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NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20506

EYES ONLY

April 10, 1991

MEMORANDUM FOR JOHN HELGERSON, DDCI

FROM: DAVID C. GOMPERT/ED A. HEWETT

SUBJECT: The Gorbachev Succession



This is a request for an analysis of the Gorbachev succession. We ask that the analysis be undertaken only in the CIA; that it involve judgements of SOVA, LDA, and [REDACTED] and that it involve Robert Blackwell and Fritz Ermarth (as individuals rather than in their official capacities in the NIC). The report will be addressed only to the two of us, Brent Scowcroft and Bob Gates. The fact that you are preparing the report for us should be closely held. We need the report by April 29. (b)(3)

The major questions we ask you to address are the following:

1. What are the potential triggers which could precipitate Gorbachev's departure or removal? Are there indicators we should monitor in order to assess the likelihood of Gorbachev's departure?
2. How are the dynamics of the succession likely to play out?
 - a. What are the conditions and scenarios for succession, and the probabilities associated with them? A succession according to the new constitutional procedures is one possibility, but what are the others?
 - b. What are the politics of succession likely to be? Who, for example, are the key political players in the succession process?
 - c. What particular role are republican leaders likely to play in the succession process? What opportunities and risks do republics face in this process?
 - d. How will the relationship of the CPSU and the government be affected by the succession? Is there, for example, a possibility that Gorbachev will leave as President, but remain as party leader?

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3. What is the nature of potential successor governments? Their political cast? The key personalities? Their political life expectancy? Their internal and external policy predispositions?

Please call either of us if you need any clarification.

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Withdrawal/Redaction Sheet (George Bush Library)

Document No. and Type	Subject/Title of Document	Date	Restriction	Class.
01. Report	Re: The Gorbachev Succession (14 pp.)	4/29/91	(b)(1), (b)(3) 50 USC 403g	S

Collection:

Record Group: Bush Presidential Records
Office: National Security Council
Series: Burns, R. Nicholas, Files and Hewett, Ed, Files
Subseries: Subject Files
WHORM Cat.:
File Location: Gorbachev Succession

**Document Partially Declassified
(Copy of Document Follows)
By SL (NLGB) on 2/6/09**

Date Closed: 5/26/2000	OA/ID Number: CF01486-016
FOIA/SYS Case #: 1999-0304-F	Appeal Case #:
Re-review Case #:	Appeal Disposition:
P-2/P-5 Review Case #:	Disposition Date:
AR Case #: 1999-0304-F (27.00)	MR Case #: 2004-1964-MR (27.00)
AR Disposition: Released in Part	MR Disposition: Released in Part
AR Disposition Date: 8/22/2005	MR Disposition Date: 12/15/2008

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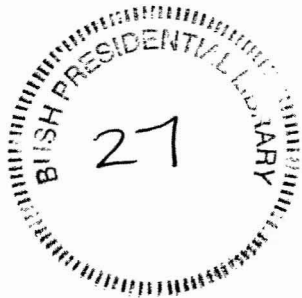
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Central Intelligence Agency



Washington, D. C. 20505

(b)(1)
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[50 USC 4039]



DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

29 April 1991

The Gorbachev Succession (b)(1); (b)(3)

The Gorbachev era is effectively over. Even if Gorbachev remains in office a year from now, real power is likely to be in the hands of either the hardliners or the republics. (b)(1), (b)(3)

If Gorbachev is forced out in the near term, it most likely would be by hardliners who would rule through a weak front man or some sort of National Salvation Committee. Without any action by the traditionalists, however, the influence of reformers will continue to grow, so as time goes on the odds increase that the democrats will come to power. The succession is not likely to be smooth, however, and there probably will be a period of transition with an intense power struggle and no one clearly in charge. (b)(1), (b)(3)

The Gorbachev succession is directly linked to the fate of the political system. If traditionalists oust him it will be to seek to preserve the empire and autocratic rule through tougher means. They would move quickly to suppress the opposition, arresting or conceivably even executing its leaders starting with Yel'tsin, and to roll back newly won freedoms. They would adopt a more truculent public posture toward the United States and seek opportunities to assert their influence abroad. Even if they were willing to rely on a massive use of force and repression, traditionalists would have difficulty maintaining power because they lack a credible program to address the country's mounting problems and would have difficulty overcoming internal divisions. Under such a regime the economy would continue to deteriorate and social alienation would increase sharply, ensuring that eventually democratic and nationalist movements would reemerge. (b)(1), (b)(3)

