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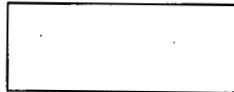
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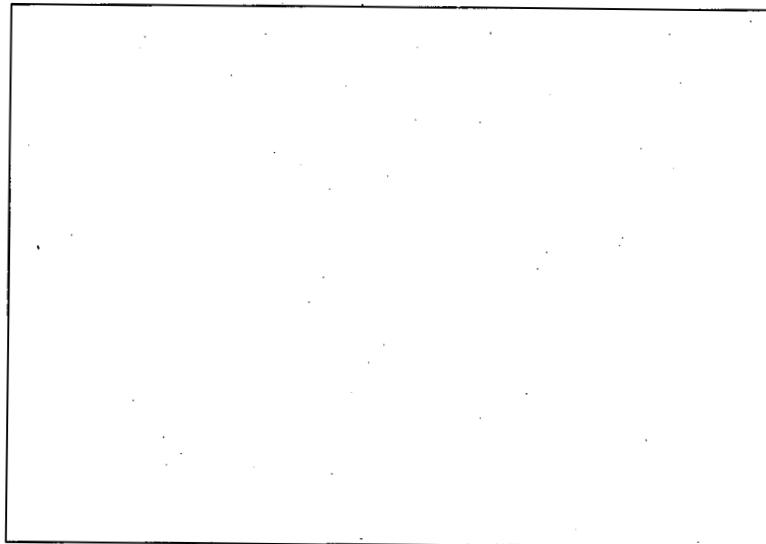
THE SUCCESSION TO KHRUSHCHEV

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The Succession to Khrushchev

This is a working paper. It discusses briefly the prospects of various of Khrushchev's lieutenants for succeeding him. It emphasizes contingencies in the succession, and argues that much additional information must come to hand before any one of Khrushchev's lieutenants can be put forward with confidence as his likely successor.

The Sino-Soviet Studies Group would welcome comment, addressed to Setrag Mardirosian, who wrote the paper, or to W.P. Southard, the acting coordinator of the SSSG. Both are in [redacted] and at [redacted]

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THE SUCCESSION TO KHRUSHCHEV

The issue of the succession to Khrushchev has begun to cast its shadow over the internal Soviet political scene. Important personnel changes have taken place during the past year which, while not affecting Khrushchev's dominant position, have shaken the upper ranks of the Soviet hierarchy from which his eventual successor will emerge. As Khrushchev ages, the competition among his lieutenants will almost certainly intensify. This paper seeks to identify the principals in the anticipated competition and to assess their various prospects as heirs to Khrushchev.

Khrushchev's Political Legacy

Although Khrushchev's hold on supreme power in the USSR has been relatively brief, he has transformed the Soviet political environment. Himself a product of the Stalin era, he has played the principal role in refashioning the Stalinist political heritage and disentangling its assets from its liabilities. He has introduced a pragmatic, innovating spirit into Soviet society and has given new direction and impetus to Soviet policies at home and abroad.

Since the defeat of the "antiparty" group in June 1957, Khrushchev has occupied a position of supreme authority in the Soviet leadership. He is head of the party and government; he has eliminated his main rivals from the seat of power; and he has placed his protegés in command of the leading organs of authority. Alone among the members of the hierarchy, Khrushchev has received wide acclaim for a multitude of accomplishments and has benefited from an apparently genuine popularity. He has thus attained heights of power and prestige well beyond the reach of any political competitors, and there is every reason to expect that he will retain this position until death or incapacitating illness removes him from the scene.

Khrushchev is not, however, a singular, isolated political phenomenon like Stalin. He is first and foremost the leader and spokesman of the interests and outlook of the party machine, the hard core of political careerists who have sought to perpetuate their rule and their philosophy over

- 1 -

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the entire country. The cornerstone of Khrushchev's policies has been the establishment of party supremacy, in fact as well as in theory, over all areas of Soviet national life. By basing his regime squarely on the party, Khrushchev has promoted not only his own interests but those of the party as well.

