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The KGB in Kremlin Politics

Jeremy R. Azrael

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Jeremy R. Azrael

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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

➤ Despite numerous claims to the contrary, the Soviet secret police were not politically neutralized or brought under nonpartisan party control after the death of Stalin. Although hard data are difficult to come by, the available evidence leaves little doubt that the KGB has been an instrument and arena of internecine conflict among Soviet leaders from the moment it was founded in April 1954. Thanks to their control of an immense arsenal of politically potent weapons, moreover, KGB cadres appear to have played important and sometimes decisive roles in the allocation of power and authority in the Kremlin under all of Stalin's successors.

The first head of the KGB, Ivan Serov, clearly owed his loyalty to Nikita Khrushchev, who had already relied on him to assist in the arrest of Lavrentii Beria and was now counting on him to help oust other rivals for supreme power. On assignment from Khrushchev, Serov and his lieutenants first collected evidence implicating Malenkov, Molotov, and Kaganovich in Beria's and Stalin's crimes and then mobilized the KGB against them, when a majority of the Politburo backed them against Khrushchev. In addition, Serov helped Khrushchev to engineer the removal of Marshal Zhukov from the Politburo. By rendering these services, however, Serov himself became expendable from Khrushchev's point of view. As a result, he was summarily demoted when the remaining members of the leadership made this a condition for their acquiescence in Khrushchev's addition of the premiership to his other offices.

Serov was succeeded by Alexander Shelepin, who served as chairman of the KGB from 1958 until 1961 and who continued to head it *de facto* until 1967. Initially it appeared as if Khrushchev had replaced one deferential partisan with another, but it gradually became clear that Shelepin was trying to parlay command of the KGB into an independent position in the very inner circle of the leadership. When Khrushchev resisted these efforts, Shelepin joined forces with other malcontents in the leadership to stage a *coup d'état* that depended heavily on the KGB for its success.

Following this 1964 coup, Shelepin had no trouble cashing in his claim to membership on the Politburo. However, his apparent ambition to succeed Khrushchev as general secretary remained unfulfilled. Instead, he was outmaneuvered by Brezhnev, who finally managed to strip him of command of the secret police by forcing him to choose between remaining in the leadership in a secondary role or courting the fate of Beria.

Yurii Andropov's selection to replace Shelepin's protege Vladimir Semichastny as chairman of the KGB in 1967 stemmed from the refusal of others in the leadership to allow Brezhnev to appoint "a second Serov" in the person of his own long-time KGB client, Semyon Tsvigun. Despite this victory for "nonpartisanship," however, Tsvigun's appointment as Andropov's principal deputy enabled Brezhnev to use the KGB to purge the leadership of two major competitors in the early 1970s. As Andropov gradually took firmer command of the KGB, it became clear that he himself was less interested in enforcing the principle of collective leadership than in furthering his own political career.

Given Andropov's increasingly obvious ambition, it is difficult *not* to suspect that the KGB may have had a hand in the misfortunes that depleted the ranks of Brezhnev's most likely successors between 1978 and 1980. Many Moscow "insiders" have alleged that this was the case, and their reports have the virtue of being consistent with the known facts. In any event, by the early 1980s, the contest to succeed Brezhnev had become a two-man race between Andropov and Konstantin Chernenko, who had Brezhnev's backing. Although Chernenko was initially the front-runner, Andropov's command of the KGB soon enabled him to close the gap. In effect, Andropov intimidated Brezhnev into giving him a lien on the general secretaryship of the party in return for a promise to defer collection for the remainder of Brezhnev's life and to observe a truce with the ranking Brezhnevites for a decent interlude thereafter.

As part of his deal with Brezhnev and the Brezhnevites, Andropov agreed that they would have a major voice in the choice of his successor as chairman of the KGB. In consequence, when Andropov unexpectedly died after serving only 15 months as general secretary, the KGB was not headed by an Andropov loyalist but by Viktor Chebrikov, who had functioned as one of Brezhnev's watchdogs in KGB headquarters since 1967. Chebrikov had been appointed chairman shortly after Brezhnev's death, when Andropov's immediate replacement, Vitalii Fedorchuk, was named Minister of the Interior. Given Chebrikov's Brezhnevite background, it is difficult to understand why some Western scholars insist that it is absurd to think Chernenko was appointed to succeed Andropov as general secretary with the support of the KGB, especially when there were numerous other high-ranking secret policemen with similar credentials. Indeed, it seems likely that such support was not only forthcoming but indispensable.

If anything, Chebrikov's backing was an even more important factor in Gorbachev's selection to succeed Chernenko than in Chernenko's to succeed Andropov. This was subsequently confirmed by Yegor

Ligachev in a speech adding substance to earlier reports that it was only after Chebrikov made it clear the KGB was firmly on Gorbachev's side, and was prepared to play political hardball on his behalf, that Gorbachev's opponents relented. Once Gorbachev began to espouse the cause of radical political reform, however, Chebrikov's enthusiasm waned. In addition to delivering increasingly strident public warnings about the excesses of *glasnost'* and *demokratizatsiia*, he has almost certainly used KGB resources to force Gorbachev to back off. Among other things, the KGB may have played a substantial behind-the-scenes role both in the publication of the inflammatory "Nina Andreeva letter" and in the entrapment and ouster of Gorbachev's supporter, Boris Yeltsin, from the leadership.

By the summer of 1988, Moscow "insiders" were reporting that the fall political season in the Kremlin would open with a dramatic showdown between Gorbachev and his increasingly insubordinate "second secretary," Yegor Ligachev, with whom Chebrikov was thought to be allied. Fyodr Burlatsky, a charter member of Gorbachev's semi-official braintrust, set the tone by underscoring the topical implications of his September 22 *Literaturnaia gazeta* article on the role of Shelepin and Semichastny in the ouster of Khrushchev. After the September 29-30 Central Committee Plenum, however, many Western analysts concluded that Burlatsky had sounded a false alarm or, at the very least, had greatly underestimated the ease with which Gorbachev would be able to counter any challenge by Ligachev (who lost his post as second secretary as a result of the plenum) and to downgrade Chebrikov and the KGB in the process.

On closer inspection, Chebrikov and the KGB actually appear to have emerged from the September plenum in an even more influential and powerful position than before. The most likely explanation for this outcome is that it was the price Chebrikov exacted in return for his agreement to cut a last-minute deal with Gorbachev at Ligachev's expense. That Gorbachev was willing to pay such a high price suggests that he may have been confronted with what he considered an even less palatable alternative. The possibility that Ligachev, Gromyko, Solomontsev, Chebrikov, and other members of the leadership really were seriously contemplating a 1964-style coup cannot be excluded a priori, especially in the context of escalating ethnic conflict in the Caucasus and growing defiance of Moscow in the Baltic states. Even more likely is that Gorbachev faced the prospect of a politically humiliating dilution of his proposals for constitutional reform, including those that he was heavily counting on to enhance his personal authority and power. In any event, he made a Hobson's choice in September 1988, and by choosing as he did, he has paved the way for Chebrikov's emergence as a candidate for supreme power in his own right.

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INTRODUCTION

With notable exceptions, Western specialists have tended to treat the involvement of the secret police in Soviet elite politics as a matter of purely historical interest.¹ Like its supposedly all-powerful Stalinist predecessors, the post-Stalinist KGB is regularly identified as one of the pillars of the Soviet regime. Its activities in monitoring public opinion, repressing dissent, and stifling protest are often analyzed in great detail.² Similarly, its role in combatting economic crime and official corruption receives frequent mention.³ And a great deal is written about its performance in the field of foreign intelligence.⁴ However, its prowess in power politics tends to be disparaged, if it is discussed at all.⁵

According to what can be called the mainstream interpretation of modern Soviet history, Stalin's heirs renounced reliance on the secret police in their internecine struggles in order to "escape from the oppressive sense of fear and personal insecurity under which they had labored as Stalin's subordinates."⁶ Thanks to a "deep seated consensus" that "nothing has happened to crack," moreover, this self-denying ordinance has supposedly been observed ever since.⁷ What followed Stalin's death, in other words, was much more than an adjustment in the balance of institutional power. The secret police did not merely lose some of its erstwhile independence and submit to firmer and more collegial "party control" over certain of its operations. These are the circumscribed terms in which the process is often described in scholarly writings. But many of the authors actually envision something much closer to the complete and permanent emasculation of the secret police as a power-political actor.

This characterization is not a caricature; the following quotations are from recent works by three highly regarded but otherwise not unrepresentative scholars. According to Bialer, it is "one of the most important characteristics of the present Soviet political system that the secret police [has been] largely eliminated from the political process

¹Robert Conquest and Amy Knight are perhaps the most conspicuous exceptions.

²Barghoorn (1976) and Reddaway (1983).

³Simis (1986).

⁴Barron (1974) and Dziak (1987).

⁵Breslauer (1982) does not mention the name of any secret police chief after Beria in his account of Soviet power politics during the Khrushchev and Brezhnev eras and mentions the KGB only twice in passing.

⁶Leonhard (1958), p. 2.

⁷Colton (1986), p. 99.

within the elite."⁸ In the same vein, Colton contends that the KGB has "never exercised much independent influence over grand decisions" and is no longer even influential enough to be courted by "warring groups within the party."⁹ Last but not least, Hough has recently put it on record that "the secret police [has] as little right to become involved in factional politics in the [contemporary] Soviet Union as the . . . FBI [has] in the United States."¹⁰ To be fair, many mainstream scholars would probably consider Hough's formulation at least slightly hyperbolic. To judge by their writings, however, most of them would nonetheless subscribe to the underlying dismissive assessment of the importance of the KGB in power politics.¹¹

The findings presented below are inconsistent with this assessment. These findings emerge from an examination of the role of the secret police in some of the most important power struggles in the Kremlin since the death of Stalin. This examination has naturally been hampered by the scarcity of hard data on both Soviet leadership conflicts and the activities of the KGB. Like all Kremlinological studies, including those of mainstream analysts, this one relies heavily on an ability to separate useful grains of information from the chaff of misinformation and disinformation that is all too frequently found in the only available sources—publications and statements by Soviet and ex-Soviet participants and observers. Because this is a far from infallible method, no claim is made that all of the inferences or conclusions in the following pages are valid, let alone that all of the events described unfolded precisely as suggested. It is claimed, however, that the cumulative weight of credible evidence is sufficient to shift the burden of proof to those who contend that the secret police has lost its power-political clout.

THE SECRET POLICE AND THE ELIMINATION OF BERIA

Whatever fearsome lessons Stalin's immediate successors may have drawn from their personal experiences under Stalin, it is a misleading oversimplification to describe the post-Stalin interregnum as a period in which Stalin's heirs "stroved to bring the security services under

⁸Bialer (1986), p. 625.

⁹Colton (1986), pp. 98 and 128.

¹⁰Hough (1985), p. 37. In his revision of Merle Fainsod's *How Russia Is Ruled*, Hough does not even list the KGB among the Soviet political system's significant institutional actors. (Hough and Fainsod, 1979, pp. 362-408.)

¹¹See, for example, Breslauer (1982), where the KGB receives only two cursory references.

collective control and prevent any one person from ever again using them as a private weapon."¹² Some members of the leadership undoubtedly hoped for such an outcome and did what they could to bring it about. Their efforts probably contributed to the prompt decision to unmask the so-called "Doctors Plot," which Stalin and his henchmen in the secret police had concocted as the prelude to a wholesale purge of the "Old Guard" members of the Presidium.¹³ Nevertheless, the chief candidates for the succession seem to have been much more interested in competing for factional control over and primacy within the secret police than in joining forces to subject the latter to nonpartisan "party control."

In the case of one of Stalin's heirs, Lavrentii Beria, the charge of employing the secret police in his factional intrigues is easily proven. Beria was arrested less than four months after Stalin's death, however, and it would be frivolous to challenge the mainstream characterization of the political role of the secret police in the post-Stalin period on the basis of his undisputed reliance on the support of many former and current "Chekists" in his short-lived bid for power.¹⁴ If Beria deserves more than a brief mention in this study, therefore, it is because he was not only an instigator of partisan activity on the part of the secret police but also a victim.

Most analysts rarely even consider the possibility that some senior secret police officers played an active role in the conspiracy against Beria. It is a real possibility, however, in light of what Khrushchev reports in the only available account of events by one of the conspirators, not to mention one with a considerable reluctance to admit to the use of "nonparty methods."¹⁵ The only conspirators Khrushchev identifies by name other than fellow members of the leadership are Marshals Georgii Zhukov and Kiril Moskalenko of the Soviet army. But he mentions the participation of nine other unnamed "marshals and generals" in the final showdown with Beria and implies that Colonel General Ivan Serov and Colonel General Sergei Kruglov of the secret police were among them.¹⁶ If these veteran "Chekists" had not been involved, it is difficult to understand what could have prompted Khrushchev to propose that Beria be consigned to Serov's custody after his arrest or

¹²Hosking (1985), p. 317.

¹³See Conquest (1961), pp. 185-191. See also Mikoyan (1988).

¹⁴The Cheka was the first Soviet secret police organization, and Soviet secret policemen have liked to refer to themselves as "Chekists" ever since.

¹⁵See Talbott (1970), p. 331.

¹⁶Ibid., pp. 336-338.

why he would imply that Kruglov had also been considered and rejected as a possible custodian.¹⁷

The suspicions aroused by Khrushchev's account of the arrest of Beria are reenforced by an independent account of the simultaneous roundup of Beria's principal henchmen. What makes this latter account relevant for present purposes is its claim that Serov signed the arrest warrants.¹⁸ If this claim is true, it clinches the case for including Serov among the active participants in the anti-Beria conspiracy. Serov's signature apart, it seems highly unlikely that the roundup of Beria's henchmen was planned or executed without the help of many of their fellow secret policemen.¹⁹ In consequence, the first phase of the post-Stalin succession struggle should probably not be described, as it often is, as an institutional contest pitting the secret police against the rest of the party-state machine. Instead, it should be seen as an institutionally cross-cutting conflict in which both Beria and his opponents relied on partisan allies in the secret police for crucial support.