This memorandum was written in response to a specific set of questions about the issue of the succession to Gorbachev. It was prepared by (b)(1), (b)(3) of the Office of Soviet Analysis. Information available as of 29 April 1991 was used in its preparation. Comments and questions are welcome and may be directed to Chief, (b)(1), (b)(3)

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[50 USC 403g]

If reformers oust Gorbachev, it will be to devolve power to the republics and create a confederation. They would allow the republics to pursue more independent paths even if they remained in a reconstituted union. Many republics would move quickly ahead with democratic and market reforms, but some would likely be subject to some new forms of authoritarianism. Although the loose confederation that remained would control the military and could probably meet most of the Soviet Union's current international commitments, each republic would quickly develop its own independent foreign policy and take over internal security responsibilities from the KGB. (b) (1), (b) (3)

In short, the Soviet Union is now in a revolutionary situation and the current center-dominated political system appears doomed. As happened in Eastern Europe over the past two years, all the ingredients are now present in the USSR that could lead not only to a rapid change in the regime, but quickly sweep away the current political system. (b) (1), (b) (3)

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2.) a gorb. fel' Isin (Sempram) na mbaebwut
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Moving Toward Succession

In recent months, President Gorbachev himself has come to be the center of the escalating Soviet crisis. Pressures have been mounting from all sides for his removal, he has almost no popular support, and the center ground he has been trying to occupy is rapidly eroding. Although their solutions for a post-Gorbachev regime are diametrically opposed, influential players in both the reformist and traditionalist camps are now working to get rid of him or to get him to do what they want. These efforts will almost certainly continue to gain strength. (b)(1), (b)(3)

The traditionalists on whom Gorbachev has been politically dependent are openly distancing themselves from him. The leadership of the KGB, the military, and the CPSU blame him for the current crisis as well as for undermining their institutions. The thrust of statements about Gorbachev's policies made to former President Nixon during his recent visit to Moscow by KGB Chairman Kryuchkov and Minister of Defense Yazov provide further evidence of a lack of confidence in the Soviet President on the part of the security services. (b)(1), (b)(3)

Many traditionalists at lower levels are actively organizing against Gorbachev. The increasingly influential traditionalist group of legislators, Soyuz, is collecting signatures to call a special Congress of Peoples Deputies aimed at removing Gorbachev. Its most outspoken leaders have been openly pressing for Gorbachev's removal since late last year. Gorbachev's position in the party also continues to deteriorate. At the April Central Committee plenum, he turned back a drive to unseat him as General Secretary with the help of the party leadership, but he still faces a growing and increasingly threatening rebellion in the party. (b)(1), (b)(3)

The reformers' drive to remove Gorbachev became more serious after Yel'tsin's nationally televised call for Gorbachev's resignation in mid-February. Although Yel'tsin has recently been more accommodating, the removal of Gorbachev and his government has become the principal demand of the ongoing miners strike and their call is now resonating in other industrial sectors. Most of these groups are calling for power to be transferred to the republics and the abolition of the USSR Supreme Soviet and Congress of Peoples Deputies. (b)(1), (b)(3)

Gorbachev has gotten into this position because his policies are generally blamed for the disaster in the country, and he is not offering any credible way out:

- He has destroyed the old Leninist political system and not created viable new political structures to replace it.
- His new "anti-crisis program" is an ill conceived attempt to restore old methods of top down control to try to stabilize the economy. Since the beginning of the year the economy has begun to decline at an accelerating rate and GNP was down about 8 percent for the first quarter, according to Soviet statistics. Stocks of consumer goods are seriously depleted, inflation is rapidly climbing, and recent price increases could set off an inflationary spiral.

Brief President's Speech
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Gorbachev Has A Good Week

what? Yel'tsin is deceptor not to push?

