

RESTRICTED

FM MOSCOW

DISTRIBUTION AMENDED 2ND MAY

TO PRIORITY FCO

TELNO 736

OF 290616Z APRIL 89

INFO ROUTINE PARIS, BONN, WASHINGTON, UKDEL NATO

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SIC EMA/EMC/EME

SOVIET INTERNAL: GEORGIA 

SUMMARY

1. A MEMBER OF THE MEDICAL COMMISSION EXAMINING THE VICTIMS OF 9 APRIL STATES CATEGORICALLY THAT A POISONOUS GAS, AND NOT JUST TEAR GAS, WAS USED. MORE THAN 100 PEOPLE NOW SUFFERING FROM ITS EFFECTS. THE MILITARY STILL REFUSING TO IDENTIFY THE GAS OR ADMIT IT WAS USED. BITTERNESS IN GEORGIA GROWING.

DETAIL

2. ON 27 APRIL TWO MEMBERS OF CHANCERY ATTENDED AN INFORMAL AND UNOFFICIAL BRIEFING ORGANISED FOR SOME SOVIET JOURNALISTS ON RECENT EVENTS IN GEORGIA. THOSE PRESENT INCLUDED SHENGELIYA, CHAIRMAN OF THE GEORGIAN WRITERS UNION, AND MEMBER OF THE GEORGIAN SUPREME SOVIET COMMISSION INVESTIGATING THE EVENTS OF 9 APRIL, AND A GEORGIAN DOCTOR WHO HAD BEEN CLOSELY INVOLVED IN TENDING THE VICTIMS OF 9 APRIL AND WHO WAS A MEMBER OF THE MEDICAL INVESTIGATORY COMMISSION. AMATEUR VIDEOS OF THE BREAKING UP OF THE DEMONSTRATION AND INCLUDING INTERVIEWS WITH HOSPITALISED SURVIVORS, WERE SHOWN.

3. THE MAIN INTEREST OF THE BRIEFING LAY IN WHAT WAS SAID ABOUT THE USE OF GAS. THE DOCTOR SAID THAT LEADING TOXICOLOGISTS FROM LENINGRAD AND MOSCOW HAD VISITED TBILISI, EXAMINED THE PATIENTS AND SIGNED A STATEMENT THAT THEY WERE SUFFERING FROM CHEMICAL POISONING: AND THAT THERE WAS NO WAY IN WHICH THEIR SYMPTOMS COULD HAVE BEEN CAUSED BY TEAR GAS IN WHATEVER QUANTITIES IT HAD BEEN USED. ACCORDING TO THE DOCTOR, THE ARMY AND MINISTRY OF THE INTERIOR WERE STILL DENYING THAT ANY GAS HAD BEEN USED EXCEPT THE CHERMUKHA TEAR GAS (OUR TELNO 700). WITHOUT THE ASSISTANCE OF THE MILITARY, IT WAS PROVING IMPOSSIBLE TO IDENTIFY THE GAS USED, AND HENCE TO DECIDE ON THE METHOD OF TREATMENT FOR ITS VICTIMS.

4. THEIR NUMBER WAS CONTINUING TO INCREASE. THERE WERE NOW OVER 100 PEOPLE IN HOSPITAL SUFFERING FROM CHEMICAL POISONING. THE GAS USED WAS HEAVY AND WAS STILL ACTIVE. IT WAS COLLECTING IN BASEMENTS OF BUILDINGS. ONLY A FEW DAYS AGO A GROUP OF SCHOOLCHILDREN HAD BEEN ADMITTED TO HOSPITAL BECAUSE ONE OF THEIR CLASSROOMS WAS AFFECTED. THE SYMPTOMS OF THOSE POISONED WERE VARIED, AND WERE PSYCHOLOGICAL AS WELL AS PHYSICAL. THE GAS AFFECTED THE NERVOUS SYSTEM AND CAUSED BREATHING DIFFICULTIES. SOME WERE SUFFERING FROM HYSTERIA AND VARIOUS FORMS OF PSYCHOSIS. IT WAS IMPOSSIBLE TO TELL HOW MANY OF THE ORIGINAL 16 DEATHS HAD BEEN CAUSED BY CHEMICAL POISONING. APPARENTLY THE AUTOPSIES WHICH HAVE BEEN CARRIED OUT DID NOT PROVE THINGS ONE WAY OR THE OTHER. BUT THE TWO WHO HAD SUBSEQUENTLY DIED IN HOSPITAL HAD DEFINITELY BEEN POISONED BY GAS. THE DOCTOR CONFIRMED THAT 14 OF THE ORIGINAL 16 DEAD HAD BEEN WOMEN AND AGED FROM 16 TO 70.

5. THE VIDEO SHOWED AN INTERVIEW WITH A GEORGIAN HOSPITALISED BECAUSE OF THE GAS WHO SAID HE RECOGNISED IT BECAUSE HE HAD USED IT IN AFGHANISTAN. IT INDUCED PARALYSIS FOR ONE OR TWO MINUTES. HE SAID HE THOUGHT THERE WAS AN ANTIDOTE AGAINST THE AFTER-EFFECTS WHICH HAD TO BE ADMINISTERED WITHIN SIX HOURS. THERE WAS NO CORROBORATION OF THIS IN OTHER INTERVIEWS.