THE MALENKOV-KHRUSHCHEV STRUGGLE

With Beria out of the way, the struggle for control of the secret police quickly took the form of a contest between Khrushchev and Malenkov. Malenkov apparently won the first round of this contest with the appointment of Kruglov as Minister of the Interior—a post that entailed command of the secret as well as the regular police, thanks to the organizational changes that Beria had introduced immediately after Stalin's death. Kruglov was clearly not Khrushchev's candidate for the job, and his summary dismissal shortly after Malenkov's resignation as premier suggests that Malenkov was his principal supporter.²⁰ Khrushchev quickly overcame this initial

¹⁷See, however, *Krasnaia Zvezda*, March 18, 19, and 20, 1988, for a three-installment interview with a military officer who participated in the arrest and subsequent detention of Beria. According to then Colonel, now retired Major General I. Zub, Serov did not participate in the physical arrest of Beria and was prevented from interrogating Beria without military observers present during the week Beria spent in Lefortovo Prison immediately following his arrest.

¹⁸Krotkov (1978), p. 230. Krotkov's alleged informant was the wife of Dekanozov (a long-time henchman of Beria), who had recently been reinstalled as Georgian Minister of the Interior.

¹⁹See R. Medvedev (1983), p. 63, for the claim that "Beria's confederates . . . together with dozens of other important MVD officials and commanders of MVD divisions" were arrested "under the direction of Serov." See also Heller and Nekrich (1986), p. 524, who credit Serov with a "key role in the elimination of his former boss."

²⁰See Talbott (1970), p. 338, for Khrushchev's insistence that he did not even know Kruglov at the time of Beria's arrest. Kruglov was dismissed in early 1956, even though by then his portfolio was no longer of any particular power-political significance.

setback, however, and forged steadily ahead to a decisive victory. From the outset, in fact, he did extremely well at landing his own clients and allies appointments as Kruglov's deputies, particularly in the so-called GUGB or Chief Administration for State Security. Moreover, he quickly managed to win approval for the GUGB's reconstitution as a free-standing bureaucratic entity.

The key figure in Khrushchev's burgeoning secret police entourage was undoubtedly Serov, who had probably been Khrushchev's candidate to succeed Beria but had been forced to settle for the post of First Deputy Minister of the Interior and chief of the GUGB when Kruglov's candidacy prevailed. Khrushchev was probably not Serov's only patron in the leadership, but the two of them had been closely associated for many years. Although proximity is not synonymous with fealty least of all in a system based on "institutionalized cross-espionage and mutual suspicion," Khrushchev trusted Serov, and looked on him as both a personal friend and a political ally.²¹ Lest Serov prove too independent, moreover, Khrushchev surrounded him with cadres who had been transferred to the secret police after serving under Khrushchev in the party organizations of Moscow or the Ukraine. Notable members of this group included K. F. Lunev, a long-time Moscow party *apparatchik* in whom Khrushchev evidently had the highest confidence; V. I. Ustinov, a former Moscow *raikom* secretary (and future Moscow *gorkom* first secretary) who was seconded to the secret police in 1953; and N. R. Mironov, one of the Ukrainian party *apparatchik* whom Khrushchev had infiltrated into the upper reaches of the secret police before Stalin's death.²²

Given this lineup, Khrushchev obviously had little reason to fear that Malenkov would be able to employ the secret police against him in their struggle for power. However, Malenkov had every reason to be nervous when the GUGB was transformed into a separate Committee of State Security (KGB), with Serov as chairman and Lunev as his

²¹Ibid., pp. 115-116 and 338, for Khrushchev's high praise and continuing affection for Serov; also Zh. Medvedev (1984), p. 59.

²²Khrushchev's confidence in Lunev is indicated not only by the fact that he was appointed first deputy chairman of the KGB in 1954—a post he held until 1959—but also because he was appointed to serve as a judge at Beria's trial, the only Chekist thus honored. Ustinov served as first secretary of the Moscow *gorkom* from 1956-1957, after which he succeeded Yuri Andropov as Soviet Ambassador to Hungary. Mironov joined the secret police in 1951 after serving in the party apparatus of Dnepropetrovsk, the point of origin of so many of Khrushchev's supporters, until they abandoned him to support their more immediate patron, Brezhnev. Between 1956 and 1959, Mironov served as KGB chief in Leningrad, where he presumably played a key role in reopening "the Leningrad Affair" on Khrushchev's behalf. From 1959-1964, he served as chief of the Administrative Organs Department of the Central Committee Secretariat.

first deputy, in March 1954.²³ Malenkov's nervousness probably came close to panic, if it is true, as was claimed by an exceptionally well-connected Soviet source, that, unlike other governmental committees, the KGB took its orders directly from the Khrushchev-dominated Central Committee rather than the Malenkov-dominated Council of Ministers.²⁴

Because this claim cannot be independently verified, Western scholars have ignored it. Collateral information, however, suggests that it may contain an element of truth. It is a reasonable supposition that the Poles were following a Soviet blueprint when they not only set up a Polish counterpart of the KGB but also established a special four-man commission of the party Politburo to supervise its operations.²⁵ If so, Khrushchev's Central Committee Secretariat almost certainly became the principal "transmission belt" between the KGB and its monitoring commission in the Kremlin, and Khrushchev himself undoubtedly became a member of this commission and possibly its chairman. Even if the KGB continued to receive its orders through normal governmental channels, moreover, its creation was clearly an important factional victory for Khrushchev. What remained to be seen was whether, how, and to what extent Khrushchev would try to use the secret police to coerce and intimidate his rivals now that his ability to do so was no longer constrained by having to circumvent Kruglov's authority.

There was an interlude in the mid-1950s in which it was possible to believe that Khrushchev had converted the secret police into a factional stronghold for strictly defensive purposes. Yet even then there were grounds for suspicion that something more ominous was going on behind the scenes. At a minimum, one could not fail to notice that the mid-1950s were very good years for Serov, who was promoted to full membership in the Central Committee in February 1956, after having been awarded the Order of Lenin in November 1955 and the Order of the Red Banner in December 1954.²⁶ Furthermore, in his report to the Twentieth Party Congress, Khrushchev roundly condemned those who displayed "incorrect and harmful mistrust of the workers of the state

²³Conquest (1961), p. 222, relying on the biography of V. I. Ustinov in the *Large Soviet Encyclopedia*, suggests that the KGB may actually have begun to operate months before its formation was publically announced.

²⁴*Politicheskii Dnevnik* (1972), pp. 39-40; R. Medvedev and Zh. Medvedev (1976), p. 40.

²⁵See *Background Information, USSR*, Radio Free Europe, Munich, October 11, 1956, p. ii, quoting reports from Seweryn Bialer, who also reported that these new security arrangements were put in place after a team of experts returned to Warsaw from a trip to Moscow in the spring of 1954.

²⁶See *Pravda*, December 26, 1954, and November 5, 1955.

security organs" and thereby failed to recognize that "the overwhelming majority of Chekists are honest officials, devoted to our common cause, and deserving of our trust."²⁷ Such gestures of deference to the secret police could have been inspired by a simple desire to prevent demoralization in the ranks of an organization that was being forced to repudiate and, in the case of many former officers, "atone" for a great deal of its past behavior.²⁸ Because they were made in the midst of intense infighting within the leadership, however, one can speculate that they were also rewards from a grateful Khrushchev for factional services rendered.

THE ANTI-PARTY GROUP

If Khrushchev owed the KGB a debt of gratitude for helping him to become *primus inter pares* within the collective leadership in the mid-1950s, he owed it an even greater obligation for helping him to retain and ultimately enhance his position in June 1957, when a sizable majority of the party Presidium, led by Malenkov, Molotov, and Kaganovich, tried to dislodge him. In fact, Khrushchev's partisan use of the KGB seems to have been important in the genesis of this crisis. Khrushchev himself admitted to Yugoslav Ambassador Veljko Micunovic that this was one of the charges his opponents leveled against him. During a lengthy conversation only a week after the crisis ended, Khrushchev reportedly told Micunovic that "the Stalinists had raised the question . . . of the removal of Serov and accused Khrushchev of having members of the Presidium 'bugged.'"²⁹ According to Khrushchev, this accusation was completely unfounded, and his opponents were quick to drop it when he demanded an immediate investigation.³⁰ Later in the same conversation, though, Khrushchev said things that make one suspect he was probably employing the KGB in even more menacing ways, at least from the point of view of his opponents. More particularly, he suggested that the primary reason "the Stalinists wanted to remove Serov and get their hands on his job . . . [was] so that they could destroy the [secret police] archives that are there to condemn them."³¹

²⁷*Pravda*, February 16, 1956.

²⁸The mid-1950s saw a continuing series of trials of "Beria-ites" and other ranking secret police officers of the Stalin era. See Golikov (1988), p. 30.

²⁹Micunovic (1980), p. 269.

³⁰The fact that Khrushchev was apparently caught completely unaware by the outbreak of the crisis lends his denial a certain credibility.

³¹Micunovic (1980), p. 274.

Although Khrushchev did not go on to confess that he himself had instructed Serov to compile incriminating evidence from the archives for the precise purpose of condemning "the Stalinists," there is little question that he had. Penkovskiy recounts a conversation in which Serov told him about "selecting materials for Khrushchev to use in his speeches on Stalin and his crimes."³² Furthermore, evidence of Malenkov's complicity in at least some of these crimes had been presented to the Central Committee as early as January 1955. According to a confidential circular letter from the CPSU to fraternal parties, this was when Malenkov was officially charged with (and allegedly confessed to) "coresponsibility" for the "Leningrad Affair."³³

It may well have been fear that Khrushchev was about to go public with some of the results of Serov's archival research that prompted the members of the anti-party group to confront Khrushchev when they did—and sooner than they would have wished.³⁴ The speech that Khrushchev was scheduled to make in Leningrad on the day after his opponents summoned him to battle would have provided an appropriate occasion for a public denunciation of Malenkov for complicity in Stalin's recurrent massacres of Leningrad's elite. The fact that Khrushchev delivered exactly such a denunciation when he finally managed to get to Leningrad almost three weeks later obviously does not prove that he would have done something similar if the June crisis had not taken place in the interim.³⁵ In conversation with Micunovic, however, Khrushchev strongly implied that he would have. There is

³²Penkovskiy (1965), pp. 210–211.

³³See Pethybridge (1967), pp. 58 and 60, citing a report by Seweryn Bialer. See also Boffa (1959), p. 27. Beria had been posthumously charged with complicity in the Leningrad Affair as early as the spring of 1954. See Zimirina (1988), p. 3.

³⁴At a minimum, such veteran conspirators as Malenkov, Molotov, Kaganovich, and Bulganin must have been disturbed by the number of foreseeable contingencies for which they were not yet fully prepared. According to a later account by Kiril Mazurov, "materials" to indict the members of the anti-party group for complicity in Stalin's crimes were presented to the Central Committee toward the end of the June crisis, when Khrushchev's victory was a foregone conclusion. The fact that these "materials" were available and ready to hand was taken for granted. (*Pravda*, October 20, 1961.)

³⁵See *Pravda*, July 7, 1957, for the Leningrad speech in which Khrushchev said that "all the members of the anti-party group were profoundly guilty of the crude mistakes and shortcomings that took place in the past; and Malenkov, who was one of the chief organizers of the so-called Leningrad Affair, was simply afraid to come to you here in Leningrad." N. M. Shvernik, chairman of the Party Control Committee, went even further in a speech that he delivered in Leningrad at the same time. After saying that "it is now established that the 'Leningrad Affair,' in whose organization Malenkov played an active part, was fabricated," Shvernik went on to say that "the Party Control Committee has reviewed many files of former [Leningrad] party members . . . in order to correct violations of revolutionary legality, which were tolerated by Malenkov, Kaganovich, and Molotov during the period of mass repressions." (*Pravda*, July 7, 1957, p. 4.)

therefore no reason to challenge the conclusion of East European observers that this is the most likely explanation for the timing of the June crisis.³⁶

In explaining how Khrushchev managed to outmaneuver his opponents during the course of the June crisis, Western scholars have emphasized the support he received from the armed forces and the party *apparatus*. With rare exceptions, Khrushchev's control of the secret police is treated as inconsequential. If the KGB is mentioned at all, it is dismissed as having "hardly counted in the political balance," let alone in the balance of "frontline" forces.³⁷ This, however, is most decidedly not the way in which the role of the KGB has been depicted by knowledgeable "insiders."

All "insider" accounts of the crisis published in the West suggest that support from the KGB was an important element in tipping the balance in Khrushchev's favor. According to Roy and Zhores Medvedev, for example, it was Serov who headed the "delegation" that demanded that the Central Committee rather than the opposition-dominated party Presidium be allowed to decide Khrushchev's fate and who threatened that any unilateral decision by the Presidium would be overridden.³⁸ Similarly, Nekrich and Heller credit Serov, along with Zhukov, with helping to arrange the special flights that enabled provincial Khrushchev supporters to gather in Moscow before the Presidium could present them with a *fait accompli*.³⁹ This is confirmed in turn by Dzhirkvelov, who was head of the first department of the Georgian KGB at the time and who claims to have seen an order from Serov to the republic KGBs instructing them "to deliver all the members of the Central Committee of the CPSU to Moscow . . . to support Khrushchev."⁴⁰ Finally, Penkovskiy, who enjoyed Serov's personal confidence, asserts, "it was help from the KGB that enabled the members of the Central Committee to rush to Moscow in 1957" and concludes, "if it

³⁶See Micunovic (1980) p. 269. Khrushchev reportedly told Micunovic that his forthcoming Leningrad speech was the first issue raised by his opponents, who insisted that it should be made by someone else, with Khrushchev limiting himself to a few innocuous comments. See T.S. (1957), pp. 386-387, for "rumors from non-Soviet Communist sources that the [anti-party] group precipitated the crisis because they got wind of Khrushchev's intention of using the Leningrad [speech] . . . as the occasion for denouncing Malenkov . . . and perhaps other leaders responsible for past purges." See also Pethybridge (1962), p. 93.

