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INFORMATION
November 24, 1975

MEMORANDUM FOR BRENT SCOWCROFT

ON-FILE NSC RELEASE INSTRUCTIONS
APPLY

FROM: Mr. Clift

SUBJECT: Status Report on Moscow Leadership Rumors

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As the 24th Soviet Party Congress nears, reports and rumors of upcoming changes in the Soviet leadership are increasing in frequency. At our request, CIA has looked at these reports in an attempt to identify possible common threads and to see what conclusions might be drawn. The paragraphs below are based on the Agency's findings as of mid-November. The chart at Tab A briefly summarizes a number of the most interesting reports

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The surge of reports in recent months concerning changes in the Soviet leadership springs from the proximity of the Party Congress next February, Brezhnev's recurring health problems and recognition that a generational changeover is impending. While earlier this year the rumor spotlight was principally on Brezhnev, the focus has now expanded to include a number of players. In fact, there are now a number of rumors to the effect that Brezhnev will survive the Party Congress and continue in power.

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These variously rumored to be on the way out are the most visible seniors: Brezhnev, Podgorny, Kosygin, Suslov and Pelshe. Although not a senior, Minister of Agriculture Polyansky is also rumored to be on the way out because of the bad harvest. The take over generation in the scenarios circulating in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe is limited essentially to those leaders whose duties keep them in the public eye in Moscow: Party Secretary Kirilenko, First Deputy Premier Mazurov, Foreign Minister Gromyko, Leningrad Party Chief Romanov and Party Secretaries Ponomarev and Demichev, KGB Chief Andropov, Moscow Party boss Grishin and virtually all the regional leaders are ignored in nearly all reports.

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With the exception of the obvious guessing relating to promotions of deputies -- with Kirilenko replacing Brezhnev and Mazurev replacing Kosygin -- there is little consistency in the pattern of reports. In contrast to last year, for example, when his removal was frequently rumored, Gromyko this year is regarded as a "stayer" with [redacted]

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[redacted] he will be part of a troika to succeed Brezhnev. Kosygin's departure is predicted [redacted] although [redacted] he might replace Podgorny as chief of state, and [redacted] Suslov will be succeeded by Ponomarev or Demichev, both of whom are his understudies.

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While analysts differ as to the explanation for the diminution of reports concerning Brezhnev and the surge of rumors [redacted]

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[redacted] concerning the rest of the leadership in recent weeks, they do seem to agree that the rumors:

- reflect growing expectation [redacted] political change will occur over the next year or two;
- are too inconsistent to represent a concerted effort to push a given Soviet line;
- ignore several key figures and in some cases show a distorted understanding of power positions in the Kremlin;
- represent an interesting political phenomenon in the willingness of Soviets at home and abroad to speculate on the political and physical health of the top leaders and their prospects.

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