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Date/DTG:	Oct 30, 2001 / 300000Z Oct 01
From:	AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
Action:	WASHDC, SECSTATE *ROUTINE*
E.O.:	Unknown
TAGS:	PREL, MARR, KCFE, UN, OSCE, GG, RS
Reference:	(A) MOSCOW 13072 (B) TBILISI 3087
Subject:	UFOS OVER GEORGIA: STRANGE ENCOUNTERS OF AN MFA KIND

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ACTION IO-00

INFO LOG-00 NP-00 AID-00 ACQ-00 CIAE-00 DOEE-00 DOTE-00
SRPP-00 DS-00 EB-00 EUR-00 OIGO-00 FAAE-00 FBIE-00
VC-00 H-01 TEDE-00 INR-00 LAB-01 L-00 VCE-00
MOFM-05 MOF-03 M-00 AC-01 DCP-01 NRRC-00 NSAE-00
NSCE-00 OIC-02 OMB-01 PA-00 PC-01 PM-00 PRS-00
ACE-00 P-00 SCT-00 SP-00 SS-00 TRSE-00 T-00
USIE-00 SA-00 BBG-00 SNIS-00 NISC-00 SSD-00 PMB-00
DSCC-00 PRM-00 DRL-02 G-00 NFAT-00 SAS-00 SWCI-00
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P 301741Z OCT 01
FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1142
INFO AMEMBASSY TBILISI PRIORITY
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY
MOSCOW POLITICAL COLLECTIVE
AMEMBASSY BAKU
AMEMBASSY YEREVAN
USMISSION USOSCE
SECDEF WASHDC
JOINT STAFF WASHDC

~~C O N F I D E N T I A L~~ SECTION 01 OF 02 MOSCOW 013169

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John Powers, Acting-Director
US Department of State
2/25/2026

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1. (~~C~~) SUMMARY: DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER MAMEDOV TOLD AMBASSADOR VERSHBOW OCTOBER 30 THAT ACCORDING TO THE RUSSIAN MINISTRY OF DEFENSE, NO RUSSIAN PLANES FLEW OVER OR BOMBED POSITIONS IN THE KODORI GORGE OCTOBER 28-29, DESPITE GEORGIAN ACCUSATIONS TO THE CONTRARY. MFA GEORGIA DESK CHIEF TEREOKEN ECHOED MAMEDOV'S STATEMENT. TEREOKEN FURTHER CONFIRMED THAT ONE RAILWAY CAR FULL OF RUSSIAN MILITARY EQUIPMENT LEFT GUDAUTA BASE AND ENTERED RUSSIA OCTOBER 29 (REF A) AND THAT TWO OTHER RAILWAY CARS ARE LOADED AND AWAITING ABKHAZ PERMISSION TO LEAVE FOR RUSSIA. THERE ARE NO PLANS TO WITHDRAW PERSONNEL UNTIL TBILISI AGREES THAT APPROXIMATELY 340 RUSSIAN "GUARDS" CAN REMAIN AT GUDAUTA. TEREOKEN SAID THAT ABKHAZ AUTHORITIES WOULD NOT ALLOW ANY OUTSIDE OBSERVERS TO WITNESS THE WITHDRAWAL. TEREOKEN TERMED GEORGIAN PARLIAMENTARY SPEAKER ZVANIA'S OCTOBER 25-28 VISIT TO MOSCOW POSITIVE IN TONE BUT EMPTY OF RESULTS. ACCORDING TO THE GEORGIAN EMBASSY, ZVANIA AND RUSSIAN DUMA SPEAKER SELEZNEV AGREED THAT BOTH SIDES SHOULD AVOID RECRIMINATIONS. TEREOKEN DENIED MEDIA REPORTS THAT DEFENSE MINISTER SERGEY IVANOV WAS PLANNING TO VISIT TBILISI SOON BUT DID NOT RULE OUT A VISIT COMPLETELY. END SUMMARY