³⁷Pethybridge (1967), pp. 89 and 137.

³⁸Medvedev and Medvedev (1976), pp. 118-119; also *Politicheskii Dnevnik* (1972), p. 107.

³⁹Heller and Nekrich (1986), p. 554.

⁴⁰Dzhirkvelov (1987), p. 154.

were not for the KGB and Serov," Khrushchev could never have survived.⁴¹

Given their authors' credentials, these accounts deserve to be taken very seriously. The Medvedevs and Heller and Nekrich are distinguished scholars with numerous informants in the Soviet establishment at the time of the June crisis; Penkovskiy and Dzhirkalov were not only serving intelligence officers with high security clearances and elite connections but also men who realized that the information they subsequently elected to transmit to the West would be critically evaluated in the light of information from other sources by case officers looking for Soviet plants and double agents. It does not necessarily follow that these accounts are accurate. However, because mainstream analysts have failed to adduce any evidence to support their contention that the June crisis was resolved without the active participation of the KGB, a strong case can be made for giving these accounts the benefit of any doubt.⁴²

THE KGB AND THE ZHUKOV AFFAIR

Although Khrushchev's victory over "the anti-party group" left him as the only viable contender for Stalin's mantle, it did not bring him dictatorial power. The expulsion of Malenkov, Molotov, and Kaganovich from the party Presidium on June 29, 1957 marked the end of the post-Stalin experiment with collective leadership. Despite this breakthrough, however, Khrushchev could not be confident that the reconstituted Presidium would function as a rubber stamp. To start with, two participants in "the anti-party group," Voroshilov and Bulganin, retained their seats on the Presidium, and one, Pervukhin, was merely demoted to candidate status. Of the nine new additions to Presidium, which was enlarged from 11 to 15 full members, moreover, only three or four were out-and-out clients of Khrushchev.⁴³ Furthermore, one of the independents, Marshal Georgii Zhukov, clearly made Khrushchev extremely uneasy.

Zhukov is always identified as a key supporter of Khrushchev in his struggle with "the anti-party group," and it is almost inconceivable that Khrushchev would have allowed him to become the first professional military officer to attain a seat on the Presidium if that were not the

⁴¹Penkovskiy (1965), pp. 206 and 282.

⁴²It may be noteworthy in this connection that Serov's deputy, K. F. Lunev, was awarded the Red Banner of Labor in October 1957 (*Prauda*, October 31, 1957).

⁴³Aristov, Belyaev, Furtseva, and, arguably, Brezhnev qualified as clients. Ignatov, Kozlov, Kuisinen, Shvernink, and Zhukov clearly did not.

case.⁴⁴ At the same time, however, Khrushchev feared "bonapartist" proclivities within the military high command.⁴⁵ And the very fact that he had been forced to solicit the military's help during the June crisis undoubtedly increased his anxiety. To make matters worse, Zhukov enjoyed immense respect among his brother officers and was, if anything, even more popular with rank-and-file citizens. Presumably, it was precisely these traits that made him so valuable to Khrushchev as a political ally. But they were highly problematical assets from the point of view of a recently embattled leader who was justifiably uncertain about the scope of his authority not only over his colleagues in the Kremlin, but over the country at large. In consequence, Khrushchev undoubtedly called on Serov and his "honest Chekists" to remain vigilant against "factionalism" in general and "military factionalism" in particular.

The high command received what may have been an esoteric public warning that it would be held accountable to the secret police for efforts to capitalize on its role in the June crisis while the crisis was still winding down. This warning (if such it was) was conveyed in a *Red Star* notice of a reception hosted by Marshal Zhukov for the Yugoslav Minister of Defense, who was visiting Moscow at the time.⁴⁶ What was striking about this otherwise routine notice was that the normally inconspicuous General Serov was listed not only as a guest but ahead of all nine of the Soviet marshals identified as participants.⁴⁷ Although this placement could be attributed to Serov's ministerial status, it was unusual and lent itself to a much less benign interpretation, in which the high command was being reminded that Serov's power within the armed forces far exceeded his rank and would, if necessary, be exercised accordingly.⁴⁸ Since Serov had spent much of his career monitoring the political activities of the high command on Stalin's behalf and had reportedly been personally involved in the arrest of Marshal Tukhachevsky during the Great Purge, this was a particularly grim reminder.

⁴⁴Zhukov had been a candidate member of the Presidium since June 1953. This promotion was also a first for a professional military officer and was presumably bestowed as a reward for the military's assistance in the arrest of Beria.

⁴⁵Khrushchev's mistrust of the military and suspicion of its political ambitions is evident throughout his memoirs. See Talbot (1974), pp. 11-28 and 540-542.

⁴⁶*Krasnaia Zvezda*, June 26, 1957.

⁴⁷Serov was not listed among the guests who attended the June 19 reception that the Yugoslav visitor hosted for Marshal Zhukov. See *Krasnaia Zvezda*, June 20, 1957.

⁴⁸See Hingley (1970) pp. 226-227, for precisely this interpretation. Hingley goes on to insist that "this deeply buried signal is the only known instance of a positive use of the political police by one leader to threaten others during the period of Khrushchev's rise."

Against this background, it is easy to believe that Khrushchev soon began to receive "information that Zhukov was indeed voicing bonapartist aspirations in his conversations with [other] military commanders."⁴⁹ Serov knew precisely the sort of information that Khrushchev wanted, and he was almost certainly ready to provide it, regardless of its authenticity. It is also easy to believe that Zhukov began to press for Serov's replacement by Marshal Konev, as Penkovskiy reports Khrushchev to have alleged to the party *aktiv* of the Moscow Military District in a speech explaining Zhukov's abrupt dismissal from the leadership only four months after his promotion.⁵⁰ Penkovskiy himself is skeptical about this charge. But Khrushchev is unlikely to have lied to a group that was in a good position to verify what he said, let alone to have invented a story that was almost certain to *enhance* the fallen Zhukov's reputation in military circles. Accordingly, one is tempted to conclude that Khrushchev was probably telling the truth and Zhukov's insistence on a change of command in the KGB was the basis for the reports that had surfaced in the weeks *preceding* his ouster about the increasing subordination of the secret police to military control.⁵¹

As a member of the Presidium, Zhukov would presumably have been well within his rights to propose high-level personnel changes and even changes in the system of institutional checks and balances. By targeting Serov and the KGB, however, he would certainly have failed to display what Khrushchev considered "a correct understanding of his role as Minister of Defense"—the only role to which Khrushchev seems to have believed he was really entitled.⁵² By proposing Konev as Serov's successor, moreover, Zhukov would have played directly into Khrushchev's hands. Khrushchev could cite this proposal as an example of precisely the sort of "bonapartist" propensity that Serov had been reporting and thereby strengthen not only the case for dismissing Zhukov but also the case for retaining Serov, about whom many of Khrushchev's colleagues had understandable misgivings.

Events did not necessarily unfold in just this way. Still, unlike many other reconstructions of the "Zhukov affair," this one does not require one to believe either that Zhukov was plotting an out-and-out military coup or that he was merely the innocent victim of "a combination of contingencies such as his personality, his status as a national hero, and his arrival in the Presidium as part of a precarious leadership

⁴⁹Talbott (1974), p. 14.

⁵⁰Penkovskiy (1965), p. 239.

⁵¹See Lowenthal (1957), p. 2; also Alsop (1957).

⁵²Talbott (1970), p. 162.

coalition."⁵³ The first of these explanations is almost impossible to reconcile with Zhukov's comparatively gentle treatment after his expulsion from the leadership. The second completely ignores a sizable body of inconclusive, but nonetheless credible, evidence that Zhukov fell victim to what, among other things, was a bitter factional struggle for control of the KGB.

THE REPLACEMENT OF SEROV

Since Khrushchev had refused to sacrifice Serov to the demands of either the anti-party group or of Marshal Zhukov, the December 1958 announcement of Serov's replacement by Alexander Shelepin, long-time first secretary of the Komsomol, came as something of a surprise.⁵⁴ According to most accounts, Khrushchev initiated this changeover because he allegedly felt that Serov had outlived his usefulness and that Shelepin would make an equally pliant but less disreputable agent.⁵⁵ In fact, however, this is highly implausible. Although Khrushchev may have felt fairly secure in December 1958, he almost certainly expected further struggles in which Serov's loyalty and experience would come in handy. Left to his own devices, moreover, Khrushchev would presumably have wanted to replace Serov with Lunev, Ustinov, or Mironov, if he had concluded that the KGB should henceforth be headed by a party *apparatchik* rather than a professional secret policeman. Unlike these obvious candidates for the KGB chairmanship, Shelepin was not a long-time client of Khrushchev's, nor even, so far as one can tell, a particularly active latter-day backer.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, Shelepin was appointed, while Lunev and Ustinov were soon dispatched to outlying posts, and Mironov was transferred to the party secretariat as chief of the Administrative Organs Department,

⁵³Colton (1979), p. 195.

⁵⁴Serov was appointed to head the GRU, The Intelligence Directorate of the General Staff. Shelepin had become Komsomol first secretary in 1952 and had served in that post until April 1958, when he was posted to the Party Organs Department of the Central Committee Secretariat. According to a highly improbable report by Zhores Medvedev, Shelepin had supervised the operations of the KGB from his Komsomol post. (See Zh. Medvedev (1986), p. 46.) However, when Shelepin left the Komsomol in April 1958, it was announced that he was leaving for "other party and government work."

⁵⁵See, for example, Hingley (1970), p. 235; R. Medvedev (1983) p. 132; Levitsky (1972), p. 269.

⁵⁶Shelepin's name does not appear among the 17 Central Committee members who are listed in the 1959 edition of *History of the CPSU* as having "acted [particularly quickly and] decisively against the anti-party group." See Pethybridge (1962), p. 103.

which was supposed to supervise the work of the KGB but had been fairly inactive in recent years.⁵⁷

What all this strongly suggests is that Khrushchev was acting under considerable duress when he went along with the replacement of Serov by Shelepin. If he was not compelled to act by *force majeure*, he was almost certainly responding to or anticipating outside pressures. The most likely scenario is one in which Khrushchev acquiesced in the changeover to conciliate colleagues who had serious reservations about his pending proposal to succeed Bulganin as premier, while remaining first secretary of the party. These colleagues might have caused trouble if he had refused to do anything to alleviate their concerns about the dictatorial implications of such multiple office-holding. In other words, a tradeoff was probably involved in which Khrushchev reluctantly agreed to give up some of the power he enjoyed as a result of his nearly monopolistic control of the KGB in return for the greater, more Stalin-like authority that he later admitted to craving.⁵⁸ There are certainly other possible scenarios, but this one is most consistent with the few known facts.

CHAIRMAN SHELEPIN

Whatever his initial reservations, Khrushchev was probably pleased by Shelepin's performance during his three years as KGB chairman.⁵⁹ In particular, Shelepin must have gotten credit for his services as point man in Khrushchev's carefully orchestrated campaign to deter future threats to his power by bringing the members of the anti-party group to trial on capital charges.⁶⁰ Although this campaign ultimately failed, Shelepin was vociferous in demanding that the "factionalists" be called to "strictest accountability" both for their "direct responsibility for the

⁵⁷Lunev was appointed head of the KGB in Kazakhstan, while Ustinov was removed as Moscow Party secretary and named ambassador to Hungary. Mironov replaced General Zheltov, former head of the MPA, as chief of the Administrative Organs Department, which had been headed by an acting chief, Gromov, from 1953 until Zheltov's appointment in the summer of 1957. Given what we know about his predecessors, Mironov was probably the first chief under whom this department began to exercise really significant control over the operations of the secret police. This was itself a sign of Khrushchev's early mistrust of Shelepin. See, for example, Penkovskiy (1965), p. 284.

⁵⁸See Talbott (1974), pp. 17-18.

⁵⁹According to Burlatsky (1988a, p. 13), Khrushchev developed "more trust in [Shelepin] . . . than in anyone else."

⁶⁰Khrushchev's intentions in this regard were signaled by the passage, in December 1958, of a new Decree on State Crimes in which "plotting with the aim of seizing power" was added to the existing list of "especially dangerous state crimes," punishable by 15 years imprisonment or death.

physical destruction" of innocent party cadres in the past and for their latter-day role as "conspirators [who] were prepared to take the most extreme steps to achieve their filthy purposes."⁶¹ While joining the hue and cry against the "political corpses" of the anti-party group, moreover, Shelepin also revived the ominous Stalinist epithet "inner enemy" in calling for the severest punishment, including punishment meted out at "show trials," of "bureaucrats . . . who are to blame for the fact that extremely important Party and government decisions . . . are not carried out."⁶² Such crude sabre-rattling was hard to reconcile with Shelepin's concurrent claim that the secret police was no longer the "frightening specter that Beria . . . sought to make it not very long ago."⁶³ But it added what was presumably a welcome note of intimidation to Khrushchev's continuing efforts to discipline and mobilize the frequently recalcitrant and sometimes insubordinate *apparatchiki* of the party-state machine.⁶⁴

Shelepin received the first big payoff for his support of Khrushchev in October 1961, when he was promoted to the Central Committee Secretariat. Since this promotion required Shelepin to give up the chairmanship of the KGB, some observers were initially inclined to suspect that it might actually signal a decrease in his power. In fact, however, Shelepin's loss of control over the KGB was strictly nominal. The new chairman of the KGB, Vladimir Semichastny, was one of Shelepin's long-time clients and closest friends.⁶⁵ In addition, Shelepin himself was assigned the task of supervising the KGB on behalf of the Secretariat—an assignment that enabled him not only to keep Semichastny in line but also, and more importantly, to referee any conflicts between Semichastny and Mironov, the "Khrushchevite" chief of the Secretariat's Department of Administrative Organs.⁶⁶ Before long (in November 1962), moreover, Shelepin was appointed a first deputy premier and chairman of the Committee of Party-State Control. The latter was a newly created position that not only placed Shelepin in

⁶¹Saikowski and Gruliov (1962), pp. 180-181, speech to the 22nd Party Congress in October 1961. See also Gruliov (1960), p. 177, for Shelepin's injunction to the delegates of the 21st Party Congress (February 1959), not to forget that "the odious and unseemly behavior of the anti-party group represented a great danger and involved a real conspiracy against the party."

