

Anatoly S. Chernyaev Diary

April 4th, 1985.

I was told the following today: that the CC and *Pravda* receive literally a torrent of letters about Afghanistan, mostly from regions of Russia and from Siberia. Unlike before, there are very few anonymous anti-Soviet letters. Almost all of them are signed. The main message: why do we need this, and when will it end?! Women are writing, pitying the young men who are dying and suffering mentally there. They are writing that if “this is so necessary,” then send volunteers, at least the commissioned, but not the recruits; because being there and doing what they must do mutilates their souls.

Soldiers are writing, sincerely and simply reporting that they do not understand “why we are here.” Officers, and even one General, who signed his name, are writing that they are unable to explain to their soldiers, subordinates, “why they are here;” and that only from the outside it can seem that they are “fulfilling the international duty,” but being there it is impossible to believe.

There were two letters from the crews of a tank and a helicopter. These are reproaching *Pravda* for writing untrue accounts: you recently described a battle in which Afghan warriors supposedly fought heroically, they say, but in reality—“we were the ones fighting and everything was completely different [from your report].”

Later we discussed this for a long time with Karen. He thinks that three people: Sokolov, Gromyko, and Chebrikov, must present the General Secretary with statistical calculations: what this war is costing us, and what the prospects are. It is obvious that there are no alternatives. We must pull out.

I objected: no one from that group will come forward with this voluntarily. There must be a resolute decision. The General Secretary assigned them to produce considerations “about the consequences, pluses and minuses” of our withdrawal, **and in any case to make the decision—to withdraw!**

Gorbachev should not delay this. I cannot imagine people in the USSR, who would be against it. Such an action would provide him with a moral and political platform, from which he could later move mountains. It would be equivalent to Khrushchev’s anti-Stalinist report at the XX Congress. Not to mention the benefits the withdrawal would give us in foreign policy.

[There was] a wonderful conversation between Gorbachev and Raul Castro. I read the transcript. In all the important fields, “his” approach is one of freshness of understanding, broad and lively thought unrestrained by any cliché or dogma, real political realism... including in relation to Natta, the PCI, i.e. the ICM, and the Chinese. But alas! argued about Afghanistan—“we will not abandon our brothers in need” (??!)