Last week Gorbachev gained a political respite with the aborted effort by hardliners to unseat him at the CPSU plenum and his accord with republic leaders, including Yel'tsin. These developments came as the political situation was rapidly deteriorating and suggest that none of the key players felt ready to escalate the power struggle:

- Yel'tsin and the republic leaders apparently feared that if they pushed too hard now, Gorbachev could be forced out by hardliners. At a (b)(1), (b)(3) meeting with Russian legislators, Yel'tsin indicated (this may have been a tactical move, saying the time was not ripe for an "all-out confrontation."
- The initiative against Gorbachev at the plenum does little to alleviate pressure on him from hardliners. The move came from disgruntled mid-level party officials, not their traditionalist leaders who would probably try to seize power in a coup if they decided to act against him.

(b)(1), (b)(3)

If only because of the continued economic disintegration, Gorbachev will find the political walls closing in on him again soon. The republic leaders, particularly Yel'tsin, will want to see a meaningful political shift by Gorbachev, while the traditionalists will be angered by the further slow erosion of central control and even more so by any sharp shift in this direction by Gorbachev.

- To reach a lasting accommodation with the republics, Gorbachev would need to concede considerable power to them, substantially reducing the center's authority and his own political role, in effect acceding to their demands for a loose confederation. If he does not agree to this, his struggle with the republics will almost certainly resume and intensify. His ability to count on the republics' fear of a traditionalist coup and consequent willingness to reach agreements to save him indefinitely is a weak reed to depend on.
- Any serious attempt by Gorbachev to accommodate the republics, however, will alarm traditionalists, who continue to have a center-dominated union as their top priority. Fear that Gorbachev is about to enter a real power-sharing arrangement with the republics would be the most likely catalyst for them to try to seize power. (b)(1), (b)(3)

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Бриф Президенту Г.И. Г. Протокол

How would they grow?

- The workers no longer trust Gorbachev's government. Labor unrest is likely to grow as the population begins to feel the effects of recent price hikes and growing shortages of consumer goods.
- Gorbachev's determination to hold a center-dominated union together at almost any price will continue to exacerbate conflicts between the center and the republics. (b)(1), (b)(3)

The growing influence of popularly elected local leaders and legislatures will also continue to undermine Gorbachev's little remaining authority. They enjoy much greater legitimacy than the central leadership and have made implementation of Gorbachev's policies almost impossible without their cooperation. If Yel'tsin succeeds in his effort to create a strong popularly elected Russian presidency and wins the election tentatively planned for June, he will strengthen his hand in challenging the center, while underscoring the bankruptcy of Gorbachev's position and increasing popular pressure for his removal.

(b)(1), (b)(3)

Gorbachev's political position is likely to go from bad to worse. Although he willingly entered into alliance with leaders of the KGB, the military, and the CPSU and is fully behind current traditionalist policies, he has become politically dependent on them and will find it increasingly difficult to ignore their demands. As a result of his turn to the traditionalists, most reformers no longer trust Gorbachev. Yel'tsin and eight other republic leaders reached an accord with Gorbachev last week that could provide the basis for renewed cooperation, but it is unlikely to last unless Gorbachev accepts a sharply reduced role and cedes real power to the republics. Although he can still use the power of the presidency to set the center's agenda, issuing decrees or vetoing decisions by subordinates, he has few other political assets left. He has lost the political initiative and is now primarily reacting to events without any realistic longterm gameplan. (b)(1), (b)(3)

The essence of the current crisis is that neither the existing political system Gorbachev is attempting to preserve nor the partially emerging new system is able to cope effectively with newly mobilized popular demands and the deepening economic crisis. In short, the Soviet Union is now in a revolutionary situation. As happened in Eastern Europe over the past two years, all the ingredients are now present in the USSR that could lead not only to a rapid change in the regime, but quickly sweep away the current political system. (b)(1), (b)(3)

The Key Players

Reformers and traditionalists appear to be squaring off for a showdown. The outcome will depend in large part on the ability of each side to overcome deep internal differences and act cohesively and resolutely. The stakes are extremely high, and both sides probably realize that once they make their final push for power they will begin what could well be a life and death struggle. (b)(1), (b)(3)

Gorbachev. Gorbachev's actions will play a critical role in how this struggle plays out. The longer he stays in office, the worse the political and economic situation is likely to become, increasing the chances that the current political system will be swept away. If he left office now, however, there would still be a possibility that his succession could take