⁶²Saikowski and Gruliov (1962), p. 182, speech to 22nd Party Congress.

⁶³Ibid., p. 181.

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 182, Shelepin's speech to the 22nd Party Congress. See *ibid.*, pp. 56-57 and 70-72, for Khrushchev's condemnation of "leaders whose work is spiritless and lacking in initiative."

⁶⁵For the still continuing friendship between Semichastny and Shelepin, see the interview with Semichastny in *Komsomolskaia Zhizn*, No. 7, April 1988.

⁶⁶See Tatu (1967), pp. 198-200 and 504.

direct command of a vast, KGB-linked intelligence-gathering and enforcement network of his own but also reenforced his other channels of access to and control over the operations of the KGB.⁶⁷

As a Central Committee secretary and first deputy premier, Shelepin was entitled to a seat on the party Presidium. This was a well-established precedent, and there is every reason to suppose that Shelepin demanded his due—of Khrushchev in the first instance. As 1963 went on, however, it gradually became clear that Khrushchev would not or could not deliver. Either he preferred to keep Shelepin as “his personal subordinate, outside the discussions of the [country’s] highest policy-making body,” or he was incapable of overcoming the resistance of other leaders who feared that “Iron Shurik’s” further promotion would enable Khrushchev to consolidate dictatorial power.⁶⁸ In either case, Shelepin had good reason to reassess his equities in the months preceding Khrushchev’s overthrow in October 1964.

Everyone who has studied the matter agrees that Shelepin and his KGB acolytes took part in the overthrow of Khrushchev. Shelepin’s promotion to the Presidium and Semichastny’s promotion to the Central Committee in November 1964 make this much indisputable. There is considerable disagreement, however, about the nature and extent of their participation. On the one hand, there are well-informed accounts making it appear that Shelepin and Semichastny played relatively passive, largely instrumental roles. They are described, for example, as having been “approached” by Brezhnev and others to make sure the KGB was “neutralized” and that Khrushchev would be unable to contact his supporters when he was summoned to the Kremlin for a final showdown.⁶⁹ On the other hand, there are accounts by well-connected “insiders” that depict Shelepin and Semichastny not as indispensable bit players but as key actors, who “organized” Khrushchev’s overthrow and came within a hair’s breadth of installing Shelepin rather than Brezhnev in his place.⁷⁰

Although there is no way of independently confirming that Shelepin and Semichastny were prime movers in Khrushchev’s ouster, it strains credulity to believe that they were mere technicians in its final

⁶⁷Hodnett (1966), especially, p. 151.

⁶⁸Lowenthal (1965), p. 4. For Shelepin’s nickname of “Iron Shurik,” see Solzhenitsyn (1976), p. 98. Attentive readers will recognize, of course, that these are not necessarily mutually exclusive or even exhaustive alternatives. Burlatsky (1988a, p. 13) mistakenly claims that Khrushchev *did* promote Shelepin to the Presidium.

⁶⁹See, for example, Hyland and Shryock (1968) pp. 170–172.

⁷⁰See, for example, Voslensky (1984) p. 157; Zh. Medvedev (1984), p. 235; and Burlatsky (1988a, p. 13) who refers to Shelepin as the “soul of the conspiracy against Khrushchev” (1988b, p. 436) and describes Khrushchev’s ouster as “the work of a group headed by A. N. Shelepin . . . [in which] a special role was assigned to Semichastny.”

denouement. They almost certainly bore responsibility, for example, for the two extremely provocative attacks that were mounted against Western diplomats in September 1964. These attacks, which were clearly attributable to the KGB, were almost transparently designed to undermine Khrushchev's credibility as a "peacemaker" (or even as an authoritative interlocutor) abroad and to embarrass him at home.⁷¹ In fact, the Soviet Foreign Ministry took the unprecedented step of issuing an official apology, blaming "opposition elements," for one of them.⁷²

Apart from these "diplomatic incidents," the activities in which Shelepin and Semichastny engaged and the uses to which they put their secret police assets in setting Khrushchev up for the kill can only be guessed at.⁷³ Nevertheless, it is doubtful that communications coordination, guard duty, and the other logistical and support functions that are emphasized in many accounts would constitute an exhaustive list. Otherwise, Shelepin is unlikely to have ended up on the Presidium, not just as a candidate but as a full member. In Shelepin's eyes no doubt, such a promotion was long overdue.⁷⁴ However, it was not automatic, and it is difficult to identify anyone in the top leadership who would have favored it if Shelepin had not been able to negotiate from a position of considerable strength. Such strength could have come only from his demonstrated willingness and ability to utilize his command and control of the KGB for self-serving, power-political purposes.

THE FALL OF SHELEPIN

That Shelepin was not a welcome presence on the Presidium was evident from the way his colleagues treated him from the outset of his incumbency.⁷⁵ To start with, his name was listed after Shelest's in a breach of alphabetical order in the announcement of their simultaneous election to the Presidium in November 1964. Any illusion that this might have been an editorial oversight was quickly dispelled when Shelepin was given a conspicuously low-level sendoff on an official visit

⁷¹See Gelman (1985) pp. 7-8, and Hyland and Shryock (1968) pp. 170-171. It is conceivable that the arrest of Professor Frederick Barghoorn in October 1963 was also directed against Khrushchev.

⁷²See Slusser (1967), p. 259.

⁷³Burlatsky (1988a) provides the instructive information that Shelepin and Semichastny replaced Khrushchev's bodyguards with a new unit immediately before his ouster, but that this was a last-minute precaution rather than a decisive initiative.

⁷⁴See Page and Burg (1966), p. 170.

⁷⁵This paragraph is borrowed almost in its entirety from Tatu (1967), pp. 503-504.

to Egypt only a few days later, a practice that was continued over the course of numerous foreign trips that were almost certainly designed, among other things, to keep him out of Moscow.⁷⁶ To add insult to injury, he was not elected to the strictly honorific commission that was tasked to draft the resolution of the March 1965 plenary meeting of the Central Committee.⁷⁷ Shelepin's colleagues were sending him a strong message with little dissent. Although they were sharply divided on other issues, a determination to put Shelepin in his place was a unifying theme.⁷⁸

The treatment of Shelepin by his colleagues casts serious doubt on the accuracy of reports that he came close to replacing Brezhnev as first secretary of the party in the summer of 1965.⁷⁹ If Shelepin had been a serious contender for supreme power, he would almost certainly have been treated with greater respect. It is possible to believe, therefore, that the reports of Shelepin's imminent promotion expressed little, if anything, more than the anxiety aroused among Soviet intellectuals by the increasingly muscular KGB crackdown on dissent.⁸⁰ Hough's suggestion that Brezhnev may have been deliberately circulated these reports to discredit Shelepin seems farfetched.⁸¹ But the fact remains that Shelepin's political fortunes went steadily from bad to worse.

The first indication that the symbolic attacks on Shelepin were destined to have "organizational consequences" came in December 1965, when he lost his first deputy premiership and his chairmanship of the Committee of Party-State Control in conjunction with the liquidation of the latter as one of Khrushchev's "harebrained" follies. Then, in a far more painful loss, sometime between April and December 1966, Shelepin was stripped of his secretarial responsibility for supervision of the secret police and assigned to monitor light industry.⁸² This switch,

⁷⁶See Barghoorn (1971), p. 120 fn., and Hough and Fainsod (1979), p. 252.

⁷⁷Mikoyan and Shvernik were also excluded from this drafting commission.

⁷⁸See Burlatsky (1988a, p. 13) where the decision to make Shelepin "look a fool" is attributed to the fact that "not only Brezhnev but Suslov and the other leaders detected his authoritarian ambitions."

⁷⁹See Solzhenitsyn (1980), p. 98, and *Politcheskii Dnevnik* (1972) p. 244. See also Voslensky (1984), p. 258, who claims that a resolution appointing Shelepin first secretary had already been drawn up but was discarded at the last moment. Voslensky describes this resolution as a false inducement to enlist Shelepin's support and says that only Shelepin expected it to be adopted and implemented. Burlatsky (1988a, p. 13) attributes these reports to members of Shelepin's own entourage and identifies them as the precipitants of "the long, devious, hidden struggle between the two leaders."

⁸⁰See Hough and Fainsod (1979), p. 252.

⁸¹*Ibid.*, p. 252.

⁸²See Tatu (1967), p. 508.

in turn, obviously presaged the early dismissal of Semichastny, who was ousted as KGB chairman in May 1967, in a move that greatly reduced the possibility of Shelepin's staging a political comeback.⁸³ It was almost anticlimactic, therefore, when Shelepin was dropped from the Secretariat in June and made the chairman of the All-Union Council of Trade Unions, a position he retained (along with his seat on the Presidium) until 1975, when he was finally cast into political obscurity.

The apparently single-minded determination of Shelepin's colleagues in the leadership to disarm him suggests that they considered his continued control of the KGB highly inimical to their collective interests. There is no evidence, however, that Shelepin attempted to use the KGB to counterattack or even to mount an active self-defense. On the contrary, the fact that he was allowed to retain his seat on the Politburo (as the Presidium was renamed at the Twenty-third Party Congress in 1966) until 1975 indicates that he surrendered control of the KGB without much of a struggle. Despite their endorsement of the principle of "stability of cadres," the other members of the leadership would almost certainly not have permitted Shelepin to linger so long if he had unleashed the KGB against them in an unsuccessful effort to protect his turf.

Exactly why Shelepin exercised such self-restraint remains an open and vexing question. For the time being, the simplest explanation is also the most persuasive—that Shelepin recalled the experience of Beria. Rather than risk his hard-won seat on the Politburo, in other words, Shelepin decided that discretion was the better part of valor in a situation in which, despite (and in considerable measure because of) his control of the KGB, he was politically isolated and pitted against a leader who enjoyed the solid support of the armed forces.⁸⁴

THE 1967 SETTLEMENT

The ease with which Shelepin and Semichastny were disarmed strengthened the growing consensus among Western analysts that the "maturation" of the Soviet system was making command and control

⁸³See however, *Politicheskii Dnevnik* (1972), p. 657, for the claim of some "well-informed Soviet sources" that Suslov, Mazurov, and Shelepin mounted an attack on Brezhnev as late as 1969—a claim that other, presumably equally well-informed sources flatly dismissed.

⁸⁴This explanation is not inconsistent with the reports from various Soviet sources that Suslov and Mazurov were allies of Shelepin in the late 1960s. (See, for example, Zh. Medvedev (1984), pp. 4 and 46.) For the close relations between Brezhnev and the military high command during this period, see, among others, Azrael (1987), pp. 1-4; also Gelman (1984), pp. 63-70 and 92-95.

of the KGB a less critical and contentious issue for Soviet leaders. However, close examination of the decisions that were made when it came time to reappoint their former responsibilities suggest a different conclusion. These decisions bear little resemblance to those one would expect to emerge from collegial deliberations on the best way to accelerate the transformation of the KGB into a truly nonpartisan security service. Instead they look very much like decisions that might have emerged from high-stake negotiations among adversaries who finally agreed to compromise their differences in a temporary settlement reflecting an extremely delicate balance of underlying power. If this resemblance is not accidental, the settlement presumably evolved from the following sorts of transactions:

- Brezhnev's colleagues made it clear that they would not consent to the replacement of Semichastny by "a latter-day Serov" in the person of Semyon Tsvigun, a long-time Chekist and henchman of Brezhnev's, who was probably his first choice to head the KGB.
- Brezhnev reluctantly went along with the appointment of Yuri Andropov as KGB chief, even though Andropov was closely affiliated with Suslov, with whom Brezhnev had a strained and at least intermittently adversarial relationship.⁸⁵
- While accepting Andropov, Brezhnev insisted on Tsvigun's appointment as first deputy chairman of the KGB, and of his client once-removed, Viktor Chebrikov, as Andropov's deputy for cadres.⁸⁶
- Brezhnev also insisted on transferring at least some of Shelepin's former oversight responsibilities as senior party secretary for administrative organs to the office of the general secretary, where those he did not care to exercise himself could be delegated to one of his trusted personal assistants, Viktor Golikov.⁸⁷

⁸⁵See Tatu (1967), p. 508. Burlatsky (1988a, p. 13) claims that "Suslov had disliked Andropov for a long time" by the time of "the 1967 Settlement," but this may reflect a desire on the part of an admiring ex-subordinate of Andropov's (during the latter's tenure as head of International Department of the Central Committee Secretariat) to retroactively distance his former mentor from one of the *bêtes noires* of the liberal intelligentsia.

⁸⁶Tsvigun replaced A. I. Perepelitsyn, who died shortly after Semichastny's dismissal. Chebrikov was a younger member of Brezhnev's "Dnepropetrovsk mafia." Initially, he was merely appointed head of personnel administration of the KGB, but he became a deputy chairman soon thereafter. A third "Brezhnevite," Georgii Tsinev, was installed as yet another deputy chairman in 1970 in place of N. S. Zakharov.

