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BRITISH EMBASSY
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LAST PAPER

S J Butt Esq
Soviet Dept
FCO

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	<i>[Signature]</i>

Dear Simon,

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On the Foreign Secretary's instructions, Ambassador Braithwaite was able to speak to Foreign Minister Shevardnadze this morning on the troubling situation in Azerbaijan. He found him obstinate, to say the least. Shevardnadze's confounding position is that nothing out of the ordinary has occurred in Baku, but he also brusquely demanded that we cease efforts to look into what he claimed was "nothing". Beyond this he was dismissive of basic facts that we have clearly established. It seems that the spirit of glasnost becomes a little opaque when it comes to the Soviet Union using its armed forces not against perceived foreign aggression, but against its own people.

Strenuous efforts to dissimulate have enjoyed only limited success. Schisms quickly appeared in a prominent official line; that this was no more than a strong dampening down of disaffected elements from the margins of society. From our own sources in the Caucasus it quickly became clear that this is not, as it is claimed, simply a few drug addicts, social undesirables and agitators.

Almost certainly at the behest of Gorbachev, army units backed by Special Forces have engaged in what amounts to a massacre of unarmed civilian protestors. It seems probable that several hundred lives have been claimed, although at this stage it is impossible to put an accurate figure on the death toll. Many more were injured.

Why this has been perpetrated is yet another matter. A reliable contact in Gorbachev's circle has quoted Defence Minister Yazov as stating that this action represents a clear warning not just to the Azerbaijanis, but to dissenting voices in other restive republics. This, and other information we have, gives rise to the conclusion that this was not an overzealous mistake by an old guard mired in old thinking, but a carefully orchestrated and official state action.

As we learn more, I will continue to write to you over the coming days.

Yours ever

Adam

Adam Noble