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(b) (1), (b) (b)(1), (b)(3) 50 USC 4030

place more or less within the old system, although the new regime would still be unstable. His retirement alone would solve nothing, however, and there is no certainty that whoever replaced him would do any better. (b)(1); (b)(3)

Gorbachev's recent statements and actions suggest that he desperately wants to hold on to power and will be extremely reluctant to step aside voluntarily. He and his advisors appear to be minimizing his problems and he may still believe he can turn things around soon. (b) (1), (b) (3) (b)(1), (b)(3)

(b) (1), (b) (3) (b)(1), (b)(3) Gorbachev appears to be getting a slanted picture of what is going on since his flow of information is now largely controlled by the KGB and traditionalists. (b) (1), (b)(3) (3)

It cannot be ruled out that as his frustrations continue to grow Gorbachev would voluntarily step aside, especially if he believed this would help achieve his vision of the Soviet future. (b) (1), (b) (3) (b)(1), (b)(3)

(b) (1), (b) (3) (b)(1), (b)(3)

His continuing health problems might also influence his thinking on retirement. Although his heart problem has probably been stabilized by medication, it still poses a danger and

(b) (1), (b) (3) (b)(1), (b)(3)

The Traditionalists. Traditionalists increasingly blame Gorbachev for going against their advice and pursuing policies that are now destroying the union and the Communist party. Mindful of the fate of their counterparts in Eastern Europe--the execution of Ceausescu in Romania, Zhivkov's trial in Bulgaria, and Honecker's similar fate if he had not been smuggled out by the Soviets--they are no doubt aware of the deep hatred of the CPSU in the USSR and some have (b)(1), (b)(3) indicated they fear for their lives. While they want to return to a center dominated system, at least some of them--particularly those near retirement age--may be willing to settle for a solution that protects their lives and pensions. (b)(1), (b)(3)

The traditionalists who now dominate the top level leadership have been trying to get Gorbachev to go along on the issues they consider most critical. By retaining him as president, they have a more legitimate front for their creeping crackdown and can avoid the risks that an outright play for power would entail. However, there are growing indications that they are dissatisfied with Gorbachev for not moving forcefully enough against the opposition. For example, the "black colonels" who have been leading the drive to replace Gorbachev with a more hardline regime claim they have tacit approval for their activities from Yazov. There is no love lost between Gorbachev and his current allies and they could well move to try to dump him if they strongly opposed steps they believed he was prepared to take (such as a coalition with reformers), or if he failed to cooperate on what they see as an essential issue (such as using force to hold the union together). (b)(1), (b)(3)

With the changes that have taken place in the top Soviet leadership in recent months, the most critical levers of power and repression are all in the hands of traditionalists:

- Vice President Yanayev is the legal successor to Gorbachev for up to 90 days while a new president is elected. He is new to the top echelons of power and is not likely to lead a conspiracy, but he has ties to the KGB and would probably be a willing accomplice.

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they want to

(b) (1), (b) (1), (b) (3) 50 USC 4030

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- Deputy General Secretary Ivashko, the next in line to replace Gorbachev as head of the CPSU, is not a strong leader and would not likely last long as head of the party if it were to again assume an important role.
- Russian Communist Party leader Polozkov is the leader of the traditionalist forces in the CPSU and could lead a drive to try to revitalize the party if he became general secretary.
- KGB Chief Kryuchkov, who has impressed observers as the smartest and most dynamic member of this group, is the most influential of the traditionalist leaders and will be critical in any move against Gorbachev. He has been increasingly pushing Gorbachev to take a harder line.
- Defense Minister Yazov does not appear to be a dynamic leader who would take the initiative in a coup, but would be a willing accomplice if the other key players are on board.
- Chief of the General Staff Moiseyev has openly supported tougher action against independent-minded republics, but has also apparently cooperated with Yel'tsin in helping to carve out a larger Russian role in defense issues. At age 52, he may be willing to cut a deal with the opposition to save the army and his career.
- Minister of Internal Affairs Pugo has a KGB background, he would be a willing accomplice; but not a key actor.
- First Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs Boris Gromov was lionized as the last commander of Soviet forces in Afghanistan. At 48, he could emerge as a key player in any upheaval.
- Prime Minister Pavlov has impressed no one since taking office in January and is unlikely to be a key actor.
- Chairman of the USSR Supreme Soviet Anatoliy Lukyanov is being increasingly touted in traditionalist circles as Gorbachev's most likely successor. They see him as more resolute than Gorbachev and having more credibility with the reformers than other traditionalists. (b)(1), (b)(3)

