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Alexander Lyakhovskiy's Account of the Decision of the CC CPSU Decision to Send Troops to Afghanistan

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On December 8, 1979, a meeting was held in L. I. Brezhnev's private office, which was attended by the narrow circle of the CC CPSU Politburo members: Yu. Andropov, A. Gromyko, M. Suslov and D. Ustinov. They took a long time discussing the present situation in Afghanistan and around it, considered all the pros and contrast of introducing the Soviet troops in the area. Yu. Andropov and D. Ustinov cited the reasons justifying the necessity of such step, such as: the efforts, undertaken by the CIA of the USA (U.S. resident in Ankara--Paul Henze), for creating a "new Great Ottoman Empire," which would have included the Southern republics of the USSR; the absence of a reliable air defense system in the South, so that in the case of stationing of the American missiles of the "Pershing" type in Afghanistan, they would threaten many vital Soviet objects, including the space center Baikonur; the danger that the Afghan uranium deposits could be used by Pakistan and Iraq for building nuclear weapons; [possible] establishment of opposition regimes in the Northern areas of Afghanistan and annexation of that region by Pakistan, and so on.

At the end of the meeting they have decided, as a preliminary plan, to develop two options: (1) to remove H. Amin by the hands of KGB special agents, and to put Babrak Karmal in his place; (2) to send some number of Soviet troops on the territory of Afghanistan for the same purposes.

On December 10, 1979, the Defense Minister of the USSR D. F. Ustinov summoned Chief of General Staff N. V. Ogarkov, and informed him that the Politburo had reached a preliminary decision of a temporary introduction of the Soviet troops into Afghanistan, and ordered him to prepare approximately 75 to 80 thousand people. N. V. Ogarkov was surprised and outraged by such a decision, and said that 75 thousand would not be able to stabilize the situation, and that he was against the introduction of troops, calling it "reckless." The Minister of Defense cut him off harshly: "Are you going to teach the Politburo? Your only duty is to carry out the orders . . ." On the same day, Nikolai Vasilievich [Ogarkov] was promptly summoned to L. Brezhnev's office, where the so-called "small Politburo" (Yu. Andropov, A. Gromyko and D. Ustinov) was in session.

The Chief of General Staff once again tried to convince those who were present, that the Afghan problem should be decided by the political means, instead of relying on using force. He cited the traditions of the Afghan people, who never tolerated foreigners on their soil, warned them about the possible involvement of our troops in military operations, -- but everything was in vain. However, in the end of the conversation they tentatively determined that for the time being they would not make the final decision on the immediate military assistance, but, in any case, the troops should start preparing.

In the evening, D. Ustinov gathered the Ministry of Defense Collegium and informed the narrow circle of officials from among the highest military leadership that possibly in the near future the decision would be made to use the Soviet troops in Afghanistan, and that they had to start preparing the appropriate forces. For this purpose Directive # 312/12/00133 was sent to the troops. Beginning from December 10, D. F. Ustinov started giving oral instructions to the Chief of General Staff regarding formation of a new Army in the Turkestan military district. On the basis of these instructions, selective mobilization of troops was carried out, and airborne and other military units were transferred to the Turkestan military district. All arrangements were carried out in secret, and noted on the maps.

Apparently, the final step was made after they received the report from the KGB representative, General-Lieutenant B. Ivanov, stationed in Kabul, with his evaluation of the situation in Afghanistan. This report was on the table of the Defense Minister at the moment when he was leaving for the CC CPSU Politburo meeting in the morning of December 12. General-Major V. P. Zaplatin, who was at that time adviser to the Chief of Political Administration of the Afghan army testified about it. The day before, the USSR Defense Minister summoned him to Moscow to report on the situation as

the man with

the most thorough knowledge of the state of affairs in the army of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan, since principal military adviser S. Magometov, who had just arrived [in Afghanistan], did not fully grasp the Afghan situation yet. However, when the General expressed his disagreement with the assessments of the Afghan Army provided by our special services, and presented his arguments to the effect that they had dramatized the situation developing in Afghanistan excessively, D. F. Ustinov showed him a coded telegram signed by the KGB representative, and said, "You cannot come to an agreement there, but we need to make a decision [here]."

On December 12, at the session of the CC CPSU Politburo (or rather its elite), on the initiative of Yu. V. Andropov, D. F. Ustinov, and A. A. Gromyko, the final decision was made unanimously to introduce Soviet troops into Afghanistan, although in the interest of secrecy, it was called "the measures." The Soviet leaders believed that that step was intended to promote the interests of strengthening the state, and pursued no other goals. The protocol of that session, handwritten by K.U. Chernenko, which for a long time was super secret, was not shown to anybody, not even those among the highest leadership and was kept in a special safe, survived in a special folder of the CC CPSU.

This document to a large extent clarifies who were the initiator and executor of the introduction of Soviet troops into Afghanistan. The protocol was signed by all the CC CPSU Politburo members, who were present at the session. In those times nobody spoke "against" [it]. Every Politburo member knew how a disagreement with the opinion of General Secretary would be received, and therefore all proposals were "received with unanimous approval." The principle of collective cover-up ruled the day. It is significant that A.N. Kosygin, whose position on this issue was negative, did not attend the session. In the document, the letter "A" signified Afghanistan, and the word "measures" signified the introduction of Soviet troops into that country. Therefore, all the false rumors, and inconsistencies regarding who was responsible for making the decision to introduce troops into Afghanistan have been removed.

The coded telegrams coming from Afghanistan looked as if they provided confirmation that the steps undertaken by the USSR leadership in regards to Afghanistan were the right ones.

There was no Decree of the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet on the issue of the introduction of troops. All orders were given orally. That was justified by the need to ensure secrecy and the need to confuse H. Amin.

In those times, such actions were possible as a result of the existing practice of making important political decisions: in reality, after their adoption by the CC CPSU Politburo (the highest organ of the ruling party), they were, for the main part, simply formally "approved" by the state organs, and were announced to the people. Therefore, there is every reason to believe that if that issue was raised at the Supreme Soviet, it would have been decided unanimously positively. Because that was the era of "unified thinking," and the strict system of hierarchy created by the party nomenclature did not allow even one step outside the line determined by the CC CPSU Politburo; the people who occupied the key posts in the government, were under the total control of that system.