2. (~~C~~) ON OCTOBER 30, DURING A PREVIOUSLY SCHEDULED MEETING, AMBASSADOR VERSHBOW RAISED REFTEL B REPORTS

ALLEGING RUSSIAN PLANES HAD VIOLATED GEORGIAN AIRSPACE AND BOMBED AREAS OF THE KODORI GORGE. THE AMBASSADOR STRESSED THAT SUCH INCIDENTS, IF TRUE, AND IF CONTINUED, COULD BE DISASTROUS FOR U.S.-RUSSIAN RELATIONS AND SPOIL THE UPCOMING SUMMIT MEETING OF OUR PRESIDENTS IN THE U.S. MAMEDOV AGREED THAT SUCH INCIDENTS WOULD HAVE A NEGATIVE EFFECT ON THE SUMMIT, BUT QUOTED THE RUSSIAN MINISTRY OF DEFENSE AS CATEGORICALLY DENYING THAT RUSSIAN PLANS WERE INVOLVED IN ANY INCIDENTS IN GEORGIAN AIRSPACE.

3. (~~C~~) MFA GEORGIA DESK CHIEF TEREOKEN, ECHOING MAMEDOV'S CLAIMS, DENIED TO US OCTOBER 30 REPORTS OF RUSSIAN PLANES BOMBING KODORI GORGE IN ABKHAZIA. HE ALSO DENIED THAT THERE WERE ANY RUSSIAN VIOLATIONS OF GEORGIAN AIRSPACE, SAYING THAT THERE HAD BEEN NO RUSSIAN PLANES FLYING NEAR THE AREA ON EITHER OCTOBER 28 OR 29. ACCORDING TO TEREOKEN, THERE WERE CREDIBLE REPORTS OF ABKHAZ HELICOPTERS BOMBING THE AREAS "WHERE THE TERRORISTS WERE" BUT THAT REPORTS OF PLANES IN THE AREA MIGHT AS WELL HAVE BEEN ABOUT "UFOS." MOSCOW, HE EXPLAINED, DOES NOT HAVE THE TECHNICAL CAPABILITY TO DETERMINE WHETHER THERE WERE FOREIGN PLANES IN THE REGION. UNDERSCORING THAT HE "WAS NOT ACCUSING

ANYONE," TEREOKEN ADDED THAT IT WAS POSSIBLE THAT "ANY SIDE" HAD SENT PLANES OVER KODORI.

4. (~~C~~) ASKED ABOUT PLANS TO WITHDRAW FROM GUDAUTA (REF A), TEREOKEN CONFIRMED THAT ONE TRAINLOAD OF MILITARY EQUIPMENT HAD DEPARTED THE BASE AND HAD ENTERED RUSSIA THE MORNING OF OCTOBER 29. TWO MORE TRAINS HAVE BEEN LOADED AND ARE AWAITING PERMISSION FROM ABKHAZ AUTHORITIES TO MOVE TO RUSSIA. MEMBERS OF THE RUSSIAN GENERAL STAFF ARE IN

SUKHUMI TO COORDINATE THESE MOVES.

5. (~~C~~) WE ASKED WHY OUTSIDE OBSERVERS HAD NOT BEEN INVITED TO INSPECT THE WITHDRAWALS. TEREOKEN CLAIMED THAT THE ABKHAZ AUTHORITIES LIKELY WOULD NOT TOLERATE THE PRESENCE OF OUTSIDERS GIVEN THE TENSE SITUATION WITH TBILISI. THE RUSSIANS, HE ADDED, HAD NO TIME TO INVITE OUTSIDE OBSERVERS BECAUSE "WE DIDN'T KNOW UNTIL THE LAST MINUTE" THAT THE WITHDRAWAL OF ONE TRAINLOAD OF EQUIPMENT WOULD PROCEED. WE ARGUED THAT MOSCOW NOW HAS TIME IF IT HAS ALREADY LOADED TWO OTHER TRAINS BUT IS WAITING FOR ABKHAZ PERMISSION TO WITHDRAW. THE LACK OF TRANSPARENCY MIGHT RAISE QUESTIONS ABOUT THE GOR'S INTENTIONS, WE NOTED. WE ASKED ABOUT PLANS TO WITHDRAW TROOPS. TEREOKEN SAID THAT APPROXIMATELY 600 RUSSIAN PERSONNEL REMAIN AT GUDAUTA. MOSCOW CONTINUES TO INSIST ON KEEPING ABOUT 340 THERE AS "GUARDS." TBILISI, HE NOTED, CONTINUES TO WANT A MUCH LOWER FIGURE.