The Reformers. Most reformers do not merely want to replace Gorbachev; their goal is now to dismantle the entire political system he heads. Many are calling for steps along the lines of Yel'tsin's plan for abolishing the presidency, or at a minimum reducing it to a technical position with no real power, and disbanding the USSR legislatures. They would transfer power to the republics in a European Community type arrangement dominated by Russia. All that would remain of the center would be some sort of coordinating body of representatives from consenting republics that would probably oversee overall foreign policy, defense policy, common economic issues such as monetary policy and trade, and other areas delegated to it by the republics. Yel'tsin and some other reformers see this transfer of power taking place through roundtable talks that would have full decisionmaking authority with Gorbachev, the republic presidents, and representatives of other political groups, such as the miners. (b)(1), (b)(3)

how would that work

(b) (1), (b) (1), (b) (3)

(b) (1), (b) (b)(1), (b)(3) 50 USC 4029

Reformers have demonstrated the ability to mobilize the population and call out huge crowds in their support in Moscow and other major cities. Despite an official ban and threats of police actions, over 200,000 people turned out in a pro-Yel'tsin demonstration last month. Many workers look to Yel'tsin for leadership, such the striking Kuzbass miners, and with his support reformers could probably pull off an extended general strike that could paralyze huge parts of the country. (b)(1), (b)(3)

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Many reformers, however, do not yet feel strong enough for a showdown with the government. Although they are making progress overcoming their differences, they are divided into numerous opposition groups and are not well organized across republic lines. Yel'tsin recently talked about the need for a well organized opposition party, but so far he has not taken steps to join forces with other reformers, some of whom distrust him and see him as an opportunist. Aside from Yel'tsin, there is no other figure among the reformers who is currently in a position to assume a broad leadership role. People like Shevardnadze and Yakovlev are too closely associated with Gorbachev, although they could emerge as important figures if there were a search for compromise candidates for leadership positions acceptable to both reformers and traditionalists. (b)(1), (b)(3)

The key players if the reformers come to power will be the republic leaders:

- Yel'tsin has said he does not want to become USSR president and given the weakness of the office and the unsolvable problems that go with it, he would be unlikely to change his mind unless he saw it as the only way to prevent it from falling into the hands of someone who might be able to use the office against him. In that case he would probably also hold on to the Russian presidency.
- The other leading ~~republic-level players~~ are Presidents Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan and Kravchuk of the Ukraine. Both want a new type of union, but are concerned that their interests not be overwhelmed by those of Russia and Yel'tsin. Nazarbayev appears to aspire to a national level role and could be a candidate for a weakened technocratic presidency. (b)(1), (b)(3)

"Reformer"?

The Reliability of the Instruments of Repression

The ability of the traditionalists to act will depend largely on the reliability of their instruments of repression--the KGB, the military, and the MVD Internal Troops. Although the security services certainly have enough loyal troops to execute a coup, imposing martial law throughout the country would be difficult. Moreover, if the opposition succeeds in its goal of neutralizing the security forces' ability to impose broad political repression--or raising sufficient doubts as to their reliability among the leadership so that it becomes reluctant to use force--the game would be up for the traditionalists. Once the opposition realized that the center would not make broad use of force against it, the breakdown of the union and the demise of the regime would accelerate. (b)(1), (b)(3)

Yel'tsin and other reformers have been working to deepen fissures in the military and KGB. Although the top leadership of both organizations appears to be solidly committed to the traditionalist course, many officers and rank-and-file members appear to

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Вопрос Президенту России

(b) (1), (b) (3) 50 USC 403g

be sympathizing with the reformers. This already appears to be having an impact and there are growing numbers of unconfirmed reports that some soldiers or military units balked at orders to use force in the Baltic republics and Azerbaijan. (b)(1), (b)(3)

The reliability of military forces for internal use appears to be a critical and growing concern for the leadership and it is taking steps to address it:

- The CPSU has launched a new drive to reassert its influence in the military and propagandize traditionalist values.
- A campaign is under way to purge the armed forces of reformist officers or at least move them out of sensitive positions.

