

“Pravda” Correspondent I. Shchedrov’s letter to the CC CPSU on the Situation in Afghanistan, November 12, 1981

According to the conference of party advisors, as of October 1981, the government of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan controlled 5 thousand hamlets out of the total number of 35 thousand, i.e. less than 15%, as well as the majority of district centers, and all 29 cities in the provinces. Overall, in this respect, there have been no significant changes in the situation from the summer of the last year.

So far, not one province has been fully liberated. In the rural areas, controlled by the rebels there is not a single guerilla unit to be found, not one big active underground group of the PDPA, DOMA or of any other revolutionary organization of the DRA.

[...]

The big operations aimed at destroying the bands and the rebel strongholds in the rear of the counter-revolution, which are undertaken in the situation where 85% of the hamlets still remain under the control of the rebels, do not have much of an effect. Upon completing such an operation, the Afghan-Soviet troops as a rule return to their bases and the regions fall back under the control of the rebels. The practice of leaving [groups] of people’s regime in some isolated settlements without a permanent cover by the military forces does not change the situation. In addition, the tactics of hot pursuit of the rebels and that of destruction of rebels’ nests on their own territory is facing growing criticism on the part of the local population. In the course of those operations, the housing and the agricultural fields are often destroyed, the civilian population is killed, and in the end everything remains the same. The rebels return and control the territory again. The experience of the last year has shown that there was no significant increase in the territory controlled by the DRA after such operations, and it is not happening now. Moreover, in the majority of the provinces, peasant visitors from the regions controlled by the rebels come secretly to the provincial centers with requests to help them in creating units of defense of the revolution and of the popular regime, but with one condition – during the first stage, until the peoples regimes get stronger, to protect them from the punitive raids of the rebels, for which [they ask us] to move the mobile or the

permanent units of the DRA armed forces closer to those provinces. The experience of Farah and other provinces has already produced positive results.

There are some examples of the opposite. In Kunduze, Shindand, and in a number of other locations, where huge overpopulated military bases of Soviet troops and Afghan units are concentrated on territories surrounded by barbed wire, units that are following the already traditional tactics of hot pursuit of the rebels on the large territories, the facts are such that a kilometer or two away from those lie the areas, which are totally controlled by the rebels, and when the night falls, and sometimes even in the daytime, they hear the sounds of nearby fighting. One of the blocks of Kabul—Podman--still remains under the control of the rebels.

[...]

The war in Afghanistan is really a special case, an undeclared war with massive participation of forces of international reaction from the abroad. But at the same time, it is also a civil war, where the counter-revolution has now switched to the new protracted tactics, where there are no big military units openly fighting against the Afghan-Soviet troops anymore, even though the general number of forces of the band formations remains the same. And the counter-revolution masks itself as if they were civilians, they live among the people. The rebels actively use not only terror, but also propaganda, controlling extensive areas and relying on the old age-proven relations of the tribal and feudal society.

Purely military operations aimed at destruction of a certain rebel unit, or a certain stronghold obviously bring no results in the situation where the enemy controls the extensive territory.

It is quite clear now that even under the most favorable circumstances, and with the most effective strategy and the tactics, the defeat of the counter-revolutionary formations will take years, most likely no less than five years. This opinion is shared by B. Karmal, S. A. Ketmand, and by the majority of other leaders of the central as well as the provincial structures, and by our advisors.

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Translated by Svetlana Savranskaya, The National Security Archive.