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CONFIDENTIAL

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10 Downing Street  
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*CDP*  
*Eric Nimitz*  
*CDP 6/6.*  
6 June 1990

*Dear Powell,*

THE PRIME MINISTER'S VISIT TO LENINAKAN

1. You will have seen Christopher MacRae's minute of 30 May about the Prime Minister's visit to Soviet Armenia. You will wish to know that this was considered by a meeting of MISC 136 on 5 June, which agreed that there was no risk of any group threatening violence to the Prime Minister during her visit to Leninakan. MISC 136 also took the view that the security arrangements for the visit were sound and that the Soviet authorities would take every measure to avoid exposing the Prime Minister to any danger.

2. We and the Assessments Staff shall continue to keep a close watch on the situation, and shall let you know if there is any development which has a bearing on the Prime Minister's security.

3. I am copying this letter to Stephen Wall and Sonia Phippard (with copies of Christopher MacRae's minute) and to Christopher MacRae.

*Yours very,*  
*David Gowan*

D J GOWAN

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CHAIRMAN - MISC 136

cc Chief Officer Coates

**SOVIET ARMENIA: PRIME MINISTER'S VISIT**

1. In the light of Mrs Thatcher's proposed visit to Leninakan on 10 June, you may find it useful to have our views on the current security situation in the republic.

**The Political Background**

2. Fuelled by the bitter and violent dispute with Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh, the political atmosphere in Armenia has been heated for months. There is deep disillusionment with Moscow, and hostility towards its representatives. It is condemned for the return of Nagorno-Karabakh to Azerbaijan's administration earlier this year, for the failure decisively to break Azerbaijan's economic blockade, and for Armenia's dire economic plight. The economy has shrunk sharply from the effects of the 1988 earthquake, the refugees from the fighting with the Azeris, and the blockade.

3. The local "popular front", the Armenian National Movement, is therefore a powerful force, which has put the local authorities on the defensive: the CPSU's leading role has been dropped from the constitution and conscription into the Soviet armed forces has been suspended. The republic is in the middle of a campaign to elect a new republican parliament, with National Movement candidates standing in two thirds of the seats.

**Weapons**

4. Guerilla warfare developed with Azerbaijan in January following anti-Armenian pogroms in Baku, the capital of

Azerbaijan. Armenian militants formed themselves into unofficial military detachments and illegally seized weapons from local army and internal security units. The commander of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) forces, General Shatalin, estimated on 25 May that militant groups still held more than 2,500 weapons, including 1,145 sub-machine guns and explosives. He publicly condemned the Armenian leadership for failing to help the MVD to disarm these groups, and described the situation as "explosive".

5. Tension has repeatedly flared into violence between the MVD and Armenian militants, as well as between the latter and Azeri militants. It did so again in three separate incidents in and around the Armenian capital, Yerevan, on 27 May in the run-up to Armenia's national day on 28 May. In at least two of these incidents numerous armed Armenians were involved: 24 people died, including two MVD soldiers, and dozens were wounded.

#### Leninakan

6. Most of the violence has been in and around Nagorno-Karabakh, on Armenia's borders with Azerbaijan (including the enclave of Nakhichevan), and in Yerevan. It has been guerilla rather than terrorist in style, and there is no evidence that the Lebanon-based Armenian terrorist group ASALA operates in any manner within the republic. Leninakan is well removed from the main hotspots. We have seen no reports from any source of violence there for at least several months.

7. It is planned that the Prime Minister will fly into Leninakan direct: no travel elsewhere in Armenia is involved. The town contains a large military garrison: the Russians certainly have the resources to ensure maximum security. Moreover, the Prime Minister is popular; there are no serious Armenian grudges against Britain; and our earthquake assistance has been well-received. We therefore judge that the likelihood of any group or individual intending violence against the Prime Minister is low to non-existent.

8. There does, however, seem to us some possibility of peaceful demonstrations being attempted. Such demonstrations would be more likely to be directed against Moscow than against the Prime Minister; but would seek to take advantage of what is likely to be the heavy media coverage of her visit. Soviet security would probably either keep them at a considerable distance or (more likely) suppress them altogether.

Christopher MacRae.

A C D S MacRAE

30 May 1990