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(b)(1), (b)(3)

Gorbachev's Downfall

Gorbachev's terms as president and general secretary do not expire until 1995. As a result of changes he initiated in the Constitution and the party rules, he can no longer easily be dumped by other members of the leadership the way Khrushchev was in 1964. Legally removing Gorbachev against his will would be a difficult and cumbersome process:

- He can only be removed as president if he is impeached for violating the Constitution by a two-thirds vote of the Congress of Peoples Deputies.
- Only a CPSU Congress can replace him as party leader, and that would require a long process of electing about 6,000 delegates. (b)(1), (b)(3)

As a result, if Gorbachev goes he is most likely to resign under pressure. Depending on whether the initiative came from the reformers, traditionalists, or he voluntarily stepped down, the consequences could be dramatically different. (b)(1), (b)(3)

A Reformist Initiative. Reformers could succeed in driving Gorbachev from office and creating a new political system in a number of ways, which are not mutually exclusive:

- Most likely this would come about as a result of massive ongoing national strikes and demonstrations aimed at toppling his government. This is the aim of the current miners strike and has been the cry at recent demonstrations in Moscow attended by hundreds of thousands. These grassroots efforts have been gaining strength and there are growing ties among opposition groups throughout the country. If coercive steps are not taken against them, it will be only a matter of time before the opposition can paralyze the country and force major political concessions, possibly including Gorbachev's resignation. Yel'tsin could hasten this process if he began to actively encourage such actions.

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- Gorbachev might also be forced out by an ultimatum from the unified leadership of the key republics. Although they have not gone as far as Yel'tsin in demanding Gorbachev's removal, other republic leaders support Yel'tsin's goal of a wholesale transfer of power to the republics. Yel'tsin and the leaders of Kazakhstan, the Ukraine, and Belorussia are already negotiating a quadripartite treaty that could be the basis for a new political system that excludes the current central government. For such a move to succeed, it would be important to gain the support of the security forces, probably by offering assurances that the military would remain intact and there would not be any retribution against the KGB. Some military leaders might even welcome a Slavic union because it would keep the bulk of Soviet forces intact, while helping defuse some of its key problems, such as ethnic tensions.
- Gorbachev might also be forced out through the roundtable process. In a desperate effort to try to defuse rising tensions, Gorbachev could agree to the roundtable talks being demanded by the opposition. Such a move would probably be a miscalculation, and Gorbachev would likely find himself confronted with an opposition united in its demands that he step down or effectively give up power. Having agreed to roundtable discussions, he might not be able to ignore these demands without provoking massive national unrest and strikes. (b)(1), (b)(3)

A Traditionalist Initiative. To take the tough steps they believe are necessary to forestall a reformist victory, traditionalists may try to remove Gorbachev and install a more hardline regime. Such a move would be conspiratorial and could unfold in several ways:

- They would prefer to oust Gorbachev with a legal veneer by getting him to agree to step down and installing their own candidate. Most likely they would present Gorbachev with an ultimatum to comply or face arrest or death. Yanayev would initially take over as president and Ivashko as general secretary. The traditionalist Congress of Peoples Deputies would then be used to install the hardliners' preferred candidate--this was the way Gorbachev was elected to the post--using the vagueness of the Constitution to postpone a popular election until 1995.
- They could bypass established procedures and use the crisis situation to justify the Congress of Peoples Deputies and Central Committee removing Gorbachev and installing hardline leaders previously agreed on. Given the traditionalist majority in both institutions, they would almost certainly endorse the choice of a united leadership, although there would be loud protests from the reformers in those bodies.
- They could move decisively to regain control by declaring a state of emergency throughout the country, installing some sort of National Salvation Committee, likely dominated by security officials, and moving forcefully against the opposition.
- They could arrange an accident for Gorbachev and replace him by one of the procedures above. (b)(1), (b)(3)