6. ALTOGETHER, 1,117 PEOPLE HAD SOUGHT MEDICAL TREATMENT AFTER THE DEMONSTRATION. 343 HAD BEEN HOSPITALISED. FOUR OF THE GAS VICTIMS WERE STILL IN A CRITICAL CONDITIONS. SOME OF THE STUDENTS WHO HAD BEEN ON HUNGERSTRIKE HAD BEEN AFFECTED BY THE GAS AND WERE ALSO IN A BAD STATE. THERE WERE WILD RUMOURS GOING AROUND ABOUT THE LONG TERM EFFECTS OF THE GAS - INCLUDING THAT IT CAUSED IMPOTENCE.

7. THE VIDEO FILMS BEGAN WITH EXTENSIVE SHOTS OF A PEACEFUL CROWD SINGING HYMNS AND SAYING PRAYERS. THE PATRIARCH, WHO HAD CLEARLY BEEN WARNED THAT THE TROOPS WERE ABOUT TO MOVE IN, PLEADED WITH THE CROWD TO DISPERSE TO AVOID 'THE VERY SERIOUS AND IMMEDIATE DANGER'. TANKS WERE SEEN APPROACHING THE SQUARE TO THE CHANTS AND JEERS OF THE DEMONSTRATORS. SOME DEMONSTRATORS KICKED AND THREW STICKS AND STONES AT THE TANKS WHILST OTHERS APPEARED TO BE MARSHALLING THE CROWD TO A SAFE DISTANCE.

8. WHAT ENSUED WAS UNCLEAR, THOUGH RIOT POLICE WITH PERSPEX SHIELDS WERE LINED UP FACING DEMONSTRATORS AND MOVING THEM BACK. ONLY ONE OR TWO INSTANCES OF SHOVELS BEING WIELDED BY TROOPS WERE CAUGHT ON THE FILM. A COMMENTATOR AT THE MEETING WHO HAD BEEN PRESENT ON 9 APRIL

POINTED OUT WHAT HE SAID WERE TROOPS DELIBERATELY ENCIRCLING AND BEATING A PORTION OF THE CROWD. BUT THIS WAS NOT SELF-EVIDENT FROM THE FILM. A SUBSEQUENT SECTION OF THE FILM WAS SHOT INSIDE THE MORTUARY. ONLY ONE OR TWO OF THE DEAD HAD OBVIOUSLY BLOODY WOUNDS, ALTHOUGH THE FILM COMMENTARY AND AUDIENCE REPEATED CLAIMS ABOUT THE USE OF SHOVELS.

9. THERE WERE ALSO VIDEO INTERVIEWS WITH HOSPITALISED SURVIVORS INCLUDED ONE WITH WITH A MEMBER OF THE GEORGIAN MILITIA WHO SAID HE HAD BEEN BEATEN WITH TRUNCHEONS WHILST TRYING TO HELP WOMEN TO SAFETY. THERE WAS AN INTERVIEW WITH A YOUNG TEENAGER WHO HAD BEEN SHOT THE DAY AFTER THE DEMONSTRATION, PRESUMABLY DURING THE CURFEW SEMICOLON FILM OF A SOLDIER SHOOTING AT A CAR PASSENGER ATTEMPTING TO FILM A TANK SEMICOLON AND AN INTERVIEW WITH A GEORGIAN WHO HAD BEEN BEATEN UNCONSCIOUS AND HAD HAD BOTH ARMS BROKEN FOR FAILING TO PRODUCE HIS IDENTITY DOCUMENTS TO PATROLLING TROOPS.

CONCLUSION

10. THIS WAS AN EMOTIONAL MEETING WITH A NUMBER OF GEORGIANS PRESENT. ALLOWANCE HAS TO BE MADE FOR THAT IT WAS DESIGNED SPECIFICALLY TO PRESENT THE GEORGIAN CASE. NEVERTHELESS, IT IS CLEAR THAT THE MILITARY ARE PAINTING THEMSELVES INTO AN INCREASINGLY AWKWARD CORNER. THE INVESTIGATORY COMMISSION MAY NOW CONCLUDE THAT A POISONOUS GAS WAS USED. AND SHEVARDNADZE AND OTHERS HAVE UNDERTAKEN TO MAKE THE FINDINGS PUBLIC. THE MILITARY'S REFUSAL TO COOPERATE IN HELPING TO TREAT THE GAS VICTIMS WILL BE FURTHER INCREASING GEORGIAN BITTERNESS, AND FUELLING THE BELIEF, ALREADY APPARENTLY WIDESPREAD IN GEORGIA, THAT THE EVENTS OF 9 APRIL WERE DELIBERATELY ENGINEERED BY ''CERTGAIN FORCES'' IN MOSCOW. THE AFFAIR IS NOT GOING TO DIE DOWN.

11. A MEMBER OF CHANCERY HAS MANAGED TO GET TICKETS TO TBILISI FROM 2-4 MAY, AND THIS SHOULD PROVIDE FURTHER INFORMATION.

12. SEE MIFT (NOT TO ALL).

BRAITHWAITE

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DISTRIBUTION

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MAIN 139

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MR BOYD
MR TOMKYS
MR GOULDEN
MR GORE-BOOTH

ADDITIONAL 13

ARMS CONTROL CHEMICAL WEAPONS

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