The re-establishment of party control over the chain of command has restored a large measure of stability in Soviet political life that was lacking when Stalin died. At that time the party was at the lowest point in its vitality and prestige, and supreme power was shared precariously by representatives of different power elites. The party machine now completely dominates the structure of power, reigning supreme over the other functional elites--the economic administrators, the armed forces, and the secret police--and party careerists operate as the principal integrating and centralizing elements in the state. Not since the early days of Stalin's rule has the party enjoyed such a position of authority. By eliminating pluralism in the power structure, Khrushchev has bequeathed to his party cohorts a firm hold over national life and has built safeguards against a fragmentation of authority outside the party after his death.

The primacy of the party has meant that the men on whom Khrushchev has relied to govern the nation have been drawn primarily from the party machine. Party careerists, led by the entire membership of the secretariat, the executive agency of the party machine, enjoy a strong majority in the presidium, the summit of the power structure. Whatever their individual differences, the members of this privileged group have an overriding interest in maintaining a common front against the other professional groups which have been demoted to a lower order of influence and status in the chain of command.

Khrushchev has initiated a series of reforms designed to infuse the party with new vitality for the performance of its enlarged command functions. Prominent among these has been a revival of party traditions which Stalin had violated during the later years of his reign: regular convocation of party meetings at the central committee level and below, insistence on strict observance of party regulations, and emphasis on wider participation of party members in party and state activities. However, these measures have not led to any dilution of the concentration of power in the party high command.

- 2 -

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Despite the alleged adherence to "inner-party democracy" in the post-Stalin period, the party has remained organized along strict hierarchical lines designed to safeguard the supremacy of the self-perpetuating leadership over the rank-and-file membership. The vast powers of patronage and discipline available to the secretarial hierarchy centered in Moscow have ensured the continued subordination of the lower party organs--from the central committee on down--to the party leadership. Even though the central committee in recent years has been convoked more frequently than in the past, it has functioned primarily as a sounding board and rubber stamp for decisions reached earlier in the restricted circle of top party leaders. Membership on the committee is an indication of prestige, not power.

Khrushchev's reliance on the party as the main instrument of authority in the state has produced striking changes in the political style of his regime. Unlike Stalin, whose dictatorship was based primarily on fear, Khrushchev has relied largely on persuasion and pressure. As leader of the party and nation, he has attempted to create a regime more acceptable to the party at every level and, at the same time, more responsive to the aspirations of the population at large. In line with the effort to popularize the dictatorship, the regime has readily discarded outmoded Stalinist patterns of control and gradually replaced them with more flexible techniques. Instead of repressing popular pressures, the regime has sought to harness them to its own purposes. In short, political manipulation and demagogic appeal, involving promises of security and welfare in exchange for party supremacy, have formed the vital ingredients of Khrushchev's style of rule.

The changes in Soviet political life wrought by Khrushchev have created a more stable setting for the succession than that existing at Stalin's death. The structure of power is more nearly monolithic, and the leadership more nearly homogenous. There has been a significant relaxation of tensions within the party and between the party and the populace. In this atmosphere, the sudden demise of Khrushchev should present less of a crisis to the party than did the death of Stalin.

Khrushchev's successors stand to inherit a system of party leadership which has been made to work without serious

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domestic challenges, and to which they are strongly committed professionally and personally. Given these circumstances, the problem of the succession would appear to be reduced to a contest for control over the party machine, rather than to a struggle between the party careerists and the other power elites.

The dominant position of the professional party machine in the system of power created by Khrushchev does not necessarily mean that one of the present central party secretaries would automatically inherit Khrushchev's position. It probably does mean, however, that the disposition of power immediately after Khrushchev's death would have to accord with the views of the majority of the central party secretaries who form an elite within an elite. It probably also means that anyone aspiring to a dominant position in the post-Khrushchev leadership would seek to gain control of the secretariat and use it as the principal instrument for enlarging his authority.

