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MACNEIL: To analyze Andropov's first year and the meaning of his present seclusion, we have first Lawrence Caldwell, who was scholar in residence at the CIA's office of Soviet analysis for the past two years. He now teaches at Occidental College in California, and is a staff member of the Arroyo Center of the Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena. Dr. Caldwell, is Andropov, in your view, still running the USSR? LAWRENCE CALDWELL (Occidental College): It's hard to know, given the signals we've had about health. Think I would disagree with Jiri Valenta in his most recent statement there. He holds all the formal levers of power. Uh, there's no sign of a challenge to him. We did have signs during the six or eight months prior to the death of Brezhnev that there was some maneuvering and jockeying... jockeying. We haven't had those signs this time. So Andropov doesn't have an alternative at the moment. If he's in ill health, which, uh, seems increasingly apparent, uh, of course he probably isn't running the show. But there is no alternative.

MACNEIL: How much of a, uh, of a leadership void would you say that there is? I mean, they pointed, for instance, to the, uh, the uncertainties and the different voices in Moscow at the time of the Korean airliner. Did that reveal to you a serious lack of leadership? CALDWELL: No, I think the only substantial signal of a lack of leadership is the fact that Andropov has been out of sight. The only statements we've had from Andropov have come in the press, and those probably come from the central committee. Uh, as far as the handling of the KAL incident, I wouldn't interpret that as a signal that he hasn't been in charge. On the contrary, uh, it could well mean that he was, or the leadership as a whole was trying to disassociate him from an immediate responsibility from what was, no doubt, an embarrassing incident.

MACNEIL: Now obviously we can't predict how ill he is, say how ill he is, and we can't predict how long he may live. Suppose he does die sometime within the next few months or year. Are we in for a longer period of uncertainty? He'll be replaced by somebody, presumably. Is he likely to be replaced by somebody who will make a, a, who will take hold of the leadership and hold it for a long period of time, or are we in for a series of quick successions? CALDWELL: If he were to die now or if he were to become incapacitated and, and be replaced in the short run, then almost certainly we would be in for another intermediate stage of the leadership. The features that governed his succession, uh, the sort of institutional balance among the KGB and the military and the party and the ministry on foreign affairs, that remains in place. The people who are there who are the, his principal colleagues on the politburo are still quite aged. Consequently, uh, my guess is that if he were to have to step down or were to die, we would see another interim leader. We're in a process of succession, one that will continue for some time.

MACNEIL: Until the younger generation... CALDWELL: Until the younger generation. And there aren't many of the younger generation on the current politburo. The Soviets that I've talked to, uh, had hoped that Andropov would be able to weather this transition on his own, that he would be able to grab ahold of the policy levers, uh, to bring new people into the politburo, and that he would be the instrument of the succession. Obviously if he's incapacitated he won't be the instrument, and we'll see another one with a short term, I would gather.

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