⁸⁷See Pravdin (1974), p. 96.

- Brezhnev's colleagues resisted this partial return to Stalinist command and control arrangements and insisted that many of Shelepin's oversight responsibilities be transferred to Suslov.⁸⁸
- Brezhnev (and possibly also Suslov) acquiesced to a demand that Andropov be made a candidate member of the Politburo to ensure that he would be accessible to the entire leadership and not just his overseer(s).
- To ensure that Andropov would remain subject to effective oversight, it was agreed that he would not be made a full member of the Politburo.
- To the same end, it was also agreed that Nikolai Savinkin, who had served as acting head of the Administrative Organs Department of the Secretariat since Mironov's death in 1964, would be confirmed as Mironov's *de jure* successor and thereby given enhanced authority to carry out his supervisory tasks.

THE DOWNFALLS OF AKHUNDOV AND SHELEST

Whatever the intentions of its architects, the settlement of 1967 definitely did not put an end to the KGB's involvement in Soviet elite politics even in the short run. This was dramatically demonstrated by developments in Azerbaidzhan, where the late 1960s witnessed a return to the Stalinist *status quo ante* in which the secret police had exercised power in the name of the party. The man who presided over this process was Geidar Aliev, who was promoted from first deputy chairman to chairman of the republic's KGB in June 1967.

Within a matter of months, it became obvious that Aliev had been authorized to conduct an anti-corruption campaign targeted not only at rank-and-file embezzlers and bribe-takers but at senior officials, including party leaders. Armed with the additional powers that had been vested in the KGB by a December 1965 statute on economic crimes, Aliev forced the removal of hundreds of cadres who owed fealty to Velia Akhundov, the incumbent first secretary of the Azerbaidzhanian party, and replaced many of them with "Ge-bisty" who continued to take orders directly from him.⁸⁹ In consequence, Akhundov became more and more isolated and was powerless to resist when Aliev was ready to attack him directly. By that time, moreover, Aliev had persuaded his superiors in Moscow that the best way to ensure proper

⁸⁸See Hough (1968), p. 30; Barghoorn (1971), p. 118.

⁸⁹See Zemtsov (1976) for a colorful and persuasive account of Akhundov's downfall and Aliev's takeover. "Ge-bisty" is a term widely used for secret policemen among Soviet citizens, who almost never use the more honorific term "Chekiaty."

enforcement of party discipline was to appoint him as Akhundov's successor. Accordingly, in July 1969, Aliev was "elected" first secretary of the Azerbaidzhanian Communist Party, a position that automatically entitled him to membership on the Central Committee of the CPSU and made him eligible for eventual promotion to the Politburo, of which he became a candidate member in 1976 and a full member in 1983.

A roughly comparable scenario was played out in the Ukraine in the early 1970s. In this case, the incumbent republic party first secretary (and Politburo member) Pyotr Shelest was replaced by a rival *apparatchik*, V. I. Shcherbitskii, rather than by a nemesis from the secret police. Such a nemesis was present, however, in the person of Vitalii Fedorchuk, erstwhile head of the Third or Military Counter-Intelligence Directorate of the KGB, who unexpectedly replaced V. F. Nikitchenko as chief of the Ukrainian KGB in July 1970.

That this was not just a routine change of command was indicated when Fedorchuk proceeded to replace almost all of Nikitchenko's top lieutenants with "outsiders" like himself.⁹⁰ This was not standard operating procedure in the KGB, and it spelled bad news for the incumbent party leadership. More particularly, it indicated that Fedorchuk had arrived with a mandate to break up the tight-knit mutual protection network that had been created over the past 15 years as a result of Nikitchenko's increasingly close affiliation with the coalition of "Kievites" and "Kharkovites" who had dominated Ukrainian politics ever since his appointment as the republic's KGB chief in 1954.⁹¹

The political consequences that were implicit in this "renewal of cadres" in the Ukrainian KGB did not take long to surface. Within a few weeks of Fedorchuk's appointment, the Ukrainian press was inundated with complaints about the lenient treatment of "economic criminals" and "bourgeois nationalists," who should long since have been called to account but who, at least until recently, had continued to function with near impunity. These complaints provided Fedorchuk with an excuse to conduct a thorough investigation in which it turned out that many party cadres had displayed "insufficient vigilance" and some had committed serious crimes. This evidence, in turn, was transmitted to Fedorchuk's superiors in Moscow, where it was used as the basis for the removal of a growing number of Ukrainian

⁹⁰See Bilinsky (1975), p. 248.

⁹¹Nikitchenko had served in the Ukraine before 1954 and had probably aligned himself with Khrushchev, the founder of the Kiev-Kharkov "dynasty," well before his appointment as the republic's KGB chairman.

apparatchiki and, ultimately (in May 1972), for the removal of Shelest himself.⁹²

Although these "police actions" in Azerbaidzhan and the Ukraine occurred after Andropov's appointment as chief of the KGB, they were not necessarily launched on his initiative. Indeed, he may not even have played a major part in their design and execution. Aliev probably took most of his operational orders directly from his former boss and long-time patron, Tsvigun, who had served as chief of the Azerbaidzhanian KGB immediately before his appointment as Andropov's first deputy.⁹³ Similarly, Fedorchuk may have gotten much of his tasking from Georgii Tsinev, who had preceded him as chief of the Third Directorate of the KGB and whose appointment as Andropov's deputy "coincided" with Fedorchuk's own assignment to the Ukraine.⁹⁴ Whatever the division of labor between Andropov and his Brezhnevite subordinates, Brezhnev was the prime mover behind what turns out on close inspection to have been factionally-motivated "abuses" of the power of the KGB.

There is no reason to doubt that Akhundov and his lieutenants were deeply involved in the corruption that was and has remained an everyday feature of life in Azerbaidzhan. Nor is there any reason to doubt that Shelest and some of his subordinates were guilty of what Moscow considered excessive "localism." What ultimately sealed their fates, however, was not their deviations in these distinctly gray areas but their close patronage ties with Politburo members whose political fortunes were in decline.

In the case of Akhundov et al., these ties ran to Shelepin through Semichastny, who had been head of the Central Committee Secretariat's Department of Party Organs for the non-Russian Republics when Akhundov was appointed first secretary of the Azerbaidzhanian party and had then served a brief stint as that party's second secretary in order to make sure that Akhundov was securely installed.⁹⁵ In the case of Shelest and his proteges, what ultimately cost them their jobs was their ties with Nikolay Podgorny, whom Brezhnev had already

⁹²See Deriabin and Bagley (1982), p. 621. See Bilinsky (1975), p. 250, for the circumstances of Shelest's abrupt transfer to Moscow in May 1972. In Moscow, Shelest served for a year as a deputy premier before being forced into retirement.

⁹³See Voslenaky (1984), p. 372. Aliev had been Tsvigun's first deputy between 1965 and 1967.

⁹⁴Fedorchuk probably also worked very closely with Andropov's other Brezhnevite deputy, Viktor Chebrikov, who, like Tsinev, was a member of Brezhnev's "Dnepropetrovsk mafia" and had recent first-hand experience in Ukrainian party affairs.

⁹⁵Shelepin also served as head of the Department of Party Organs for the non-Russian Republics during the interlude between his resignation as first secretary of the Komsomol and his appointment as chief of the KGB.

outmaneuvered in the Politburo but who could not be completely discounted as a rival as long as his power base in the Ukraine was intact. In both cases, in other words, what one discovers at bottom is the employment of the KGB to strengthen Brezhnev's already strong position, while undercutting the power of his colleagues in the ostensibly "collective leadership."

THE RISE OF ANDROPOV

The intimidating demonstration effects of his willingness and ability to employ the KGB as a partisan weapon in consolidating his power undoubtedly made a substantial contribution to Brezhnev's unchallenged domination of Soviet leadership politics in the mid-1970s. To make the threat of KGB muscle-flexing on his behalf even more credible, moreover, Brezhnev launched an all-out effort to enlist Andropov as a factional ally. To this end, he agreed to the abrogation of a policy that had been in effect for nearly 20 years: In April 1973, he signed off on Andropov's promotion to full membership in the Politburo.

In taking this step, Brezhnev obviously knew that he was running a certain risk. He did not need to be reminded that Andropov's political pedigree left something to be desired from a Brezhnevite perspective. If push came to shove, moreover, Brezhnev knew that a seat on the Politburo would make Andropov harder to command and control. But he also remembered that Khrushchev had paid a heavy price for *not* promoting Shelepin and, more generally, for *not* giving the KGB the political recognition to which it thought it was entitled. And he knew that his own vulnerability on this score would drastically increase if he kept the KGB on hold, while proceeding with his plan to upgrade the armed forces and the diplomatic corps by coopting the Minister of Defense and the Minister of Foreign Affairs onto the Politburo. Risk was unavoidable, in other words, even if Andropov were not promoted. Promotion, however, could convert Andropov into an active partisan and thereby make the KGB an even more reliable and intimidating Brezhnevite weapon.

For a long time, it looked as if Brezhnev's gamble would pay off handsomely. Despite continuing strain in Brezhnev's relations with Suslov and other leaders with whom Andropov had forged close ties, Andropov's own relations with Brezhnev seemed to grow progressively closer. His public pronouncements on both domestic and foreign policy generally echoed the Brezhnev line, and there were no discernible signs of behind-the-scenes discord. The only possible exception was

Andropov's failure to take the floor at the Twenty-fifth Party Congress in 1976. So many other Politburo members also failed to speak on that occasion, however, that their silence may have been intended to convey the message that Brezhnev's lengthy report to the Congress said everything worth saying. In any event, insofar as Brezhnev and Andropov were concerned, the overall picture was one of harmony.

The first signs that Andropov might be envisioning a more independent role did not surface until the late 1970s, and then only faintly. The greatest giveaway, if such it was, was the appointment, beginning in 1977 and continuing into the early 1980s, of several additional deputy chairmen of the KGB.⁹⁶ What is known about the careers of these new deputies, whose responsibilities encompassed domestic as well as foreign operations, suggests that they were nominated for their jobs by Andropov. The fact that Brezhnev did not exercise his right to veto their promotions bears witness to Andropov's success in disarming suspicion that what was involved was an effort to dilute the authority of his Brezhnevite deputies and enhance his ability to deploy the resources of the KGB for his own purposes, even against the wishes of the aging General Secretary.⁹⁷ Nevertheless, this was probably what Andropov intended and is certainly what he achieved.

One use to which Andropov obviously put his growing freedom of maneuver within the KGB was to probe the extensive links between members of the Soviet underworld and members of Brezhnev's immediate and extended families. "Leaks" to this effect began to proliferate in late 1981, and much of the incriminating evidence that was uncovered has since been published. During the late 1970s, however, Andropov had no interest in going public with any of the information he collected about the questionable associations and illicit activities of Brezhnev's relatives and friends. If he shared this information with anyone outside his own inner circle, it was almost certainly only with Brezhnev, whom he could claim he was obligated to protect against potentially embarrassing surprises. A confrontation with Brezhnev was the last thing Andropov needed or wanted at a time when he was still too low in the political pecking order to have any chance of succeeding Brezhnev as General Secretary.

That Andropov was beginning to envision himself as the next General Secretary was indicated by the appearance of several Soviet-

⁹⁶Knight (1984), p. 40.

⁹⁷That Andropov did not entirely disarm such suspicion is suggested by the fact that in December 1978 Tavigun and Troop Commander Matrosov were promoted to the rank of general of the army, which made them superior to Andropov's other deputies and equal to Andropov himself in military rank.

inspired reports to that effect in the Western press.⁹⁸ In the process, moreover, Andropov almost certainly thought long and hard about how he could outmaneuver competitors whose credentials to succeed Brezhnev were far better than his own. Hence, it is difficult *not* to suspect that he may have had a sizable hand in the plague of misfortunes that depleted the ranks of Brezhnev's most likely successors between 1978 and 1980.⁹⁹ Certainly, this was the strong suspicion of numerous Moscow "insiders," who were quick to attribute the abrupt political eclipse of Kiril Mazurov and Andrei Kirilenko (in 1977 and 1979 respectively) and the untimely demise of Fyodr Kulakov in 1978 and Pyotr Masherov in 1980 directly or indirectly to the KGB.¹⁰⁰

Since Moscow "insiders" have been known to overindulge in conspiratorial thinking, these allegations must obviously be taken with a grain of salt. They have the virtue, however, of being consistent with all the known facts, including some that are harder to reconcile with other hypotheses.¹⁰¹ And they certainly pass the test of *cui bono*, not only for Andropov but for Brezhnev, who was increasingly worried about being prematurely retired and who had developed a distinct aversion to the presence in the leadership of ambitious younger men.

With Mazurov, Kulakov, Kirilenko, and Masherov *hors de combat*, the contest to succeed Brezhnev quickly settled down to a two-man race between Andropov and Konstantin Chernenko, who was Brezhnev's favorite and initially appeared to be the front runner. In mainstream accounts of Andropov's come-from-behind victory in this race, his chairmanship of the KGB is almost always discounted as a contributing factor.¹⁰² In fact, it is usually described as a serious handicap that Andropov had to overcome. Nevertheless, there is a good deal of evidence in support of different conclusions. It is almost certain, for example, that some members of the Soviet establishment backed Andropov precisely *because* of his KGB background and affiliation. Likewise, some of Andropov's opponents may have been persuaded to change their minds or, at least, to hold their tongues, by familiar KGB techniques and methods.

⁹⁸Peck (1979), p. 2; also Zh. Medvedev (1979), where Andropov is identified as Brezhnev's most likely successor.

⁹⁹This suspicion is very rarely voiced by mainstream analysts.

¹⁰⁰See, for example, Solovyov and Klepikova (1986), pp. 68-69.