Бриф Президенту Г. Я. Ивашко

(b) (1), (b)(b)(1), (b)(3) 50 USC 402j

A Temporary Compromise. As happened in most of the transitions from Communism in Eastern Europe, the dismantling of the current Soviet political system might be a multistage process and could begin with Gorbachev's participation. A half-way solution is most likely if neither side is sure of its strength and is therefore willing to compromise. Any compromise, however, would mean a significant degree of power sharing with the reformers and would be a major step on their road to power. Once such concessions were made, it would be more difficult for traditionalists to regain the initiative, but fear of a coalition that sharply reduces their influence might be a catalyst for them to act. Such a coalition would be highly unstable and would not last long. It might happen under the following conditions:

- Gorbachev agrees to step aside, but insists on having a role in the transition, perhaps playing for time and still hoping to stay in office.
- Gorbachev resigns before he is confronted with an ultimatum and neither traditionalist nor reformers are strong enough to take control on their own.
- Gorbachev steps aside under pressure or dies in office, but the current political system remains, with traditionalists retaining control of some key positions, while other important portfolios are given to reformers.
- Gorbachev is forced out as president by democrats, but he or another traditionalist remains as head of the CPSU, which is able to retain the loyalty of the leadership of the KGB, military, and MVD. This would create a situation of dual power in at least parts of the country. (b)(1), (b)(3)

Indicators and Triggers

The current political situation is highly volatile and could quickly unravel and throw the country into a succession crisis with few indicators. While the reformers' drive to unseat Gorbachev will continue to be fairly public, a traditionalist initiative would be a secret conspiracy executed suddenly. Military activity would no doubt be associated with it, and while preparations for a nationwide state of emergency could probably be detected, the moves preceding a coup probably would not and even if they were their intent would not be clear. (b)(1), (b)(3)

Any of the following developments could precipitate a crisis that could bring the leadership situation to an immediate head:

- Gorbachev's death or sudden incapacitation would give the traditionalists some advantages if they were able to keep the information secret and then tried to present the succession as a fait accompli.
- The current labor situation could quickly escalate into a national general strike aimed at bringing down the government.
- The death of Yel'tsin, whether or not by natural causes, would spark massive demonstrations against the regime if it is attributed to the KGB, as it most likely would.

(b) (1), (b)(b)(1), (b)(3)

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(b) (1), (b) (1), (b) (3) 50 USC 403j

- The belief by traditionalists that their days are quickly coming to an end could prompt them to make a preemptive move.
- After he wins the Russian presidency, Yel'tsin and reformers could mobilize the populace to press for the removal of Gorbachev.
- Another confrontation between security forces and civilians resulting in civilian deaths, especially if it is much more violent and in a Slavic region, could spark widespread protests. (b)(1), (b)(3)

Policy Implications

No matter what type of succession takes place, initially the new political arrangements are not likely to be stable. At a minimum, elements of the losing side are unlikely to relinquish power smoothly, so there could be a period of intensified struggle that could escalate into widespread upheaval. Under such unstable conditions, a reformist or traditionalist regime would focus on consolidating power and put other issues on the back burner. Nevertheless, there would quickly be some distinct differences between how each would deal with the most pressing domestic and foreign policy issues.

(b)(1), (b)(3)

The Reformers. The exact course of events if reformers took over would depend on circumstances and who the new leaders would be. The result, however, would be a more or less rapid devolution of power to the republics:

- For at least a transition period a reconstituted center would exist, but its policies would be set by collective decisions of the participating republics. This would likely be an unwieldy arrangement, dominated by Russia. It would control the military and limited aspects of foreign policy, but decisions over most domestic matters would be transferred to the republics. One of the first targets of the new regime would be dismantling the repressive capabilities of the KGB.
- Different domestic policies would quickly emerge in various republics. In most of the European parts of the USSR, democratic institutions would develop and there would be a transition to a market economy. In Central Asia and parts of the Caucasus authoritarian regimes would likely emerge.
- The military would be under the joint control of the republics, but Russia would have the predominant role. While the Slavic core might agree to support a common military effort, each republic would probably develop some of its own forces, possibly allowing for some centralized command. Soviet nuclear capabilities would remain under a single command. Republics not participating in joint military operations, almost certainly the Baltics and the Caucasus, would raise their own small armies with small conventional arms, but some might maintain some sort of bilateral defense arrangements with the Slavic core that could allow bases to continue to operate on their soil.