In any case, there remain the basic elements of instability and uncertainty in any transfer of power in a totalitarian state. The kind of authority Khrushchev possesses is personal to him and not resident in the various offices he holds. Such authority cannot be inherited but must be won under conditions of fierce competition, since no rules exist for its exercise or for its smooth transfer to other hands. Hence, Khrushchev's lieutenants, despite the advantages they have over other competitors, must face the prospect of an open race within their ranks.

Contenders for Khrushchev's Mantle

At the present time the leading contenders for the succession are to be found among the members of the Communist party presidium--the 13 full (voting) members and 10 candidate members who, together with Khrushchev, wield supreme power in the USSR. Although the men under Khrushchev nominally share power, they by no means stand on an equal footing in the hierarchy. The influence they exert varies with their training, experience, and administrative duties; it also depends heavily on their relationship with Khrushchev.

- 4 -

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There appear to be several fairly distinct gradations in rank and influence within the Soviet ruling group. Khrushchev's inner circle of advisors appears to consist of four men: First Deputy Premiers Anastas Mikoyan and Froi Kozlov, who concentrate on governmental questions, and party secretaries Mikhail Suslov and Averky Aristov, who handle party affairs. Aleksey Kirichenko, formerly a ranking party secretary, was a member of this privileged circle, but both he and Nikolay Belyayev, until recently party boss of Kazakhstan, have suffered a severe decline in status. Immediately below these top-ranking figures are the younger members of the presidium who are also members of the secretariat--Nikolay Ignatov, Leonid Brezhnev, Yekaterina Furtseva, and Nuritdin Mukhitdinov. Well below these two groups are the last remaining "Old Bolsheviks" in the presidium--Kliment Voroshilov, Nikolay Shvernik, and Otto Kuusinen.

Among the ten men now serving their apprenticeship in the ruling group as candidate members of the presidium, central party secretary Petr Pospelov, planning boss Aleksey Kosygin, and RSFSR Premier Dmitry Polyansky probably have an edge in influence because they reside in Moscow. The remaining candidate members are, in the main, regional or republic party secretaries who are too far removed from the centers of decision-making to exert much influence.

Unlike Stalin's successors, who had long and wide experience in the ruling group, the men who serve under Khrushchev are, as a rule, relative newcomers to the top level. For the most part, their membership in the ruling group has dated from Khrushchev's political victory over his opponents in June 1957. Because of their relatively brief tenure at the top level and their almost complete deference to Khrushchev, they have had very little opportunity to demonstrate the leadership qualities and to develop the networks of supporters needed to assure victory in any contest for supreme power.

During the past two years, when the turnover in the upper ranks of the hierarchy was virtually nil, it appeared as if Khrushchev's subordinates were beginning to stabilize their positions and areas of responsibility in the leadership. Only one full member of the presidium (Bulganin) was expelled from that body, while two candidate members (Polyansky and Podgorny) were added. In this same period the composition of

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the secretariat, all of whose members serve jointly in the presidium, remained unchanged. This situation contrasted sharply with the upheavals in the hierarchy that attended the struggle for power after Stalin's death.

Recent events, however, have brought an end to this period of relative stability. Since the consolidation of his own position, Khrushchev has campaigned for the removal of ineffective leaders and for the infusion into the hierarchy of new blood from the younger political generation. This campaign, which gained momentum last year, began to take its toll among the senior leaders in the regional and republic hierarchies, the secret police, and the central party apparatus. By the end of the year it had reached the top leadership itself: Yan Kalnberzin, a candidate member of the presidium, was replaced as Latvian first secretary, and Belyayev, a full member of the presidium, was sharply criticized by Khrushchev for shortcomings as Kazak first secretary. Belyayev was subsequently removed from this post and assigned a less important position in the regional party hierarchy. These events highlight the fact that even those on whom Khrushchev has counted for support during his rise to power can no longer rest on their laurels.