¹⁰¹Cases in point include the highly unusual obituary notice published at the time of Kulakov's death, the patent falsity of the official explanation of Mazurov's departure from the Politburo for reasons of health, and the sheer unlikelihood of a fatal traffic accident involving the car of a candidate member of the Politburo (in the case of Masherov).

¹⁰²See, for example, Bialer (1986), p. 86, and Colton (1986) p. 98.

Most of the cadres who supported Andropov because of his KGB background and affiliation were led to do so by their conviction that the way to avert what they perceived as a clear and present danger of economic decline and social unrest was to enforce "discipline" and restore "order." This conviction led them to view the KGB as the country's best, perhaps last, hope of avoiding "a Polish outcome." If there was any repository of accurate information about the "real" situation in the economy and the "real" state of public opinion, it was the KGB. In comparison with the rest of the party-state machine, moreover, the KGB was relatively free of corruption and was still capable of exacting widespread obedience. To install the long-time head of this agency as general secretary would drive home the message that the hour of reckoning was finally at hand—that shirking, cheating, black-marketeering, and other derelictions of patriotic duty would no longer be tolerated, let alone strikes and demonstrations of the sort that were occurring in Poland. This would be particularly effective, because Andropov speeches left little doubt that he himself was strongly in favor of an all-azimuths crackdown.¹⁰³ What was needed, therefore, at least as a first step, was to make sure that Andropov defeated Chernenko, who seemed to have even more apocalyptic domestic threat perceptions, but who apparently thought that what the system most required was increased responsiveness to the *vox populi* and more grassroots political participation.¹⁰⁴

Andropov's ability to tap this and other sources of support (including the belief that he was not at all a typical "Chekist" or, alternatively, that the typical Chekist nowadays was really a closet liberal), undoubtedly provides part of the explanation for his victory over Chernenko. A full explanation, however, must also take account of his use of the KGB to demobilize and disarm his opponents. Here the secret of Andropov's success was to demonstrate that the KGB could destroy reputations and ruin careers that both Brezhnev and Chernenko wanted protected and thereby encourage "defections." The previously noted "leaks" of incriminating information about Brezhnev's relatives and friends were crucial in this regard, because they left no doubt whatever that Andropov could commit *lèse majesté* with impunity. Moreover, much more information could be collected and disseminated in the future thanks to the progress Andropov had made toward taking

¹⁰³These speeches, of course, were calculated to appeal to what Andropov considered an important constituency for his candidacy.

¹⁰⁴See Zlotnik (1982) on Chernenko. The implication that it was Chernenko rather than Andropov who was the precursor of Gorbachev is meant to be taken seriously, at least by those who are inclined to look for precursors among Gorbachev's immediate predecessors.

over the KGB, a process that had undoubtedly been furthered by Tsvigun's suicide in January 1982, even though that takeover had been stopped short of completion by the promotion of another Brezhnevite, the superannuated Tsinev, to replace him.¹⁰⁵

THE BREZHNEV-ANDROPOV SUCCESSION

By the spring of 1982, Andropov's campaign for the succession had gained such momentum that Brezhnev himself could no longer be confident of riding it out, let alone of overriding it on behalf of Chernenko. In consequence, he apparently tried to buy time by striking a deal with Andropov at Chernenko's expense. It is impossible to say whether his efforts culminated in the conclusion of an explicit agreement. However, they probably resulted in a mutual understanding that Andropov would be given a lien on the general secretaryship in return for a promise to defer collection for the remainder of Brezhnev's life, or at least for a decent interlude. This can be inferred from the fact that Brezhnev's increased willingness to negotiate on Andropov's terms in the spring of 1982 was followed by a marked relaxation of KGB pressure on Brezhnev's relatives and cronies in the summer and fall.

The first clear sign that Brezhnev's resistance was weakening came in late May, when Andropov was reappointed to the Central Committee Secretariat—this time, by virtue of his concurrent membership on the Politburo, as a senior party secretary. Because it required him to give up the chairmanship of the KGB, this appointment was a mixed blessing from Andropov's point of view, especially as he was not allowed to designate his own successor. Nevertheless, he had reportedly been seeking the appointment for some time to broaden his power base and enhance the legitimacy of his candidacy for the post of general secretary.¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, it soon became apparent that Andropov was displacing Chernenko as the party's *de facto* second secretary. More precisely, Andropov was taking over many of the politically critical oversight responsibilities that Chernenko had been discharging since the death of Mikhail Suslov in January 1982. This was plainly the case insofar as ideological and personnel matters were concerned, and it may also have been true in the case of secretarial supervision of the KGB, an assignment that Brezhnev had increasingly entrusted to

¹⁰⁵On the multitude of contradictory rumors and mysterious circumstances surrounding Tsvigun's death, see Doder (1986), pp. 54-57; and Schmidt-Hauer (1986), pp. 72-74. A few months after Tsinev's promotion, Chebrikov also became a first deputy chairman of the KGB thanks to a promotion of uncertain sponsorship. (See below, pp. 36-37.)

¹⁰⁶For Moscow reports that Andropov wanted to return to the secretariat, see Peck (1979).

Suslov and that Andropov undoubtedly sought to have entrusted to him.¹⁰⁷

What made these arrangements tolerable to Brezhnev was not only the price he might have had to pay for trying to prevent them but also the confidence he felt in Vitaly Fedorchuk, Andropov's successor as chairman of the KGB. Although Brezhnev might have preferred to see Tsinev get the job, Fedorchuk was probably appointed at his insistence, with Andropov's reluctant acquiescence.¹⁰⁸ The fact that Fedorchuk was reassigned within weeks of Andropov's inauguration as general secretary leaves little doubt that he was Brezhnev's candidate and that he kept faith with his patron until the end.¹⁰⁹

Had Brezhnev been in better health and lived longer, he might well have tried to capitalize on Fedorchuk's appointment and utilize the KGB as a sword against Andropov, as well as a shield. However, any attempt to do so would have been extremely risky before Fedorchuk had had time to counteract the effects of Andropov's 16-year long effort to cultivate the support of his KGB subordinates. If Brezhnev seriously tried to reverse his fortunes in the weeks before his death, therefore, it was probably by other means. In particular, he may have appealed to the armed forces in the hope that the prospect of having a long-time secret policeman as their commander-in-chief would prompt a military intervention on his (and Chernenko's) behalf. This could be part of the explanation for the extraordinary meeting that Brezhnev held with the military high command in October 1982.¹¹⁰ By then, though, Brezhnev was at death's door, and no one in the Soviet establishment was prepared to challenge a virtual *fait accompli*. In consequence, Brezhnev's death on November 10, 1982, was quickly followed by Andropov's "unanimous" election as general secretary. Although this outcome might have given mainstream analysts pause, it led them

¹⁰⁷The coincidence between Suslov's death and the opening of Andropov's offensive against Brezhnev's relatives and cronies was unlikely to be accidental, as Suslov appears to have become quite protective of Brezhnev's prestige during his later years.

¹⁰⁸Following the death of Tsvigun, Tsinev, Fedorchuk's long-time patron, had been promoted to first deputy chairman of KGB, along with Chebrikov somewhat later. See, however, Zh. Medvedev (1984), p. 12, and Knight (1984), p. 41, who believe that Fedorchuk was Andropov's nominee. According to other accounts, Andropov nominated Dobrynin as his successor.

¹⁰⁹Fedorchuk was promoted to the rank of general of the army and appointed Minister of Internal Affairs in December 1982. Although some analysts have cited this appointment as proof that Andropov had so much confidence in Fedorchuk that he selected him as point man in his campaign against corruption, it is much more likely that Fedorchuk owed his survival in high office to the confidence of the Brezhnevites in the leadership that he would limit the political fallout of a cleanup that they were no longer completely able to prevent.

¹¹⁰See Zh. Medvedev (1984), p. 97.

to affirm that the longest serving secret police chief in Soviet history was "a professional Party man," who "owed no political debt to the KGB," which had allegedly neither been invited nor itself elected to play any part in the factional conflicts of the late Brezhnev era.¹¹¹

THE INTERREGNUM

Although his elevation to the general secretaryship provided Andropov with the power and authority he needed to remove Fedorchuk as chairman of the KGB, it did not entitle or enable him to fill the resultant vacancy with a political client or ally. His colleagues in the leadership were no longer in a position to overrule his objections to any given individual, but they were almost certainly both powerful and prudent enough to veto the appointment of an Andropov loyalist. Frequent assertions to the contrary notwithstanding, therefore, it seems highly unlikely that Fedorchuk's successor, Viktor Chebrikov, had betrayed his Brezhnevite heritage and switched his allegiance to Andropov during his long years of service as one of the latter's principal deputies.¹¹² In comparison with other Brezhnevites in the upper reaches of the KGB, Chebrikov may have performed his watchdog role in a way that led Andropov to believe that he could eventually be won over. Given the balance of power in the Politburo, however, Chebrikov could not have become chairman of the KGB unless he had managed to preserve close ties with the Brezhnev camp in the process.¹¹³ What remained to be seen, of course, was whether and how his promotion would affect the further evolution of the balance.

There are several reasons for suspecting that Andropov may have looked on Chebrikov's chairmanship of the KGB as an interim or probationary appointment. One is that a year passed before Chebrikov was promoted to the rank of general of the army and elected a candidate member of the Politburo.¹¹⁴ There are undoubtedly plausible alternative explanations for this delay in Chebrikov's receipt of the standard emoluments of his office, but the most persuasive explanation is Andropov's continued doubts about his loyalty. Andropov could surely have made him a general of the army at any time and could almost certainly have upgraded his political status by the time of the June 1983

¹¹¹Bialer (1986), pp. 85-86; Colton (1986), p. 98.

¹¹²See, for example, Bialer (1986), pp. 86-87.

¹¹³See Knight (1988a), p. 93, who seems to have reached the same conclusion.

¹¹⁴See Knight (1988a), p. 93. Knight also notes that Chebrikov received only the Order of Lenin rather than the more prestigious Order of the October Revolution on his 60th birthday in April 1983.

Central Committee Plenum.¹¹⁵ Even though Chebrikov's belated promotions to general of the army and candidate member of the Politburo took place while Andropov was still alive, moreover, they were not necessarily made on Andropov's initiative.

The normalization of Chebrikov's military and political status in November and December 1983, respectively may have been a tribute to his success in finally overcoming Andropov's suspicions. Among other things, he may have received a good deal of credit for the KGB's active participation in the ongoing discipline campaign that had become a hallmark of the Andropov regime, as well as for the investigative breakthroughs that led to the arrest of several of Brezhnev's former cronies and to the replacement of an even greater number of incumbent Brezhnevite party secretaries. However, the upturn in Chebrikov's fortunes coincided with the onset of Andropov's final illness and the reactivation of Chernenko's campaign for the post of general secretary. It may therefore have been Chernenko rather than Andropov who initiated Chebrikov's promotions, which should be viewed not only as overdue debt payments by Andropov but as down-payments by Chernenko for future support.

Although the timing of Chebrikov's promotions may not clinch the case for the formation (or reconfirmation) of a Chernenko-Chebrikov alliance, it does provide something that Colton insists is lacking: "a whit of evidence that warring groups within the party courted . . . the police" in the early 1980s.¹¹⁶ Additional evidence to the same general effect is provided by the great lengths to which Chernenko went, both before and after his selection as Andropov's successor, to publicize his own status as a former Chekist, if only by virtue of his youthful service in the border guards.¹¹⁷

Despite such overtures, many "Ge-bisty" undoubtedly took a dim view of Chernenko's candidacy and may have lobbied on behalf of the Andropovite Gorbachev in the unusually protracted consultations and deliberations preceding Chernenko's eventual selection. This was almost certainly not true, however, of such KGB heavyweights as first deputy chairman Tsinev, ex-chairman Fedorenko, or Aliev, the former head of the Azerbaidzhanian KGB, who had become a full member of

¹¹⁵A less persuasive alternative explanation is that Andropov did not want to be accused of packing the Politburo with former associates from the KGB. One could also hypothesize the existence of insurmountable opposition to Chebrikov's further promotion within the Brezhnevite camp, but evidence to this effect is hard to find.

¹¹⁶Colton (1986), p. 98.

¹¹⁷Chernenko first adopted this tactic in May 1981, when he put in what may have been a first-ever appearance by a top leader at a ceremony for the KGB border guards. See *Pravda*, May 27, 1987.

the Politburo under Andropov but whose promotion had reportedly been put in the works by Brezhnev. Even if Chebrikov is omitted, therefore, it is hard to see why Chernenko's taking office with a substantial amount of KGB support is so hard to believe.¹¹⁸ Indeed, it does not even seem absurd to speculate that such support may have made an indispensable contribution to Chernenko's narrow victory in a contest that probably found the KGB somewhat more than ordinarily divided against itself but that strongly confirmed its continuing involvement in leadership politics.

THE CHEBRIKOV-GORBACHEV ALLIANCE

Chebrikov's backing was at least as important a factor in Gorbachev's selection as general secretary after Chernenko's death in March 1985 as it had been in Chernenko's selection after Andropov's death a year earlier. This might have been inferred from the fact that Chebrikov was promoted to full membership on the Politburo in April 1985, at the first regular scheduled Central Committee plenum following Gorbachev's inauguration. As a result of Yegor Ligachev's unusually candid speech to the Nineteenth Party Conference in July 1988, it has since been more or less officially stated for public record.¹¹⁹ Ligachev identified Chebrikov as one of the three members of the leadership whose outspoken support of Gorbachev turned the political tide in the latter's favor.¹²⁰

In effect, Ligachev confirmed Hough's controversial contention that Gorbachev could not have won a vote in the Politburo (of which Chebrikov was still only a non-voting, or candidate, member) without outside support.¹²¹ In the process, however, he cast considerable doubt on Hough's thesis that the outside support that really mattered came from the party apparatus, to the exclusion of the KGB.¹²² If anything, Ligachev lent additional credibility to Roy Medvedev's earlier report that it was not until Chebrikov made it clear that the KGB was firmly on Gorbachev's side and was prepared to play political hardball on his behalf that Gorbachev's opponents withdrew their support for the rival

¹¹⁸Colton (1986), p. 98.

