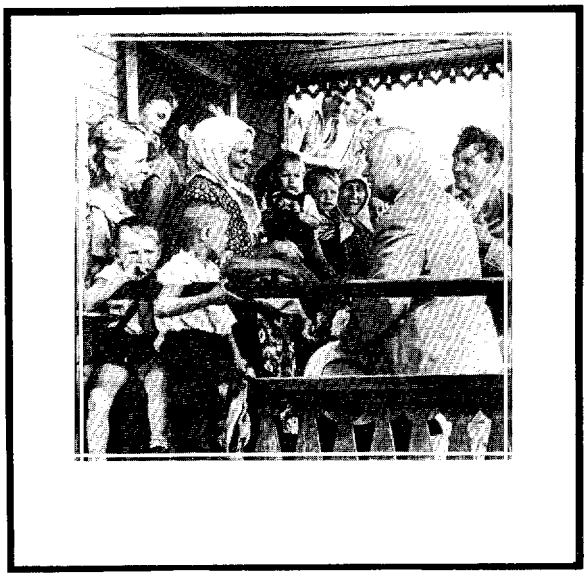
the authoritative voice of the party. In the uncongenial milieu of culture he may well see himself as "the simple wise old worker with clear and precise answers to everything"--a stock figure in Soviet literature whose common sense and devotion to the party magically combine to solve all fictional problems.

Khrushchev also sees himself, however, as the leader of a world power whose international prestige is damaged by heavy-handed party intervention in cultural affairs. Moreover, he has become aware that his own tastes in art are not universally respected. In an apparent attempt to improve his image, he has presented himself in the guise of patron of the arts and has occasionally acceded to personal appeals for permission to publish controversial works.

Khrushchev's efforts to reconcile the statesman who appreciates creative endeavors with the simple party worker who knows little about art but knows the "right" answers underlie the ambivalence in his policy. Confusion has also been generated by the apparently ad hoc basis on which he responds to personal appeals. Some decisions have been based on considerations of artistic prestige or personal influence and have had no political implications beyond complicating the task of the literary disciplinarians who must attempt to define "party-mindedness." On other occasions, however, he has approved a work because it fitted in with a specific political aim of his own, with little or no thought to its repercussions in the cultural world.

Possibly because Khrushchev is unsure of his own judgment in the field, culture is an area in which others in the leadership apparently feel free to operate. Kozlov, Kosygin, Ilychev, and Polyansky were all involved in the maneuvering during the fall of 1962 and the winter of 1963, and probably this is by no means the complete picture.

It is doubtful that Khrushchev has had any specific policy goal in culture beyond protecting the party's authority and nurturing the country's prestige. The abandonment of Stalinist terror and his tendency to make spot decisions on the basis of "common sense" rather than doctrine have tended,



however, to work to the advantage of the liberal intellectuals. They have developed a community of interests and mutual support which transcends party loyalty and on occasion has led to the open flouting of party discipline. As a result, the cultural overseers have seen their old Stalinist concepts of "party-mindedness" and "ideological principledness" become badly eroded and have had their own authority circumvented by personal appeals to Khrushchev.

The influential liberal intellectuals have shown no desire to overthrow the regime as Khrushchev apparently feared in 1957. They have, however, shown an increasing insistence on the right to stand aside and comment objectively on their world rather than serve as tools of the party. The line between "healthy" criticism and "dangerous" criticism can become a fine one, and Khrushchev and his successors will be increasingly called upon to try to make the distinction.

Foreign Policy

Khrushchev's conduct of foreign policy through most of the period of his ascendancy has been marked by the same ebullient self-confidence, bold innovations, and flexibility that have characterized his domestic programs. His intention to impose a new style and direction on Soviet policy was symbolized at the 20th party congress in 1956 by attacks on the "ossified forms" of Molotov's diplomacy and by major ideological reformulations on the issues of war and revolution. These themes were repeated at the 22nd congress in October 1961, when Khrushchev charged that Molotov and "his like" did not understand the changes that had occurred in world politics and Brezhnev hailed the abandonment of "obsolete methods and ossified dogmas."

While Soviet foreign policy under Khrushchev's guidance has displayed considerable versatility and resourcefulness in making pragmatic adjustments to the realities of the nuclear age, the Soviet premier's behavior since the spectacular failure of his Cuban missile venture has reflected a growing recognition that the wide-ranging political offensive against the West which was launched in 1957-58 has run its

Khrushchev in Indonesia, 1960

course without yielding the expected results. Events over the past three years, particularly the Cuban fiasco, have called into question the fundamental assumptions of this strategy--that time and long-term trends in the East-West contest were working to the advantage of the USSR and the socialist camp. Khrushchev's adjustments to this situation have been symbolized by the limited test ban treaty last summer and the relaxation of pressures on Berlin and other exposed areas.

