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# Inside the Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan and the Seizure of Kabul, December 1979

By Aleksandr Antonovich Lyakhovskiy  
Translations by Gary Goldberg and Artemy Kalinovsky  
January 2007



**THE COLD WAR INTERNATIONAL HISTORY PROJECT  
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**Christian F. Ostermann, Series Editor**

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## PREFACE

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979 is recognized as one of the pivotal moments of Cold War history, yet the circumstances surrounding this event have remained murky ever since they took place. This Cold War International History Project Working Paper presents, for the first time in English, substantial examples of the work of the preeminent Russian military historian of the Soviet war in Afghanistan, Alexander Liakhovsky. After serving as Deputy Director of the USSR Defense Ministry working group in Afghanistan under General Valentin Varennikov from 1987 to 1989, since 1991, Liakhovsky has written a series of important Russian-language works on the conflict, including *Tayni Afganskoy Voyni [Secrets of the Afghan War]* (1991), *Tragedia I Doblest' Afgana [The Tragedy and Valor of Afghanistan]* (1995) and *Plamia Afgana [The Flame of Afghanistan]* (1999). A new edition of *The Tragedy and Valor of Afghanistan* appeared in July 2004. All of these works incorporate important primary sources, including the author's extensive oral history interviews with many of the Soviet military participants in the Afghan operation ranging from senior figures in the Defense Ministry in Moscow to officials managing the seizure of Kabul to soldiers engaged in the storming of Amin's heavily-guarded presidential palace. Although the Soviet collapse facilitated the release of much previously secret communist documentation that has greatly enhanced understanding of the political (CPSU) and intelligence (KGB) processes pertinent to the Afghan invasion and war—and much important scholarship and archival evidence in these areas has appeared in English<sup>1</sup>—Liakhovsky's *oeuvre* constitutes the most significant contribution by Russian scholars to a fuller comprehension of the Soviet military dimension of the conflict.

In this Working Paper, the co-editors, in cooperation with Liakhovsky, have selected excerpts illuminating the Soviet military occupation of Kabul, including the dramatic and in some cases bloody operations that led to the elimination of Amin and some of his defenders, at a substantial cost to the Soviet military invaders. In particular, excerpts have been translated from *The Tragedy and Valor of Afghanistan* (2004). As this Working Paper aims merely to present an illustrative sampling of Liakhovsky's work, full citations are not provided, and scholars wishing to obtain fuller documentation or analysis may consult the original Russian-language works, or contact the author himself at [alya46@mail.ru](mailto:alya46@mail.ru). The translations have been made by Gary Goldberg and Artemy Kalinovsky.

- James G. Hershberg (George Washington University)
- Svetlana Savranskaya (National Security Archive)

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<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., Raymond L. Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, rev. ed., 1994); Odd Arne Westad, "Prelude to Invasion: The Soviet Union and the Afghan Communists," *International History Review* 16:1 (February 1994), pp. 49-69; Odd Arne Westad, "The Situation in 'A': New Russian Evidence on the Soviet Intervention in Afghanistan" (and accompanying translated Soviet and East German archival documents) *CWIHP Bulletin* 8-9 (Winter 1996/1997), pp. 128-132, 133-184; "New Evidence on the War in Afghanistan" (articles and translated documents), *CWIHP Bulletin* 14-15 (Winter 2003-Spring 2004), pp. 139-271; Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005), esp chap. 8; and on the intelligence aspects, Vasilyi Miktrokhin, *The KGB in Afghanistan*, CWIHP Working Paper no. 40 (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center, February 2002).

## "Inside the Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan and the Seizure of Kabul, December 1979"

After Hafizullah Amin came to power in mid-September 1979 by overthrowing his rival Taraki, the situation in the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (DRA) quickly worsened. The regime quickly lost all authority. The alarming processes in the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) and government bureaucracy and the growth of discontent among the popular masses were actively inflamed by external forces hostile to the PDPA regime. The US, Pakistan, and several Arab countries rapidly increased military aid to the opposition movement. A concentration of Pakistani army subunits and military maneuvers was periodically noted on the DRA's southern borders. With military and moral support from abroad by the end of 1979 the rebels had managed to raise the strength of their irregular formations to 40,000 men and launch combat operations in 16 of the (then) 27 provinces. They controlled Laghman, Kunar, Paktia, and Paktika completely.

They held up to 90 percent of the territory and all the main lines of communications in the provinces of Jowzjan, Takhar, Badakhshan, Logar, Ghowr, Kapisa, Ghazni, Zabol, Helmand, Farah, Herat, and Badghis. Garrisons of government troops were located in provincial capitals and therefore they were included the PDPA's zone of control. But the government completely controlled the situation in only three provinces: Kabul, Kunduz, and Baghlan. In sum, a threatening situation had developed for the PDPA. Amin took energetic steps to stabilize it, mainly by force.