The recent downgrading of Kirichenko, a full member of the presidium and a member of the secretariat, shows dramatically the unstable nature of the positions held by Khrushchev's subordinates. A long-time Ukrainian protégé of Khrushchev who ascended rapidly in the hierarchy on his patron's coat tails, Kirichenko was generally considered one of the two or three top ranking figures in the leadership after Khrushchev, as well as a most promising candidate for the succession. Not only did he appear to possess the requisite qualities of youth, toughness, and ability, but he also seemed to be entrenched securely in the hierarchy as Khrushchev's understudy in the secretariat. Yet, despite these outstanding political qualifications, he was suddenly transferred to a relatively minor regional party post. While his status in the presidium, like that of Kalnberzin and Belyayev, remains in doubt, he clearly has suffered a serious political reversal, since in his regional post he can no longer perform the vital duties of a central party secretary.

The recent political shake-ups in the USSR reflect the pressures at work within the hierarchy. While continuing to

- 6 -

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insist on more vigorous leadership from his lieutenants, Khrushchev has held out promises of advancement to the younger political generation knocking on the door. As he put it when criticizing Belyayev, "Friendship is one thing, and work is another....It is quite normal to replace a worker unable to cope with his task with a more able person and a more experienced organizer." By making efficiency in performance a major, if not the most important, criterion for success or failure, Khrushchev has generated pressures that are bound to lead to further changes in the top command.

The road appears to have been cleared for the peaceful retirement of the older members of the presidium from active political life. Korotchenko (66), Kalnberzin (67), Voroshilov (79), Shvernik (72), and Kuusinen (79) have all passed their prime and can be expected to be replaced by younger men. Even if the older figures should retain their present positions until the next party congress scheduled next year, they would, by reason of age alone, be out of the running for the succession. Pospelov, in his mid-sixties, would also appear to be out of the running by reason of his lack of experience in organizational and personnel work.

Mikoyan, although also in his mid-sixties, enjoys a stronger position than the other older members of the presidium. He is second only to Khrushchev in prestige and influence and acts as one of Khrushchev's principal confidants in both foreign and domestic affairs. Also, apart from Khrushchev, he is the ablest and most widely experienced politician among the survivors of Stalin's politburo. Moreover, he is a respected figure among both party leaders and influential quarters of the governmental bureaucracy.

The members of the ruling group now in their forties or fifties stand out as the strongest contenders in the long run. Some of the members of this age group are likely to retain strong potential influence even if the succession is postponed for several more years or if the struggle for succession after Khrushchev's death is prolonged. In terms of career development, the members of this group have much in common. They all belong to the postrevolutionary generation of party members who have distinguished themselves by their administrative and organizational talents. Most of them are party careerists specializing in organizational management. Presidium member Suslov is the only theoretician in the group, and only

- 7 -

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Kosygin and Pervukhin, both candidate members, trace their careers back to the state economic bureaucracy. With the exception of Pervukhin, whose political fortunes have varied sharply in the post-Stalin period, all have until recently been beneficiaries of Khrushchev's rise to power.

The younger members of the presidium are distinguished from one another by the nature of their administrative assignments. The relative importance of these assignments, in terms of access to the main levers of power and opportunities for building up personal followings, has a considerable bearing on the contenders' prospects. From the standpoint of their assignments, the younger members of the presidium may be divided into the following groups:

1. Central party secretaries -- Aristov (57), Brezhnev (54), Furtseva (50), Ignatov (59), Mukhitdinov (43), and Suslov (58).
2. Territorial party secretaries -- Belyayev (54), Kirichenko (52), Kirilenko (54), Mazurov (46), Mzhavanadze (58), and Podgorny (57).
3. Governmental administrators -- Kozlov (52), Kosygin (56), Pervukhin (56), and Polyansky (43).

