

Prime Minister

CDD

Mr 2/7.

Jp.061Mr PowellSoviet Leadership

The election today of Gromyko as Chairman of the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet (ie President of the USSR) the appointment of Shevardnadze as Foreign Minister, and the disappearance of Romanov raise a number of questions.

Gromyko

2. Will he continue to be the main interlocutor for the West in foreign affairs? At 76 he is still pretty fit and active. It is difficult to imagine him now playing a merely ceremonial role. Our preliminary guess is that he will wish to remain at the centre of things, and that Gorbachev will want him to. With Gorbachev in the driving-seat, Gromyko would continue to provide all the policy advice which the Politburo needs, especially on Soviet-US relations and on arms control. There is simply no-one else with his experience. But this will not necessarily mean he will be easily accessible to senior foreign visitors.

Shevardnadze

3. His appointment is a mystery. But it looks like a downgrading of the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Shevardnadze is a product of the Georgian Party and Interior Ministry and has had almost no experience of foreign affairs. We do not know if he speaks English (FCO Research Department suspect not). His lack of exposure to the West (he has visited nowhere in the West except Austria), suggests that Gromyko will have to continue in a supervisory capacity for some time to come.

Romanov

4. He had been absent from the scene since 6 May and Gorbachev studiously avoided mentioning him during his recent visit to Romanov's old fief in Leningrad. He is known to have been a heavy drinker in public. His retirement at an early stage of Gorbachev's regime comes as no surprise, and there is no evidence that Gorbachev will have had to expend any political capital in easing him out.

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Gorbachev's own position

5. The leadership changes today and at yesterday's Party Plenum have strengthened Gorbachev's position still further. We have always doubted that Gorbachev wanted the encumbrance of the Presidency. With Gromyko still around to advise on Soviet foreign policy, Gorbachev will have time to concentrate on the main domestic and international issues. Now that Gromyko is Reagan's opposite number in protocol terms, it seems increasingly likely that a summit with Gorbachev would be more likely to take place in a third country (eg Geneva), unless Gromyko were included, which cannot be entirely ruled out.

6. The JIC will be looking at all this next week.

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