

November 8, 1989

East Germany: Government Falls, Plenum Opens□□□

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Summary:

An analysis of the resignations of the entire East German government.

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The resignation of the entire government yesterday and East German leader Krenz's anticipated purge of additional hardliners at a Central Committee plenum opening today probably will not stop the demonstrations or mass emigration to the West that are undermining Krenz's position. [redacted]

Cabinet Resigns

Initial reactions were negative to the announcement that the cabinet had resigned and the legislature would soon convene, perhaps as early as tomorrow, to elect replacements. A spokesman for the opposition group New Forum [redacted] and thousands of demonstrators in several East German cities labeled the move inadequate and called for free elections. Demonstrators in East Berlin last night marched on party headquarters as the police watched. [redacted]

Meanwhile, a legislative committee yesterday rejected as too restrictive the government's draft regulations easing travel to the West. A Central Committee session slated to go three days begins today against a background of demands from local party officials, Communist academics, and the party's own youth newspaper that the Politburo step down. [redacted]

Comment: Krenz undoubtedly engineered the cabinet's resignation, a move that leaves his position as head of state intact. He probably will appoint more non-Communist ministers from members of the four allied parties to try to appear responsive to demands that the Communists share power. Currently there is only one member from each. It is possible, although less likely, that he will appoint a non-Communist as premier. The legislative committee's rejection of the proposed travel reforms suggests that the normally rubberstamp legislature may contest proposed cabinet choices. [redacted]

Krenz will have to move fast to maintain control over a rapidly changing situation. At the party plenum, which is likely to be contentious, he probably will try to purge more hardliners beyond the seven already removed to consolidate his hold on the leadership. He also may move up the date for the next party congress—now scheduled for May 1990—as some party members have demanded. [redacted]

Without free elections, new opposition parties, or greater assertiveness by the allied parties, none of these moves will convince East Germans that the party is ready to share power. If East Germans

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6.2(d)

keep fleeing to the West, the increasing damage to the fragile consumer economy and growing public demoralization probably will build pressure for Krenz to step down. [redacted]

6.2(d)

Role of The Wall Changing

The Berlin Wall has lost most of its functional significance as a barrier to disgruntled East Germans seeking freer travel and emigration. [redacted]

3.3(b)(1)

[redacted] part of the Wall's function will become "illusory" because of liberalized travel regulations. [redacted]

3.3(b)(1)

[redacted] the East Germans appear receptive [redacted] to expand by four the number of checkpoints available for public use, including the Glienicke Bridge, which has been the site of several spy swaps. The Wall retains great symbolic value, however, as an aging relic of the Cold War and Communist tyranny and—for the East Germans—as a border that bolsters East Berlin's claim to sovereignty in the eastern sector of Berlin, a claim that violates Four-Power agreements on the city. [redacted]

3.3(b)(1)

6.2(d)

Comment: Because it remains a potent symbol, the Wall could be used for attention-getting gestures, including an announcement by Krenz to tear it down to show that he is serious about change. It could also be the scene of a destabilizing incident, such as a protest that gets out of hand or a terrorist-style car bombing. [redacted]

3.3(b)(1)

6.2(d)

The East Germans have put their border troops along the Wall on heightened alert [redacted] presumably to prevent such an incident. If East Berlin reimposes travel restrictions or—less likely for now—attempts to crack down, the Wall would regain much of its odium as a barrier to freedom. [redacted]

3.3(b)(1)

6.2(d)

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