

Anatoly S. Chernyaev Diary

October 17<sup>th</sup>, 1985.

I was at the Politburo today. There was a historical statement about Afghanistan. Gorbachev has finally made up his mind to put an end to it. [Gorbachev] outlined his talk with Karmal. He, Gorbachev said, was dumbfounded, in no way expected such a turn, was sure that we needed Afghanistan more than he did, and was clearly expecting that we will be there for a long time, if not forever. That is why I had to express myself with the utmost clarity: by the summer of 1986 you will have to learn how to defend your revolution yourselves. We will help you for the time being, though not with soldiers but with aviation, artillery, equipment. If you want to survive you have to broaden the regime's social base, forget about socialism, share real power with the people who have real authority, including the leaders of bands and organizations that are now hostile towards you. Restore Islam to its rights, [restore] the people's customs, lean on the traditional authorities, find a way to make the people see what they are getting from the revolution. And turn the army into an army, stop with the Parchamist and Khalqist scuffle, raise the salaries of officers, mullahs, etc. Take care of private trade, you will not be able to establish a different economy for a long time yet. And so on in this vein.

He read several heart-rending letters, all of them not anonymous. There is a good deal of everything [in the letters]: international duty?! For what? Do the Afghans themselves want us to fulfill this duty? And is this duty worth the lives of our boys, who do not understand what they are fighting for?.. And why are you (the Soviet leadership) throwing recruits against professional killers and gangsters, who have been taught by the

best foreign instructors and who are armed with the best weapons: ten of whom are capable of fighting against a whole brigade?! At least recruit volunteers or something...

Besides the letters filled with tears, mothers' grief over the dead and the crippled, heart-rending descriptions of funerals, there are letters of accusation: the Politburo made a mistake and it should be rectified, the sooner the better, because every day is taking lives.

By giving an account of this, Gorbachev was obviously forcing emotions, but he did not qualify the letters' evaluations, for example by saying whether it was a mistake or not. He concluded by saying: "With or without Karmal we will follow this line firmly, which must in a minimally short amount of time lead to our withdrawal from Afghanistan."

Marshal Sokolov took the floor twice, and it was obvious that he was ready to pull out of there and had no plans of giving Karmal any indulgences.

Gromyko took the floor, pronounced some amendments to the recommendations that are supposed to be handed over to Karmal in a day or two. One just had to see his colleagues', including Gorbachev's, ironic faces, they seemed to say: and why are you, jerk, now reasoning about it... you drew the country into such an affair, and now you would have us all responsible. I think Gorbachev will tell the people of this decision even before the Congress.