6. (~~C~~) WE ASKED TEREOKEN ABOUT GEORGIAN PARLIAMENTARY SPEAKER ZURAB ZVANIA'S VISIT TO MOSCOW LAST WEEK. HE CONFIRMED THAT THE TONE OF ZVANIA'S VISIT WAS POSITIVE. HE NOTED, HOWEVER, THAT THE VISIT "HAD NO PRACTICAL OUTCOME." THE GEORGIAN EMBASSY TOLD US OCTOBER 26 THAT GEORGIAN ZVANIA'S VISIT WAS GOING WELL (NOTE: ZVANIA DEPARTED MOSCOW OCTOBER 28). ACCORDING TO GEORGIAN POLCOUNS CHKHEIDZE, ZVANIA AND RUSSIAN DUMA SPEAKER GENNADIY

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SA-00 SNIS-00 NISC-00 SSD-00 PMB-00 DSCC-00 PRM-00
DRL-02 G-00 NFAT-00 SAS-00 SWCI-00 /017W
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SELEZNEV AGREED THAT BOTH COUNTRIES NEEDED TO DISCUSS THEIR DIFFERENCES CALMLY AND WORK ON A GENERAL TREATY.

7. ~~(C)~~ TEREOKEN DISMISSED PRESS REPORTS THAT DEFENSE MINISTER SERGEY IVANOV HAD AGREED TO VISIT TBILISI VERY SOON BUT NOTED HE COULD NOT ENTIRELY RULE OUT A VISIT IN THE COMING WEEKS. HE CLAIMED THERE ARE PLANS FOR A POSSIBLE MEETING BETWEEN SHEVARDNADZE AND PUTIN ON THE MARGINS OF THE NOVEMBER 30-DECEMBER 1 CIS SUMMIT IN MOSCOW, BUT NOTED NOTHING IS YET CONFIRMED.

8. ~~(C)~~ COMMENT: IT IS HARD TO ACCEPT OFFICIAL RUSSIAN DENIALS THAT RUSSIAN PLANES WERE NOT INVOLVED. TO POSIT THAT THEY COULD BE UFOS WOULD BE HUMOROUS IF IT WERE NOT FOR THE SERIOUSNESS OF THE VIOLATIONS. MOST LIKELY THE RUSSIANS WANT TO KEEP THE PRESSURE ON THE GEORGIANS AND THE CHECHENS IN THE GORGE IN AN UNSUBTLE EFFORT TO PREVENT THESE GROUPS' MOVEMENT TO ABKHAZIA OR TO RUSSIA. THEIR OFFICIAL DENIALS REFLECT A TRADITIONAL RUSSIAN PENCHANT TO AVOID AN AWKWARD ADMISSION WITH A BOLD LIE. AS FOR GUDAUTA, THE GOR LIKELY IS USING THE CONTINUED PRESENCE OF ITS 600 TROOPS THERE AS A BARGAINING CHIP TO TRY TO GET CONCESSIONS FROM TBILISI ON BOTH THE BODEN PAPER ON ABKHAZIA AND ON CLAMPING DOWN ON CHECHENS INSIDE GEORGIA.

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