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The Director of Central Intelligence
Washington, D.C. 20505

National Intelligence Council

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EXECUTIVE BRIEF

CRISIS IN THE CAUCASUS: THE KID GLOVES COME OFF

- The Soviet military effort to restore order is likely to quickly devolve into a long-term occupation against a continuing insurgency requiring significantly larger numbers of forces to control the situation.
- Rules of engagement by Soviet military forces remain very restrictive, indicating that Moscow wants to minimize the use of force and realizes that any solution will be primarily political.
- Tehran is not enthusiastic about increased Azeri nationalism and is likely to continue to take a measured approach to the situation; this course will be difficult to sustain if Moscow is required to conduct a long-term occupation.
- Gorbachev has probably gained a short-term political benefit in the run-up to February's Central Committee plenum, but these advantages will dissipate as the costs of the occupation mount.

On 21 January 1990, a teleconference between CIA, DIA, NSA and State/INR was called by NIO/USSR to discuss the implications for the Soviet decision to send troops into Baku.

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CRISIS IN THE CAUCASUS: THE KID GLOVES COME OFF

Current Situation

There are roughly 45-50,000 troops in the region (excluding Georgian SSR). Nearly 10,000 of these are soldiers from five different airborne divisions (76th, 98th, 103rd, 104th and 106th). The remainder are regular army, naval, and MVD units and reservists.

- Soviet forces have managed to gain control of key government buildings and freedom of movement in the Baku area. Casualty figures are likely close to those reported by Soviet officials -- less than 100 killed and several hundred wounded (both military and civilian).
- Gorbachev probably intends to minimize the use of force. Although Soviet forces did not interfere in Monday's demonstration in Baku, there are indications of an increasing willingness to use police force in a selective fashion.
- Cities and areas south of Baku to the Iranian border presumably remain in the hands of the Popular Front.
- Fighting is continuing in Nagorno-Karabakh and Nakhichevan and it is unclear whether the situation is improving or worsening.
- Armenia remains stable. []
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- In the Nakhichevan region, the border with Iran has been closed by coordinated Soviet and Iranian actions. Elsewhere, the border remains porous, but Soviet forces are beginning to reassert control.

Possibilities for Coming Weeks and Months

While the Soviets may have secured Baku militarily, emotions are becoming increasingly anti-Soviet and anti-Russian, and there have been demands for withdrawal and

secession by the Azerbaijan Supreme Soviet. It is likely:

- An insurgency will develop, directed against Soviet forces.
- The martial law situation in Azerbaijan will be a long-term affair requiring substantially larger numbers of forces (estimated 5-6 more divisions) to maintain order.

The degree to which the Azeri have been cowed by Moscow's use of force will have an impact on the ultimate success of the operation.

- Most Community analysts believe that resistance, active and passive, to Soviet occupation forces will be both widespread and prolonged.
- INR believes that, although there will be resistance, Moscow will use force so overwhelming that the population will eventually accept, grudgingly, the new conditions.

Politically, Moscow may hope that its actions are viewed as aimed against Popular Front extremists and that it will be able to reestablish a dialogue with moderate Azeri leaders.

- Community representatives view this outcome as very unlikely since Moscow's actions appear to have radicalized the Azeri population.

Potential for Spread to Central Asia

The potential to spread beyond Azerbaijan is a concern for Moscow and in part explains the cautious approach Gorbachev has followed in using force against Muslims until now. Although there is a dearth of evidence, the possibility of a pan-Islamic uprising in Central Asia in support of Azerbaijan is considered unlikely by Community representatives at least in the near- to mid-term. (Some experts outside the Community believe this potential is higher.)

- The driving factors causing unrest in the region are much more likely to be problems unique to the area.
- Central Asians, unlike Azeris, are Sunni, not Shiite, Muslims and have historically had a much different national experience.
- If Moscow's efforts to control the Caucasus run into serious, prolonged difficulty, however, it could encourage various Central Asian nations to press their demands more vigorously.
- But an Azeri insurgency develops as expected and Russian casualties mount or if massive demonstrations continue, pressure will once again come to bear.
- The crackdown does not signal, in the Community's view, a retreat on *perestroika*; Gorbachev may, as our Embassy suggests, accelerate it further.
- The turmoil in the Caucasus will, however, add to the economic strain the system is already under and raise new questions about this ability to handle the consequences of his policies.

Significance for the Baltic Republics

If anything, the Community believes that Moscow's actions have encouraged the Baltic republics to pursue their present steady, political and non-violent course toward independence. Moscow's distinction between violent and peaceful approaches toward change gives them greater reason to believe that their course will produce the desired outcome with minimal risk of confrontation.

Relations with Iran

Despite unofficial warnings of the consequences of any Soviet over-reaction, the use of force in Baku seems to have elicited a low-key Iranian response. Tehran is not enthusiastic about increased Azeri nationalism, regardless of the form, in part because 2/3 of the world's Azeris live in Iran. It is likely to continue to take a measured approach to the crisis in the near term to avoid inflaming Azeri nationalism -- which could spill over into Iran -- and to continue to develop its relations with the Soviet Union.

The Iranian leadership, however, will find restraint increasingly more difficult if Moscow is required to conduct a long-term military occupation.

A Leadership Crisis for Gorbachev?

By 'playing hardball,' Gorbachev has answered criticism of his 'indecisiveness' in dealing with the nationalities issue. He will likely benefit politically from this in the short run, especially in the run-up to the Central Committee plenum in early February.