Of the three groups, the central party secretaries appear to have the best opportunities for building up personal followings in the major party organs. As members of the secretariat, they are concerned with the machine that has the greatest amount of patronage to dispense. Furthermore, as full members of the presidium with assignments in Moscow--a status enjoyed by Kozlov alone among the younger leaders who are not secretaries--they have a considerable share in the decision-making process.

The secretariat members who concentrate on organizational and personnel questions affecting the party and government are probably better situated for any test of strength than those whose responsibilities fall in other fields. Party secretaries Aristov, Ignatov, and Brezhnev, men with broad experience in party leadership at the regional and republic levels, appear to be the leading contenders within the secretariat at the present time. They belong to the breed of tough, aggressive, multicompetent operators who have formed the bulwark of Khrushchev's support in the party and who have risen rapidly in the hierarchy under his patronage.

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Aristov now occupies a pivotal position in the leadership, serving as Khrushchev's deputy in the RSFSR party bureau. This is the organ which exercises central control over party affairs in the Russian Republic, by far the most important republic. This post offers unique opportunities for building up a personal following among party careerists and influential party members in the RSFSR. Ignatov and Brezhnev also bear watching. They carried out important trouble-shooting assignments for Khrushchev early in the post-Stalin period--Ignatov in Leningrad and Brezhnev in Kazakhstan--and they now oversee key sectors of the economy: Ignatov supervises agriculture; Brezhnev, heavy industry. Ignatov has made a particularly strong comeback since his return to full-time work in the secretariat late last year. On two recent occasions, for example, he was ranked ahead of Aristov in the press listings--usually a good indicator of status. Brezhnev, a wartime political officer in the armed forces in the Ukraine, has also figured prominently in public functions. It is believed that one of his responsibilities has been for party work in the armed forces and paramilitary organizations.

Among the remaining central party secretaries, Furtseva and Mukhitdinov can probably be counted out of the running on grounds of sex and nationality, respectively. The latter, an Uzbek, has served primarily as an instrument of Khrushchev's diplomacy in the Moslem world. Finally, there is Suslov, the ranking member of the secretariat in terms of tenure. He enjoys considerable prestige and influence in the leadership, operating as the presidium specialist in ideological affairs and international Communist activities. He appears to be handicapped, however, by a colorless personality and by lack of experience in the more important sectors of party work. He would thus appear to be ill-equipped to maneuver for a larger share of power than he now holds.

The second group of younger presidium members, the regional or republic party secretaries, are not considered serious contenders for the succession at present. Kirichenko and Belyayev, the most prominent figures in this group, occupy lower rungs in the ladder of status. Most of the others have had limited experience outside their present bailiwicks and hence little opportunity for empire-building. While the territorial party posts have traditionally served as steps to higher office, they are too far removed from the centers of

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power to grant their incumbents much leverage at the national level. As long as these men are assigned to their present posts, there is no point in speculating about their prospects.

The third group of younger presidium members, the governmental administrators, does contain two promising contenders for the succession, First Deputy Premier Kozlov and RSFSR Premier Polyansky. Both are party careerists who have risen very rapidly in the hierarchy--Kozlov was formerly party boss of the Leningrad area; Polyansky held secretarial posts in the Ukraine and RSFSR--and both are relative newcomers in the government bureaucracy. Kozlov left Leningrad in December 1957 to become RSFSR premier and was replaced by Polyansky three months later when he became first deputy premier under Khrushchev. The assignment of party careerists to leading positions in the government is part of Khrushchev's policy of ruling through domination by the party, but it also reflects the increased importance Khrushchev attaches to the government.

The career prospects of Kozlov and Polyansky do not appear to have been retarded by their assignments to government work. Both men still retain important direct and indirect ties with the party machine: Polyansky and two of Kozlov's former Leningrad associates are members of the powerful RSFSR party bureau. Kozlov in particular has emerged as a prominent figure in the national political scene, enjoying close working relations with Khrushchev and benefitting from the latter's patronage.