In our internal and partly in foreign publications all the failures and mistakes of the PDPA are associated with Amin and the armed actions of the rural population against the new regime are connected with the actions of outside forces and the opposition. There is some truth here, of course, but the main thing is that it led to a tragic development of events, to a civil war – the adventurist actions of the PDPA in the countryside and the lost battle for the peasant masses. The history of the *Basmachi* movement in the Soviet Central Asian republics is evidence: mistakes, even criminal actions, of several local Soviet bodies drove support of the Muslim population to the *Basmachi* since economic and social reforms capable of attracting peasants to the side of Soviet power had not been carried out by that time. The local leadership's errors did not give birth to the *Basmachi* but rather strengthened it at the expense of people who bore a grudge against the new regime. They facilitated the expansion of the social base of the counterrevolutionary movement and the growth of its popular basis. In Afghanistan the same causes and tendencies resurfaced.

The Soviet leadership had artificially formed the opinion that Amin would soon be overthrown. It was presumed that the ascent of the opposition to power was practically inevitable within a few months. Information about Amin's contacts with US representatives emerged. Mutinies began in the army, instigated by "the Four". Meanwhile Amin hardened his policy toward the opposition and the Khalqis, the supporters of his predecessor, Taraki, even more. Manipulating socialist slogans and covering himself with democratic phraseology, Amin pursued the establishment of a dictatorial regime and unleashed a wide-scale campaign of terror and repression in the country incompatible with the PDPA's declared goals. He adopted a policy of turning the Party into an appendage of his dictatorship.

First Amin liquidated everyone who had ever spoken against him or expressed even the slightest disagreement, then those who enjoyed authority in the Party and could become his competitors. Soon representatives of several "non-Amin" groups and factions were subjected to repression. In reality a hunt occurred not just for Parchamists (wing of the PDPA who had opposed Taraki and Amin–ed.) but for some Khalqis, who were divided into "Aminists" and "Tarakists."

Special attention was devoted to the army. Purges were conducted in the army every month Amin was in power. The most active, the most independent thinking, the most ardent Khalqis who could not accept Amin were eliminated. To fill the shortage of young officers a three-month commanders' training course was organized for which Pushtuns devoted to Amin were selected. At the end of the course they received the rank of lieutenant and were sent to military units. They customarily received the name "Amin's fledglings."

In September 1979 Amin published a partial list of those who had been executed: there were 12,000 names on it. According to some estimates the numbers of those killed by the autumn of 1979 reached 50,000 or even more.

Murders of people who were in no way guilty reached a massive scale, which caused a sharp reduction of the social base of the regime and increased the stream of refugees to Iran and Pakistan (expanding the social base of the opposition). Many eminent members of the Party and government who were Khalqis and also the main mass of the



Parchamists were forced to hide or emigrate. Personnel appointments started to be made on the basis of personal loyalty to Amin. The recommendations of Soviet officials to stop such acts were ignored. What is more, the new PDPA general secretary tried to shift the responsibility for his illegal acts onto the Soviet side, declaring that these steps were supposedly undertaken on the recommendation of Soviet leaders. It is possible that by this Amin wanted to “obligate” his benefactors even more but he had crossed the permissible limit.

The CPSU CC repeatedly appealed to the Afghan leadership, trying to stop the repressions and calling for the rule of law. Having studied the tactics of Soviet leaders well, Amin gave assurances about the cessation of lawlessness and hypocritically stressed his friendly attitude toward the USSR. In the process he justified his actions by our own postulate – everything is moral which benefits the Revolution. Amin said more than once: “We have ten thousand feudal lords. We eliminated them and the problem was solved. The Afghans recognize only force.” And he was as good as his word.

The US charge d’affaires reported to the State Department:

We have been observing for 18 months how this Marxist party (the PDPA) has been destroying itself...By way of illustration: if you take the list of ministers who were confirmed in April 1978 there have been 25 changes among them. The number of changes among deputy ministers is even greater – 34. One purge follows another and it is difficult to imagine how the regime manages to survive. Part of the answer to this question is, of course, the brutal repression of the identified opposition. The number of murdered political prisoners has evidently reached 6,000 but the number of those held in political prisons and who have been imprisoned in them is possibly four times this number...<sup>2</sup>

