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# OPINION

## Don't Await A Miracle With Krenz

By Josef Joffe

MUNICH — Who is Egon Krenz? As of Wednesday, he is the new No. 1 in East Germany, after General Secretary Erich Honecker resigned for "health reasons."

Is Mr. Krenz another Mikhail Gorbachev? Or is he a German version of Konstantin Chernenko, the tired old apparatchik who took over in Moscow after the deaths of Leonid Brezhnev and Yuri Andropov?

The honest answer is: We don't know, and what we do know about Mr. Krenz is not very interesting. But his blandness gives significant cues.

Above all, Mr. Krenz, a Politburo member since 1983, is Mr. Honecker's handpicked successor. The new party boss has carried the "crown prince" label for a long time, having served Mr. Honecker faithfully and facelessly for years on end.

Only once has he shown his true colors: On a trip to West Germany, during the Tiananmen Square massacre in Beijing, he openly sided with the Chinese regime. So the safest bet is that Mr. Krenz is no Gorbachev.

Nor are his Politburo colleagues in East Berlin a bunch of Boris Yeltsins — let alone the kinds of Communists who slunk away from power in Warsaw or blithely voted to abolish their Marxist-Leninist party in Budapest.

East Germany is different. Hungarians cannot cross into "West Hungary." Poles cannot escape into a land that is theirs by language and culture — and super-rich and democratic. Yet the youngest and best educated East Germans have been running by the tens of thousands.

How can Mr. Krenz stop the hemorrhage? He could junk neo-Stalinism in favor of democratization. But for East Germany, that cure is worse than the curse. If it were to ditch the "dictatorship of the proletariat," then why have a second German state?

Only Prusso-socialism buttresses

POINTY-HEADED, THREE-EYED EXTRATERRESTRIALS, REPORTED IN THE SOVIET UNION, ARE SEEN AGAIN...



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East Berlin's claim to separate statehood. Let it go, and out goes East Germany's reason for being. Allow for free elections today, and you might just as well celebrate anschluss with West Germany tomorrow.

Precisely because East Germany is not like Hungary and Poland, precisely because the state might evaporate along with the regime, Mr. Krenz can make haste only slowly. He will yield here to take the pressure off, and he will retract there to divide an inexperienced, uncertain opposition.

In this respect, the Warsaw-Budapest model is misleading, too. There, the potential reformers had no place to go, and so they were in position when the great Gorbachev thaw began. But their East German counterparts left long ago — among the three million who escaped before the Berlin Wall went up in 1961, and the tens of thousands who left when the safety valve of controlled emigration was opened in the 1980s.

Nor does a more supple Prusso-socialism look like a hopeless strategy, because the Krenz regime may well enjoy the tacit support of Bonn.

Strangely, the upheavals in the East have not triggered a nationalist avalanche in the West; rather, the mood is one of embarrassment and confusion. East German refugees are welcomed, but not with jubilation. Ultra-nationalism, a German specialty in two world wars, seems a spent force; reunification does not top the average West German's agenda.

Also, Bonn dreads uncontrollable, cataclysmic change in East Germany — and the violent reaction it might provoke. Bonn thus stands ready, as always, to act as stability lender of last resort. Rather than let East Germany rot on the stem as a prelude to reunification, the Federal Republic will extend its enormous riches to East Berlin as soon as Mr. Krenz shows the first signs of reformism.

Above all, let us not count Mr. Gorbachev out prematurely. Unless he is truly willing to dismantle the Soviet empire in Europe — something great powers are not wont to do — he will not let go of East Germany. Here, too, East Germany is different from Poland and Hungary.

It is the very brace of Soviet pos-

sessions, a strategic bastion that allows Moscow to contain and encircle all the rest. To relinquish East Germany is also to withdraw 400,000 Soviet troops that are the ultimate insurance against the empire's demise.

In that respect, the basic realities of postwar power have not changed. For Germany to be reunited, bigger things must happen. The Russians must part with their great prize of World War II and withdraw from the heart of Europe. That they will not do as long as the Americans stay. Yet, if both leave, that would bespeak an enormous transformation of the balance of power — and one that would, willy-nilly, accrue to Germany.

But that is a prospect that nobody is willing to contemplate — and probably not for a long time. Perhaps, paradoxically, not even the Germans themselves, who have learned from bitter experience that a solitary position at the center is neither splendid nor serendipitous.

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