Pervukhin, the Soviet ambassador to East Germany, and Kosygin, a deputy premier and chief of Gosplan, do not appear to have good prospects in the competition for the succession. Pervukhin has suffered a sharp decline in status since his involvement with the defeated opponents of Khrushchev, and his chances for recovering lost ground are slim. Kosygin has come into prominence recently as a result of his specialized administrative talents, rather than for his prowess as a politician. Even though he may be called on to occupy a larger role in the regime, he seems destined to remain among the secondary figures, whose talents are needed by the politicians in power to carry out the complex practical tasks of managing the nation.

The Outlook

The recent political changes have highlighted the uncertainties confronting the contenders for succession. After

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a relatively quiescent period of nearly two years, change has once more become the order of the day in the upper ranks of the hierarchy. The men who won high places in the regime through allegiance to Khrushchev are now under heavy pressure from above and below to demonstrate other talents as well. In order to survive the rugged test ahead, they must maintain unswerving loyalty to Khrushchev and at the same time prove to be capable administrators. Above all, in maneuvering for favor and influence, Khrushchev's lieutenants must avoid staking premature claims on the succession.

On present evidence, it is impossible to predict the outcome of any personal contest for supreme power after Khrushchev's death. The recent reshuffling in the hierarchy clearly upset the power relationships among the men around Khrushchev and left the issue of the succession notably obscure. Although the career prospects of some of the younger leaders--particularly Kozlov and Aristov--appear to have been enhanced by the recent events, these personal gains may not be stable. Against the background of the pressures already at work in Soviet political life, there is every reason to believe that before Khrushchev departs from the scene, new figures will emerge into prominence in the hierarchy, replacing the older men and further complicating the issue of the succession.

Despite the gradations of rank and influence separating the men around Khrushchev, no single individual now is in a position to assume all his powers. Indeed, it is highly doubtful whether any of his subordinates, if Khrushchev were to die now, could independently attain such a position in the near future.

In the interest of promoting a smooth and orderly succession, Khrushchev might seek to foster the career prospects of one of his favorites. In a private conversation last year he said that both he and Mikoyan favored Kozlov as his successor, and he flatly rejected Kirichenko as a suitable candidate. Subsequent developments--Kozlov's increased prominence in public affairs, the promotion of some of his former Leningrad associates to influential positions, the demotion of Kirichenko, and the eclipse of several other figures with Ukrainian backgrounds--appear to give substance to Khrushchev's remarks. Although the evidence is inconclusive, Khrushchev may be manipulating the succession in Kozlov's favor.

- 11 -

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Whether Khrushchev will actually allow Kozlov or anyone else to develop a position as heir apparent remains to be seen. To ensure a smooth succession, Khrushchev would have to relinquish a considerable part of his own power to his chosen heir; this would permit the latter to replace the secondary figures created by Khrushchev with men of his own choosing. Even if such a delicate process of political change were carried out gradually, it would still be an extremely hazardous enterprise, threatening eventually to imperil Khrushchev's own position. It is doubtful whether any transitional arrangements laid down by Khrushchev that fell short of an actual transfer of supreme power from his hands could carry sufficient force to survive his passing from the scene.

Whatever the long-term prospects for the succession--which in any case depend on contingencies that cannot now be foreseen--the short-term outlook appears to be fairly clear. If Khrushchev should die or become incapacitated in the near future, his successors would almost certainly have to share in the disposition of his legacy. The formula of "collective leadership," in disuse during the period of Khrushchev's supremacy, would probably again be revived as a symbol of legitimacy reflecting the divided and uncertain distribution of power. Although Khrushchev's successors would probably be united in their intent to deny any single individual full power, they might accept a transitional figure with limited authority. Mikoyan would qualify as such a candidate and could conceivably emerge as the nominal head of a caretaker regime while a struggle for primacy was being waged among the younger members of the hierarchy.

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