However, in spite of brutal measures the zone controlled by the PDPA regime did not increase and even shrank. At this time more than 80 percent of Afghan territory where ten million people lived was outside the control of central authority, which held the cities and largest population centers. The opposition controlled practically all rural areas and to some degree major road and transport routes. As a result, when the authorities’ reforms were carried out they considered neither the specific nature of the “tribal zones” nor their semi-autonomous status and in a number of places the Pushtun tribes revolted. The Mohammedzai, Barakzai, Alkazai, and the Jadran tribes, traditionally hostile to central authority, took an irreconcilable position toward the PDPA regime. Several influential people in the tribes who were not very religious saw an opportunity in the weakening of central authority to strengthen their positions among their fellow tribesmen, settle accounts with other tribes, and, finally, “line their pockets” with shipments of weapons, goods, and narcotics.

Amin warned a number of tribal authorities about responsibilities, having announced strict measures of punishment for resistance to the authorities from fines to the death penalty. But when this did not produce an effect he ordered that regular troops and air strikes be used against rebellious tribes; this caused part of the tribes to cross over to Pakistani territory, which contributed to outbreak of the refugee problem. In response to criticism from Soviet advisers as to how he could bomb entire tribes, he quietly replied, “You don’t know our people! If any tribe takes up arms it will not lay them down. The only solution is to destroy them all, from big to small! Such are our traditions.”

Several days after Taraki’s murder General Ivan Pavlovskiy called Soviet Defense Minister Dimitri Ustinov and reported that his group had completed their assignments. The defense minister was interested in how the situation in Afghanistan was developing after Amin came to power. Pavlovskiy characterized the situation in the army as stable and noted that with suitable work its fighting effectiveness could be raised to a level allowing it to deal with the opposition. In response Ustinov told Pavlovskiy he had not analyzed it at all – comrades Yurii Andropov, the KGB chairman, and Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko had other information. When General Pavlovskiy asked permission to return to Moscow Ustinov thought for a long time and then said, “Return on 3 November.”

On 3 November the USSR Ambassador in Kabul, Aleksandr Puzanov, informed Amin about the Soviet leadership’s readiness to receive him in Moscow and about its “satisfaction with the steps taken by the Afghan leadership in the area of Party and nation building.” Before Puzanov left he visited Amin and again expressed satisfaction with DRA.

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<sup>2</sup> Spetsial’nyy byulleten’ Instituta Vostokovedeniya AN SSSR [Special Bulletin of the USSR Academy of Science Institute of Oriental Studies] No 5, pp. 135-136. “Nauka”, 1986.

The Soviet leadership decided to exploit a favorable situation, counting on the fact that the Americans were most concerned on how to solve the problems in Iran where Ayatollah Khomeini's Islamic revolution had overthrown the Shah and, on November 4, the US embassy in Tehran was seized and would not stand in the way of our actions in Afghanistan. The idea appeared of creating conditions to remove Amin and replacing him with a more loyal figure since he was not reliable and was capable at any moment of realigning himself toward the West. This is what was feared most of all – the changes in policy in Egypt, Chile, and Somalia in an anti-Soviet direction were still fresh in Moscow's mind...And here again "evidence" "surfaced" about his purported association with the CIA; that is, every basis was present for doubt.

At a symposium organized by the Norwegian Nobel Institute in September 1995, in reply to my question, "Was Hafizullah Amin an agent of the CIA?" former CIA director Stansfield Turner replied: "I have heard many times about Amin's ties with the CIA and the US. I ought to say that they ascribe more things to us than we were able to do. Afghanistan was not a first priority problem for us; we had many more other problems. And even today we have limited interest in it."

LYAKHOVSKY: "...As Valentin Ivanovich [Varennikov] has just said, our leadership found itself faced with a question [after Amin overthrew Taraki in September 1979]: what to do now? It was decide[d] to leave it as it was for the time being—to accept the facts, even though, as I have said, they did not trust Amin. They did not trust him because there were reports that he was a CIA agent. I am not going to prove or disprove it, because there are some secondary facts that speak for it, and some that speak against it. For instance, in 1977, when Khalq and Parcham were getting united—even before the April [1978] revolution—Amin was not elected to the Politburo because everyone opposed him. [He] was accused of cooperating with the CIA during his study in the United States. He admitted that he was 'playing' with the CIA because he needed money to continue his studies; but he said it was nothing serious, 'just playing.' There is a transcript of a meeting with Ulyanovsky, where he talks about this[.] Karen Nersesovich [Brutents] has this document.

