

**On the Changing Mission of the Soviet Forces in Afghanistan,
[from Alexander Lyakhovsky, *The Tragedy and Valor of Afghan*, Moscow, GPI
“Iskon,” 1995]**

One has to emphasize that up until a certain moment the USSR leadership and our military command tried to avoid responding to Babrak Karmal’s requests for help in fighting with the military formations of the opposition. Leaders of the operative group of the USSR Defense Ministry Marshal of the Soviet Union S. L. Sokolov and General of the Army S. F. Akhromeev argued that they did not envision participation of the units and formations introduced into Afghanistan in combat activities in the DRA territory. They [the troops] could only respond if forced to do so under an immediate fire impact on the part of the rebels, or undertake operations for liberation of our military advisers. However, after the mass anti-government uprisings in Kabul in the end of February 1980 (...), and after another appeal to the Soviet government from B.Karmal, who was frightened by that uprising, the command of Soviet forces in Afghanistan received a categorical order from Moscow: “Begin active operations for destruction of the formations of the armed opposition together with the DRA Army...” Of course, this was a deviation from the original plans, but the order came from the government, and the troops were obligated to carry it out.

From the beginning of March 1980, the formations and units of the LCST [Limited Contingent of Soviet Troops] began their operations in the Kunar Province. They found themselves pulled into the internecine war in Afghanistan and began to fulfill tasks related to suppression of the rebel movement, which initially did not figure in the USSR plans at all. ...

According to the documents from the Archive of the Main Operations Department (MOD) of the General Staff, ... in the end of February 1980, the Soviet leadership worked on the issue (supposedly on L. I. Brezhnev’s initiative) of withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan, because it was believed that having overthrown Amin and having solidified the new Afghan government of B. Karmal, they have fulfilled their main task. However, at that time, they did not do that for several reasons. D. F. Ustinov and Yu. V. Andropov (possibly A. A. Gromyko as well), were against withdrawing troops from Afghanistan. In their opinion, at that time, withdrawal of troops would have

meant a concession to the aggressive policy of the United States; would have strengthened the positions of the proponents of the harsh course toward the Soviet Union in the United States and in other Western countries, would have hurt the prestige of the Soviet Union as a state abiding by the treaties it signed, would have led to further destabilization of the situation in the DRA as a result of the weakness of the party and state apparatus and the armed forces, which in the end could have led to the loss of Afghanistan; and would have led to rapid growth of Muslim extremism near the borders of the Soviet Union. Taking [the above reasons] into account, it was proposed to return to consideration of the issue of withdrawal of troops later, as the party and state forces get stronger, and the political situation in the country stabilizes. It is possible that the worsening of the situation in Kabul in the end of February influenced their decision; in any case—the [decision] to leave the Soviet troops in Afghanistan inevitably led to their involvement in the civil war.

When it became obvious that the Limited Contingent of Soviet Troops was to stay in Afghanistan for a long time, they started to replace all the military reservists with enlisted officers and regular conscripted personnel. The full replacement of reserve personnel with enlisted personnel was completed as follows: officers—by November 1980, sergeants and soldiers—by March. Altogether 33,5 thousand people were replaced, among those 2.2 thousand officers, and 31.3 thousand sergeants and soldiers. At the same time, all automobiles and other machines supplied by the civilian sector were replaced with the military equipment.

[Lyakhovsky, pp. 176-177]

Translated by Svetlana Savranskaya, The National Security Archive.