(b) (1), (b) (1), (b) (3)

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- Although a reconstituted center would probably retain an overall coordinating role in foreign policy, it would be difficult for it to conclude international negotiations without active republic participation. The republics would probably uphold existing international obligations and treaties, although the dispersion of authority could make implementation and enforcement difficult. The republics would also quickly begin to pursue independent foreign policies and would be particularly anxious to move ahead in establishing foreign economic relations as well as in some cases defense agreements with their neighbors. (b)(1), (b)(3)

The Traditionalists. Traditionalists would try to move quickly to clamp down on the opposition:

- They would immediately arrest and conceivably even execute key leaders of the opposition, including Yel'tsin; reimpose strict media censorship; ban activities by opposition political groups; and revert to tight central control over the economy.
- Although there would be severe economic constraints, the decline in defense spending would probably stop.
- While the main focus would be on reestablishing control at home, foreign policy would become less flexible. Progress on arms control would be extremely difficult, but existing agreements probably would be observed. Soviet active measures would increase and if the domestic situation were temporarily stabilized the leadership would probably look for targets of opportunity to reassert Soviet influence abroad, provided the political and economic costs are not too high.
- The regime would adopt a much more truculent public posture toward the West and there would be an internal campaign blaming the country's problems on Western subversion. Although the regime would still be interested in pursuing economic cooperation, its policies would create a very unfavorable climate for joint economic ventures and other cooperative efforts. (b)(1), (b)(3)

A Temporary Compromise. Because it would be so unstable, a temporary political compromise would make any major shifts in policy difficult, especially in foreign and defense policy. Such a coalition would be preoccupied with the domestic struggle and would be unlikely to focus on foreign policy, making it difficult to come to closure on arms control negotiations. Individual republics, however, would use the opportunity to press their own agendas abroad and push for recognition as independent states. Reformers might be able to make some progress in advancing their domestic initiatives, and the shift of power to the republics would be accelerated, giving them greater latitude to pursue their own agendas. (b)(1), (b)(3)

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(b) (1), (b) (b)(1), (b)(3) 50 USC 4032

Prospects: A Messy Transition

No matter what happens, the current political system in the Soviet Union is doomed. If traditionalists seize power, with massive use of force and repression they might temporarily reestablish control of most of the country. Under such a regime the economy would continue to deteriorate and social alienation would increase sharply; almost certainly democratic and nationalist movements would reemerge. (b)(1), (b)(3)

Time is working against the traditionalists, however. The longer force is not used, the weaker their position will become. The security services will continue to fracture, while democratic and nationalist forces continue to gain strength and organize. Moreover, as workers increasingly feel the pinch of recent price hikes and the economy continues its downward spiral, labor unrest is almost certain to become more serious, fueling pressures to change the system. (b)(1), (b)(3)

Even if Gorbachev manages to remain in office a year from now, the Gorbachev era is over. The sharp decline in his power will be almost impossible to reverse and a de facto transfer of power will likely have taken place to either the reformers or traditionalists, with very much the same policy consequences if they had come to power without him.

(b)(1), (b)(3)

Бүгд Президентийн Тиймшдэ Протоколды

(b) (1), (b) (b)(1), (b)(3)

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April 30, 1991

Ed:

Here are some thoughts for your Scowcroft letter to Webster on the CIA study:

1) The paper is out-dated. It was conceived and written before the agreement of the nine and Gorbachev's apparent shift in course. In my view, those events argue for a rethinking of some of the major points in the paper. They should at least give the CIA pause in their stark view of Soviet internal affairs.

2) I see this as essentially two different papers. The first part is a concerted attempt to make an airtight case that Gorbachev has no chance of surviving and that Soviet politics will be a struggle between reformers and traditionalists. They ought to think carefully about infusing this section with a more nuanced approach.

The second part of the paper is much more useful--it describes the process by which Gorbachev could be ousted and indicates who might do it and how. I think this is by far the more relevant and interesting for policymakers.

3) In the interest of objectivity, they ought to at least make a try at the possibility that Gorbachev might survive. The paper needs to be buttressed by a section on how he might survive and the impact his continued rule could have on both left and right.

NB NB