¹¹⁹See *Los Angeles Times*, July 2, 1988, pp. 1 and 10.

¹²⁰The others, according to Ligachev (who was not yet himself a Politburo member or candidate in March 1985), were Gromyko and Solomontsev, the Chairman of the Committee on Party Control. Ligachev also credited a group of *abkom* secretaries, himself presumably included, with lobbying hard for Gorbachev.

¹²¹Hough (1988), pp. 157 and 164.

¹²²*Ibid.*, pp. 157-159.

candidacy of the longtime Moscow party secretary, Viktor Grishin.¹²³ Since Ligachev did not dot his "i's" and cross his "t's," it is probably safe to predict that there will still be analysts who insist that there is not "anything to suggest that . . . the KGB played kingmaker" for Gorbachev's benefit.¹²⁴ Nevertheless, it will be harder to argue that "events . . . refute [such] claims" or to dismiss Chebrikov as a "mere" intelligence and security expert, with little, if any, clout.¹²⁵

During Gorbachev's first year or so as general secretary, it looked as if his alliance with Chebrikov might prove fairly long-lasting. For his part, Gorbachev seemed comfortable enough with the relationship to assign Chebrikov several high-profile assignments on behalf of the regime and to allow the KGB to bask in a great deal of favorable publicity.¹²⁶ Chebrikov, in turn, seemed quite willing not only to help Gorbachev consolidate additional power within the leadership but to endorse his call for an agonizing reappraisal of existing priorities and practices.¹²⁷

Although Chebrikov had insisted as recently as 1981 that only "enemies of socialism" could claim that "Communists of the older generation are doing a bad job of building the new society or are, at best, adopting the wrong approach," he now had no discernible qualms about Gorbachev's view that the system was approaching a dead end that could only be avoided by a drastic change of course.¹²⁸ On the contrary, he became the first member of the new leadership to employ the loaded term "reform" in describing what was needed to get the system moving again—this in a November 1985 speech in commemoration of the Bolshevik Revolution.¹²⁹ Some cadres seemed incapable of understanding the urgency of this requirement, he complained, but he and his

¹²³For Zhores Medvedev's version of his brother's report, which was directly delivered to many Westerners in Moscow, see Zh. Medvedev (1986), p. 172.

¹²⁴Colton (1986), p. 98.

¹²⁵Ibid., p. 98; and Bialer (1986), p. 87.

¹²⁶See Knight (1988a). Chebrikov was selected to speak for the regime at the October Revolution anniversary celebration in 1985 and to address the 27th Party Congress (March 1986), which thereby became the first party congress since 1961 to hear from a chairman of the KGB. In addition, Chebrikov was selected to lead several well-publicized Soviet missions to Eastern Europe, Cuba, and Vietnam.

¹²⁷Chebrikov almost certainly supported Gorbachev in his efforts to oust Romanov and Grishin from the leadership. Otherwise, Gorbachev would have encountered greater difficulty than he did in outmaneuvering—and ultimately removing—the Leningrad and Moscow KGB chiefs, who were apparently instrumental in enabling Romanov and Grishin to put up a vigorous, if unsuccessful, self-defense.

¹²⁸Chebrikov (1981), p. 40. This strong defense of the older generation reinforces the view that Chebrikov had maintained close ties with the Brezhnevites during the run-up to the Brezhnev succession.

¹²⁹*Pravda*, November 7, 1985.

fellow "Chekists" were impatient to proceed. It should not be forgotten, after all, that, in addition to their state security functions, "Chekists" had always "actively participated in the resolution of a multitude of serious economic and social problems."¹³⁰

GORBACHEV'S ALIENATION OF THE KGB

When Chebrikov issued this transparently self-serving reminder, he had ample reason to expect that the KGB would be called upon to play a major role in restructuring the Soviet system. At the time, Gorbachev's program seemed almost indistinguishable from Andropov's in its stress on discipline and coercive mobilization. Like Andropov, moreover, Gorbachev seemed determined not only to inaugurate a wholesale "renewal of cadres" but to conduct it in a way that invited KGB muscle-flexing and empire-building. The prevailing neo-Stalinist mood was well exemplified by an authoritative *Kommunist* editorial urging the prompt liquidation of all "the parasites, idlers, and bad workers, money-grubbers, bribetakers, speculators, plunderers, squanderers of state resources . . . [and] all sorts of [other] dangerous insects [that] . . . still survive in our land."¹³¹ With the passage of time, however, Gorbachev apparently began to have second thoughts about where such an open-ended vigilance campaign was likely to lead. In any event, he ended up adopting a drastically different approach that was far less compatible with the instincts and interests of the KGB.

Initially, Chebrikov and his lieutenants may have been prepared to go along with the introduction of *glasnost'* and *demokratizatsiia* in the belief that these policies would facilitate the release of pent-up social pressures that might otherwise be politically destabilizing. Recalling the "hundred flowers campaign" in China, they may also have initially believed that the introduction of *glasnost'* and *demokratizatsiia* would entice potential troublemakers to identify themselves and thereby pave the way for a more efficient and effective crackdown. By late 1987, however, they had seen enough to convince them that Gorbachev was pursuing a course that was not only dangerous but gratuitously insulting to the KGB. They could hardly think otherwise of a leader who, in the name of *glasnost'* and *demokratizatsiia*, had recently:

- recalled Andrei Sakharov from exile and personally "rehabilitated" him;

¹³⁰Ibid.

¹³¹*Kommunist*, No. 12, October 15, 1985, pp. 14-23.

- insisted on the "premature" release of hundreds of other victims of the KGB's crackdown on the dissident movement;
- forced Chebrikov himself to publicly acknowledge the role of several of his subordinates in coordinating the frame-up of a muckraking journalist;
- permitted and even encouraged the publication of scores of articles criticizing KGB misconduct and calling for the strengthening of juridical and public controls over its activities;
- presided over a process of societal deregimentation and liberalization that enabled entire communities to hold protest demonstrations and emboldened some protesters to target the KGB's very existence.

CHEBRIKOV FIGHTS BACK

For a time, it looked to outsiders as if Gorbachev could inflict these indignities on the KGB with impunity. Until the fall of 1987, for example, Chebrikov uttered no word of public protest. During the next 12 months, however, he issued a series of combative statements that were clearly designed to put Gorbachev on the defensive. At the same time, moreover, several of Chebrikov's principal lieutenants issued almost identical statements, thereby eliminating any doubt that he was speaking on behalf of the KGB.¹³² The threat behind all of these statements was greatly amplified, in turn, by the simultaneous delivery of repeated jeremiads against excessive *glasnost'* and *demokratizatsiia* by Gorbachev's increasingly insubordinate "second secretary," Yegor Ligachev.

Chebrikov made his debut as a public critic of Gorbachev's political reforms at a celebration of the 110th anniversary of the birth of Felix Dzerzhinsky, the founder of the Cheka, in September 1987, a celebration that Gorbachev conspicuously failed to attend. In his speech on this occasion, Chebrikov waxed eloquent about the efforts of "imperialist special services" to convert

Soviet people to the bourgeois understanding of democracy, to remove the process of increasing . . . sociopolitical activism from the

¹³²See, for example, the interviews with deputy KGB chairman K. G. Ageyev and with Lithuanian KGB chief Eduardas Eismuntas in *Sovetskaiia Rossiia*, April 19, 1988, and *Sovetskaiia Litva*, June 11, 1988, respectively. For a much less strident interview with V. Golushko, the Chief of the Ukrainian KGB, see *Radyanska Ukraina*, August 9, 1988.

party's influence, to undermine the monolithic unity of the party and the people, and to inculcate political and ideological pluralism.¹³³

Furthermore, he reported, these same "special services" were encouraging recently pardoned dissidents "to perpetrate new illegal actions . . . in order to stir up yet another ballyhoo about alleged Soviet human rights violations." At the same time, efforts were under way to push individuals from the new "independent associations" that had appeared on the scene "into anti-social positions and onto a path of hostile activity" and to push "individual representatives of the artistic intelligentsia into positions of carping, demagoguery, nihilism, the blackening of certain stages of our society's historical development, and the abandonment of the main purpose of socialist culture."¹³⁴ Expanding democracy and transparency were "natural and necessary," he conceded, but it was essential

not to forget the organic combination of socialist democracy and discipline, autonomy and responsibility, citizens' rights and duties . . . restructuring [and] the leadership of the Communist party, within the framework of socialism and the interests of socialism.¹³⁵

Lest the real message of this diatribe against Western "special services" be misunderstood, Chebrikov repeated it in less aesopian terms in another major speech a few months later in which outside agitators figured much less prominently. In this speech he deplored the fact that the "state of affairs in the sphere of strengthening order and discipline everywhere" was still unsatisfactory. In particular, he criticized "attempts . . . to take advantage of the growth in the people's social and political activism to the detriment of the state and society."¹³⁶ Using a formula that was traditionally reserved for intra-party polemics, he warned against any "underestimation" of the activities of certain individuals who,

by employing a diversified arsenal of methods of social demagoguery and substituting bourgeois liberalism for the essence of the concept of socialist democracy . . . are essentially trying to nullify the Party's gigantic work . . . [either] consciously . . . [or out of] elementary political ignorance.¹³⁷

Failure to combat these manifestations with the utmost vigor could lead, he predicted, "to the emergence of very undesirable phenomena." What

¹³³*Pravda*, September 11, 1987.

¹³⁴*Ibid.*

¹³⁵*Ibid.*

¹³⁶*Pravda*, April 14, 1988.

¹³⁷*Ibid.*

was "obviously necessary," he insisted, was "the strictest discipline and self-discipline, order and organization, high standards of labor and behavior, and an organic combination of the interests of each citizen and of society as a whole."¹³⁸

Finally, in September 1988, Chebrikov issued an even more strident warning against excessive democratization. In an unprecedented interview with *Pravda*, he made it clear that he believed the time had come to crack down on those who had "delusions" about "the [correct] relationship between the interests of the individual and society, the citizen and the state."¹³⁹ In a clearly implied criticism of the permissiveness and leniency the regime had shown toward the mass protest demonstrations that had recently taken place in Armenia and the Baltic republics, Chebrikov urged prompt KGB intervention to end "hostile actions undertaken with the aim of undermining and eliminating our existing system by citizens of anti-Soviet, anti-socialist persuasion." Along with "hostilely inclined citizens," it was important to realize, according to Chebrikov, that one was dealing with "foreign intelligence officers in the persons of terrorists and emissaries from nationalist organizations [who] are sent into the country with means of espionage and sabotage and propaganda materials that incite extremism."¹⁴⁰

While conceding that "the new political and moral atmosphere in the country" required KGB staffers to restructure their own thinking and to "abandon [old] stereotypes," Chebrikov insisted that there were no grounds for "the statements, frequently heard of late, that we are allegedly frightening ourselves with . . . 'mythical foreign agents' and are victims, as it were, of our own 'spymania.'" On the contrary, Chebrikov assured his interlocuters, "the special services and subversive ideological centers" of the West really exist and are systematically endeavoring

to stimulate the organization in our country of illegal, semilegal, and even legal entities that will do their bidding; . . . to find and promote the cohesion of . . . individuals in our society whom [they can] provide with moral and material support and nudge onto the path of direct struggle against the Soviet state and social system; . . . and to discredit the leading role of the Communist party and inspire the emergence of political opposition on the basis of independent groupings.¹⁴¹

¹³⁸Ibid.

¹³⁹*Pravda*, September 2, 1988. Chebrikov's use of the term "delusions" constituted an implicit endorsement of the diagnostic categories KGB psychiatrists under Brezhnev had routinely applied to dissidents—a practice that Gorbachev's supporters had roundly denounced as an impermissible psychiatric abuse.

¹⁴⁰Ibid.

¹⁴¹Ibid.

Whenever possible, Chebrikov contended, the KGB naturally preferred to nip these efforts in the bud by effective "preventive work," because "this accords most fully with the spirit of the democratization that is taking place in the country." In all circumstances, however, "hostile elements and any other persons who embark on the path of anti-state activity" must be held strictly accountable.¹⁴²

Chebrikov accompanied these warnings with repeated denials that he was politicking against Gorbachev within the leadership. In his September 1987 speech, for example, he drew what was, in effect, an analogy between his position and the position of Dzerzhinsky, who "while considering [Lenin's] conclusion of the [Brest-Litovsk] peace a mistake, at the same time . . . dissociated himself from [any effort] . . . to split the party."¹⁴³ Despite this and later disclaimers, however, Chebrikov's opposition to Gorbachev's policies has almost certainly not been limited to "comradely criticism."¹⁴⁴ There is no reason whatever, for example, to think that Boris Yeltsin, then-secretary of the Moscow party organization and candidate member of the Politburo, was being paranoid when he insinuated to the February 1987 plenum of the Moscow *gorkom* and the October 1987 plenum of the Central Committee that he (and other Gorbachev supporters) had been targeted for hostile action by the KGB. On the contrary, it is easy to believe his thinly veiled charges that the KGB was seeking to sabotage his reform efforts and undermine his position by failing to keep him informed about "negative trends and occurrences" in Moscow, while simultaneously providing his opponents with derogatory information for the secret dossiers that they were busily compiling on him and his liberal allies.¹⁴⁵ Among other things, the credibility of these charges is enhanced by Yeltsin's obvious lack of preparation for his politically self-destructive meeting with the leaders of the neo-Nazi wing of the Pamyat' Society in May 1987, and by his subsequent insistence on resigning from the leadership despite Gorbachev's desire to retain him.¹⁴⁶ Although one cannot be certain that the KGB blindsided Yeltsin in the first instance and blackmailed him in the second, "insider" reports to this effect are likely to be substantiated when fuller accounts of the Yeltsin Affair become available, as they presumably will.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴²Ibid.