One of the most important factors that has shaped Khrushchev's foreign policy outlook has been his strong desire to gain world recognition of the USSR's status as the great-power equal of the US. This impulse has been evident in his dealings with American leaders and public figures and in the pleasure he finds in personal contacts with other non-Communist statesmen. His conduct has long reflected feelings of personal and national inferiority and excessive sensitivity to any real or imagined affronts to his prestige or that of the USSR. Khrushchev has often displayed deep resentment over what he regards as the stubborn refusal of the Western powers to accord the Soviet Union the recognition and rights due a country that has achieved great-power status by its own efforts. His violent reaction to the US handling of the U-2 incident in May 1960 was the most striking manifestation of these attitudes.

Another characteristic of Khrushchev's foreign policy approach is great confidence in his ability to determine accurately the risks in any venture and to control the course of events in such a way as to maximize advantages and minimize the danger of losing control of a situation. Throughout his long Berlin offensive, Khrushchev frequently voiced confidence that the West would not go to war over a separate peace treaty with East Germany. He has tried to impress Western visitors by displaying detailed knowledge of the policies and intentions of his opponents as well as his own ability to manipulate developments without risking a military collision. Following the confrontation between Soviet and American tanks at the Berlin wall in October 1961, Khrushchev

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Khrushchev at Paris, 1960

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Khrushchev has relied heavily on bluff and intimidation tactics and on his technique of alternating deliberate creation of crises with proposals for high-level negotiations and hints of Soviet concessions. His long campaign to alter the status of West Berlin and achieve some form of Western recognition of East Germany has been based on a combination of repeated pressures and inducements calculated to draw the West into negotiations under conditions favorable to the USSR.

Khrushchev has also shown a penchant for clever strategems designed to entrap and confuse opponents and to increase pressures on them to grant concessions. His exploitation of the U-2 incident was intended to produce a storm of protests against US policy and to embarrass President Eisenhower on the eve of the Paris summit conference. Khrushchev confined his initial announcement of the shoot-down to bare details and then sat back to await the expected disavowal from Washington. After the US issued the cover story of a missing NASA research U-2, Khrushchev announced that he had withheld information that the pilot and aircraft were in Soviet hands, "because had we told everything at once, the Americans would have invented another version; just look how many silly things they have said."

In February 1962, after the US publicly announced detection of an underground nuclear explosion in the USSR, Khrushchev declared that this test had been staged deliberately to disprove the West's contention that on-site inspections were necessary to enforce a prohibition on all nuclear tests.

There is reason to believe that Khrushchev has encouraged circulation of rumors abroad that his efforts to improve relations with the West were facing strong opposition within the top leadership. These hints of Khrushchev's political vulnerability clearly were intended to persuade Western governments that some concessions were necessary to help Khrushchev resist his domestic enemies.

Khrushchev at Vienna, 1961

The outcome of Khrushchev's attempt to exploit the U-2 incident and to deploy missiles to Cuba point up his greatest weakness in the field of foreign policy--his vulnerability to self-deception and his ignorance or disregard of the mentality and reactions of his opponents.

In the case of the U-2, Khrushchev's miscalculation derived from his gamble that by absolving President Eisenhower of all personal responsibility for the U-2 flight, he could prevent events from getting out of hand and endangering the summit meeting and his "detente" policy of that period. But the President's assumption of personal responsibility shattered this scheme and exposed Khrushchev to charges by Communist critics that he had been deceived and that his peaceful coexistence strategy had been proved a failure.

Khrushchev's radical misjudgment of the probable US reaction to the deployment of missiles to Cuba appears to have been the product of two main factors. His misreading of the US conduct of the Bay of Pigs operation in April 1961 and the shift in US policy in Laos represented by acceptance of a coalition regime pledged to neutrality seems to have led him into the fatal error of underestimating American resolution. Khrushchev also allowed himself to believe that the high stakes involved in the missile venture justified a sharp reduction in the margin of safety which had characterized his previous major foreign decisions. The great advantages he anticipated from using the threat of Soviet missiles in Cuba to force a major diplomatic showdown on Berlin made Khrushchev vulnerable to what one former Western ambassador in Moscow has described as "an incurable political shortsightedness which prevents him from foreseeing the remoter consequences of his words and actions." (SECRET)

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