

## **CC CPSU Letter on Afghanistan, May 10, 1988**

[Source: Alexander Lyakhovskiy, *Tragedy and Valor of Afghan*, Iskon, Moscow 1995, Appendix 8, Translated by Svetlana Savranskaya]

*On May 10, 1988, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the USSR issued a "closed" (internal use) letter to all Communist Party members of the Soviet Union on the issue of withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan. The letter presents the Central Committee analysis of events in Afghanistan and Soviet actions in that country, the problems and the difficulties the Soviet troops had to face in carrying out their mission. In particular, the letter stated that important historic and ethnic factors were overlooked when the decisions on Afghanistan were made in the Soviet Union. The letter analyzes Soviet interests in Afghanistan and the reasons for the withdrawal of troops.*

The decision was made in the conditions when there was a lot of uncertainty in the balance of forces within the Afghan society. [Our] picture of the real social and economic situation in the country was also insufficiently clear. We do not want to say it, but we should: at that time, we did not even have a correct assessment of the unique geographical features of that hard-to-enter country. That found its reflection in the operations of our troops against small highly mobile units, where very little could be accomplished with the help of modern military technology.

In addition, [we] completely disregarded the most important national and historical factors, above all the fact that the appearance of armed foreigners in Afghanistan was always met with arms in the hands [of the population]. This is how it was in the past, and this is how it happened when our troops entered [Afghanistan], even though they came there with honest and noble goals.

Babrak Karmal became head of the Afghan government at the time. His first steps in that capacity gave grounds to hope that he would be able to solve the problems facing his country. However, nothing new had emerged in his policy, which could have changed the attitude of the significant portion of the Afghan population to the new regime to the better. Moreover, the intensity of the internal Afghan conflict continued to grow, and our military presence was associated with forceful imposition of customs alien to the national characteristics and feelings of the Afghan people, which did not take into account the multiple forms of economic life, and other characteristics, such tribal and religious ones.

One has to admit that essentially we put our bets on the military solution, on suppressing the counterrevolution with force. We did not even fully use the existing opportunities for neutralization of the hostile attitudes of the local population towards us. We have to assess critically some aspects of functioning of our adviser apparatus in Afghanistan as well. It did many things to provide assistance in strengthening the PDPA and the people's regime. However, often our people, acting out of their best intentions, tried to transplant the approached we are accustomed to onto the Afghan soil, encouraged the Afghans to copy our ways. All this did not help our cause, it bred the feelings of dependency on the part of the Afghan leaders in regard to the Soviet Union both in the sphere of military operations and in the economic sphere.

Meanwhile the war in Afghanistan continued, and our troops were getting engaged in extensive combat actions. The situation developed, which made any way out more and more difficult as the time passed. Combat action is combat action. Our losses in dead and wounded—and the CC CPSU believes it has no right to hide this—were growing, and becoming more and more heavy. Altogether, by the beginning of May 1988, we lost 13,310 people [dead] in Afghanistan; 35,478 Soviet officers and soldiers were wounded, many of whom became disabled; 301 people are missing in action. There is a reason that people say that each person is a unique world, and when a person dies, that world disappears forever. The loss of every person is very hard and irreparable, it is hard and sacred if one died carrying out one's duty.

The Afghan losses, naturally, were much heavier [than ours], including the losses among the civilian population.

One should not disregard the economic factor either. If the enemy in Afghanistan received weapons and ammunition for hundreds of millions and later even billions of dollars, the Soviet-Afghan side also had to shoulder adequate expenditures. The war in Afghanistan costs us 5 billion rubles a year.

Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

May 10, 1988