¹⁴³*Pravda*, September 11, 1987.

¹⁴⁴In his interview with *Pravda*, on September 2, 1988, Chebrikov stressed "that there is complete unity in our Politburo on fundamental questions."

¹⁴⁵See *Moskovskaia Pravda*, February 23, 1987; and Bialer (1988).

¹⁴⁶See, among others, *New York Times*, July 26, 1987; *Pravda*, August 11, 1987; Rahr (1987); and Tismaneanu (1988).

¹⁴⁷Personal communications. One account that may become available before long is that provided to the Soviet magazine *Ogonyok* by Yeltsin himself in an interview the

Future revelations may also confirm suspicions that Chebrikov and the KGB played a role in the publication of the so-called Nina Andreeva letter, which appeared in *Sovetskaiia Rossiia* and other Soviet newspapers in March 1988 and was clearly designed to serve both as a conservative manifesto and an illustration of the perils of free expression.¹⁴⁸ Giuletto Chiesa, the well-connected and highly respected Moscow correspondent of the Italian Communist Party newspaper, *L'Unita*, believes the author of the letter had links with the KGB. Although Chiesa does not claim to have proof that what he calls "operation Andreeva" was conceived and conducted by the KGB, his confident assertion that Nina Andreeva gave a debriefing on the operation of the Higher School of the KGB in Leningrad makes this a distinct possibility.¹⁴⁹

If the Nina Andreeva letter provided a sobering reminder that *glasnost* was not necessarily either a benevolent or an irreversible process, the Azeri-Armenian confrontations broke out in the spring and summer of 1988 provided an even more ominous warning about the risks of *demokratizatsiia*. Given the deep animosities between the Azeri and Armenian communities, it was almost inevitable that tensions would escalate as citizens acquired greater control over their own destinies. In consequence, a properly vigilant KGB would have taken steps to forestall or contain what might otherwise become an explosive situation. According to authoritative spokesmen for the Armenian community, however, this is not what happened. Instead, the KGB reportedly tried to spread disorder and panic and to incite racial violence, thereby helping to transform an intractable problem into an urgent crisis.¹⁵⁰ Once again, there is no way for outsiders to verify this report, but it comes from a trustworthy source in a good position to know.¹⁵¹

magazine editor himself has admitted was too hot to publish for the time being. (See *Moscow News*, No. 29, July 1988.) See also the interview with Yeltsin in *Sovetskaya Molodezh* (August 4, 1988), and Yeltsin's defense of his Nineteenth Party Conference speech attack on Ligachev and "also someone else" in response to a question at a September 1988 session with teachers and students of the Komsomol Higher School in Moscow. This meeting was attended by Elfie Siegel, Moscow correspondent of the *Frankfurter Rundschau*. Further confirmation of a Chebrikov-Yeltsin clash regarding the KGB is provided by Chebrikov's vitriolic denunciation, at the October 1987 Central Committee Plenum, of Yeltsin's meddling in police matters that, according to Chebrikov, were none of his business. (See *Los Angeles Times*, November 1, 1987.)

¹⁴⁸*Sovetskaiia Rossiia*, March 13, 1988.

¹⁴⁹*L'Unita*, May 23, 1988.

¹⁵⁰See *Liberation*, March 12-13, 1988, reporting a Moscow press conference of Sergei Grigoryants, who had just returned from Yerevan with a "white paper" prepared by the Yerevan Organizing Committee.

¹⁵¹Reading between the lines, one can find what may be further confirmation of this report in the published summary of the criticism and self-criticism voiced at one of several extraordinary meetings of leading cadres of the Armenian KGB in November 1988. (See *Kommunist* (Yerevan), November 18, November 26, and November 27, 1988.)

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Despite Chebrikov's resort to such strong-arm tactics, few Western analysts were prepared to entertain the possibility of KGB participation in a 1964-style coup. Thus, the highly unusual praise that Gorbachev lavished on Chebrikov and the KGB at the Nineteenth Party Conference went almost unnoticed, even though it strongly suggested that the General Secretary himself was concerned enough about the growing alienation of his secret police to make special efforts to conciliate them.¹⁵² Similarly, almost no attention was paid to "insider" reports that the fall political season in the Kremlin would open with a dramatic showdown between Gorbachev and Ligachev, with whom Chebrikov, who had just given an extremely hardline interview to the editors of *Pravda*, was still thought to be firmly allied.¹⁵³ There was a brief flurry of interest, to be sure, when Fyodr Burlatsky, a charter member of Gorbachev's semi-official braintrust, encouraged Western analysts to explore the topical implications of his September 14 *Literaturnaia Gazeta* article on the role of Shelepin and Semichastny in the ouster of Khrushchev.¹⁵⁴ Although Burlatsky had wittingly or unwittingly spread disinformation in the past, it was highly unlikely that he would to raise doubts about Gorbachev's political longevity unless he hoped that the resultant hue and cry would help avert what he considered a clear and present danger. Within a matter of days, however, the outcome of the September 30th Central Committee Plenum led most analysts to conclude that Burlatsky had sounded a false alarm or, at the very least, had underestimated Gorbachev's ability to counter any challenge to his power by Ligachev (who lost his post as second secretary of the party) and to further downgrade Chebrikov and the KGB in the process.

In the rush to judgment about what went on in the Kremlin in late September 1988, a great deal of attention has been directed to Chebrikov's resignation as chairman of the KGB and the fact that his replacement, Vladimir Kryuchkov, was not promoted to the Politburo even as a candidate member. These have been widely cited as evidence of Gorbachev's success in cutting Chebrikov down to size and stripping the

¹⁵²See *Pravda*, June 29, 1988. In his report to the Nineteenth Party Conference, Gorbachev conspicuously identified the KGB as one of the few agencies that was functioning "in accord with the spirit of the times" rather than "fighting tooth and nail to maintain [out-of-date] positions." What was needed in the case of the KGB, he asserted, was not drastically intensified pressure to follow the party line, but "support for the purposeful work of [its] leadership [Chebrikov] . . . in improving [its] activities in current conditions."

¹⁵³*Pravda*, September 2, 1988.

¹⁵⁴Burlatsky (1988a). Burlatsky underscored the contemporary relevance of this article in several conversations with Western interlocutors.

KGB of all power-political influence.¹⁵⁵ Comparatively little attention has been paid to other pertinent outcomes such as:

- the promotion of Chebrikov to the Central Committee Secretariat (a promotion that mandated his resignation as chairman of the KGB);
- the selection as new chairman of the KGB of a long-time Chekist, who has no known ties to Gorbachev but who has worked extremely closely with Chebrikov since 1967, without any observable signs of rivalry or tension;¹⁵⁶
- the appointment of Boris Pugo, another long-time Chekist with close ties to Chebrikov, as chairman of the Committee on Party Control;¹⁵⁷
- the transfer out of the Central Committee Secretariat of Anatolii Luk'yanov, a law-school classmate of Gorbachev's, who had supervised the work of the Central Committee's Administrative Organs Department since early 1987;¹⁵⁸
- the subordination of the Administrative Organs Department to Chebrikov in his capacity as chairman of the newly created Central Committee Commission on Legal Policy, a portfolio that also ensures him an extremely influential role in drafting the new laws on state security and state security organs that have evidently been the subject of intense controversy for many months.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁵See, among others, the interpretation of events by Western diplomatic sources in Moscow as reported by UPI on October 3, 1988. See also Jonathan Steele's report in *The Guardian*, Steve Crawshaw's report in *The Independent*, and the anonymous report in *The London Times*, all also on October 3. For a very different interpretation, much closer to the one offered below, see Knight (1988d).

¹⁵⁶Kryuchkov joined the KGB at the same time as Chebrikov, after a career that included diplomatic service in Hungary when Andropov was ambassador there and further work under Andropov when the latter headed the Central Committee Department for Liaison with ruling Communist parties. He became head of the First Chief Directorate of the KGB in 1974 and a deputy chairman of the KGB in 1978.

¹⁵⁷Pugo served in the KGB from 1976 to 1984, first at KGB headquarters in Moscow and then as KGB chief in Latvia, where he had formerly headed the republic's Komso-mol. From 1984 until his September 1988 appointment as chairman of the Party Control Committee, he was first secretary of the Latvian Communist Party.

¹⁵⁸Luk'yanov was transferred to the post of first deputy chairman of the presidium of the Supreme Soviet.

¹⁵⁹That Chebrikov oversees the Administrative Organs Department is strongly suggested by the fact that he presided over the ceremonial meeting held to celebrate Soviet Militia Day on November 11, 1988 and over the KGB party conference on December 17, 1988. (See *Pravda*, November 11, 1988; and *Argumenty i Fakty*, No. 52, December 24-30, 1988.) An additional bit of evidence to the same effect is the citation of Chebrikov's views by Leningrad KGB chief Prilukov in an interview published in *Leningradskaya Pravda* on October 4, 1988. Since Chebrikov was no longer chairman of the

Unless the rules of the game of Kremlin politics have been completely rewritten in the past several years, these outcomes strongly suggest that Chebrikov and the KGB have become even more powerful and influential as a result of the leadership changes in the fall of 1988.¹⁶⁰ This seems even more likely in view of the simultaneous adoption of what appears to be a somewhat narrower definition of the permissible limits of *glasnost* and *demokratizatsiia*.¹⁶¹

If Gorbachev's victory over Ligachev was actually accompanied by an increase in his and the KGB's power and influence, the most likely explanation is that this was the price Chebrikov exacted in return for his agreement to cut a last-minute deal with Gorbachev at Ligachev's expense. That Gorbachev was willing to pay such a high price suggests that he may well have been confronted with what he considered an even less palatable alternative. The possibility that Ligachev, Gromyko, Solomontsev, Chebrikov, and other members of the leadership really were seriously contemplating a 1964-style coup cannot be excluded *a priori*, especially in the context of escalating ethnic conflict in the Caucasus and growing defiance of Moscow in the Baltic states. Nor can one exclude the more likely possibility that Gorbachev faced the prospect of a politically humiliating dilution of his proposals for constitutional reform, including those that he was heavily counting on to enhance his personal authority and power. In any event, it is hard to escape the impression that he was forced to make a Hobson's choice in September 1988 and that, by choosing as he did, he may well have helped to pave the way for Chebrikov's early emergence as a candidate for supreme power in his own right. That Chebrikov may have ambitions in this regard is indicated by the publication in the Soviet weekly *New Times* of an article comparing the CIA and KGB in which the French Communist author

KGB, Prilukov had no reason to cite his views if he did not still enjoy authority over the KGB in some other capacity. On the controversy over new state security legislation, see Yasmann (1988b).

¹⁶⁰Since the promotion of Kryuchkov to the Politburo would obviously clinch this case, it is worth noting that Fyodr Burlatsky has intimated that such a promotion may be in the offing. (See, *Sankei Shimbun* (Tokyo), November 4, 1988.)

¹⁶¹Although it would be wrong to speak of a crackdown in this connection, late 1988 and early 1989 saw the cancellation of plans to publish Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago*, the rejection of Estonia's demand for a veto over all-union legislation, and the arrest of several militant Armenian nationalists. These steps and others like them were foreshadowed by Gorbachev's uncharacteristically "Chebrikov-like" address to a meeting of media representatives on September 23. (See *Pravda*, September 25, 1988.) See also the report of the arrest of dissidents in Leningrad, Novosibirsk, Saratov, and Sverdlovsk in *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, December 17, 1988.

argues that George Bush's service as director of the CIA makes him particularly well qualified to serve as President of the United States.¹⁶²

CONCLUSION

Whatever the future role of the KGB (or its successor as the agency responsible for internal security), its role to date has clearly been important enough to merit much more attention than it has received from mainstream scholars.¹⁶³ One does not have to subscribe to each and every interpretation of the evidence presented above to be persuaded that analyses of Soviet high-politics omitting the KGB or alleging that it has been only marginally involved in the elite political process are both incomplete and misleading. The evidence in question may not fit comfortably into the analytical frameworks that specialists on Soviet politics have recently been so eager to borrow from specialists in other fields, but it cries out for adequate recognition nonetheless.

What the evidence shows is that the elimination of mass terror and ubiquitous secret police controls over the Soviet population has *not* been accompanied by the elimination of secret police coercion and intimidation at the apex of the system. Although Stalin's immediate heirs and latter-day successors called a halt to the "ritual of liquidation" that had decimated the ranks of the Stalinist ruling elite, they did not succeed in politically neutralizing the secret police or subjecting it to nonpartisan party control. In fact, they do not appear really to have tried. On the contrary, most members of the Kremlin's inner elite seem to have done everything possible to enlist the support of the KGB in their factional conflicts and to deploy their secret police allies for offensive as well as defensive purposes. As a result, the KGB has been actively involved in Kremlin politics as both an arena and an instrument of partisan warfare since the day it was founded. On several occasions, moreover, ranking "Ge-bisty" have managed to parlay their continuing control over an immense arsenal of politically potent weaponry into substantial and sometimes decisive influence over both the allocation of power and the formulation of policy within the ruling elite.

¹⁶²*New Times*, No. 36, 1988, pp. 27-28.

¹⁶³There have been many recent hints from Moscow that the domestic security functions of the KGB may be assigned to another agency, possibly one constituted as a chief directorate of the MVD. Organizationally speaking, this would restore the immediately post-Stalinist *status quo ante*, when this GUGB was a part of first Beria's and then Kruglov's Ministry of Internal Affairs.

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