...After Amin had killed Taraki, the attitude of our leadership to him changed. Our leadership was afraid that Amin might be cooperating with the CIA, and, observing his turn to the Americans and the Pakistanis, was worried that he might abandon us. And at the same time Amin continued his ministry of Socialist slogans. So we were worried that we might find ourselves in a situation when we would be in Afghanistan, and the Afghan leader would be pro-American, but still using Socialist rhetoric. In other words, he would be disguised as a socialist; but he would not be 'our man.'"

Later, Turner responded:

"I have heard many descriptions of possible relationships between Amin and the CIA, and of the United States and its designs on Afghanistan. I would like to start with a view that Leonid [Shebarshin] and I share: that people in our business are often accused of doing all kinds of things we never have the capability of doing. And I would refer to the comment Gary [Sick] made earlier that when the Shah approached us to do something undercover with respect to Afghanistan, we turned our back on that. I would suggest to you that while this conference is on Afghanistan, if you put it in the context of 1978 and early 1979. Afghanistan was not very high on the American foreign policy agenda. We are focusing on it entirely here. We had lots of other things that were of much greater concern to us..."

As far as the CIA and it[s] relations with Amin are concerned, I would ask you to step back and recognize that starting in 1976-1975, actually—covert actions—undercover activities like this—were in bad repute in the United States—as was the CIA—as a result of the Church committee hearings, which roundly criticized past activities of the CIA. As far back as 1974, our Congress had passed a law saying that any time we were going to undertake one of these dirty tricks or covert action campaigns, the President must approve it and must inform the Congress. When I got there in 1977, there was no strong inclination on the part of the Carter administration to exercise covert activities. But, interestingly...the CIA itself was running very scared having had this considerable criticism, and was reluctant, even in the case of Afghanistan after the invasion, to get involved in a major covert activity that might backfire and lead to another Church Committee investigation, and another series of criticisms of the CIA..."

Marshall Shulman, formerly an advisor on Soviet affairs to Secretary of State Cyrus R. Vance, added:

“Now, a few words on the question of Amin and whether or not he was an American agent. It seems to me, to put the issue in those terms, is a little too black and white. What seems to me more plausible—and this is especially strengthened by my reading of the excerpt from the book by Diego Cordovez and Selig Harrison [*Out of Afghanistan*] that Malcolm [Byrne] included in the readings, was that, throughout that period, Amin seemed to be searching for other orientations. It was quite possible that he was seeking some role more independent of the Soviet Union, either through the Pakistanis, because of that abortive invitation to Zia to come to Kabul, or through his contacts with the Americans. This did not necessarily mean he was an *agent*; but it may be that in his maneuvering he was seeking a more independent role for himself. It is clear that this could have been misinterpreted from Moscow. It could also have represented a danger to Moscow. But the issue should not be limited to the question of whether he [was] or was not formally an American agent. I think the issue is more complex than that.”<sup>3</sup>

On General Pavlovskiy’s return to Moscow Defense Minister Ustinov sent a note to the CPSU CC about the results of his work in the DRA.

Top Secret<sup>4</sup>

CC CPSU

On the Results of the Mission of the USSR Deputy Defense Minister, General of the Army I. G. Pavlovskiy, in the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan

In accordance with the CPSU CC's Decree No. P163/62 of 15 August 1979, USSR Deputy Defense Minister, General of the Army I. G. Pavlovskiy, and a group of generals and officers were in the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan from 17 August to 22 October with the aim of reviewing the state of the People's Armed Forces of Afghanistan and the organization and methods of their combat operations against the rebels; providing on-site assistance to the Afghan commanders in dealing with these questions; and preparing recommendations for the further strengthening of the combat capabilities of the People's Armed Forces of Afghanistan.

The work of Cde. I. G. Pavlovskiy's group in providing assistance to the Afghan military command was carried out in strict accordance with the CPSU CC's decision and with instructions issued by the USSR Minister of Defense, taking account of the military-political situation in the country and also the political and organizational measures implemented within the Afghan army by the DRA leadership.

On all matters that they studied, recommendations were devised and transmitted personally by Com. I. G. Pavlovskiy to H. Amin, offering them as proposals for the further strengthening of the Afghan armed forces.

The provision of comprehensive practical assistance by our side to the People's Armed Forces of Afghanistan enabled them to make a transition between August and October. Rather than continuing to rely on a passive defense and faltering operations by small units against the rebels, they were able to launch coordinated and active operations by larger groupings. This allowed them to gain the initiative in combat and to destroy the most dangerous forces of counterrevolution in the provinces of Paktia, Ghazni, Parwan, Bamiyan, and several other areas.

To prepare the troops for these actions, tactical exercises with live fire were held, and combat operations were conducted to resolve specific tasks. Soviet generals and officers provided direct assistance in working out the plans for operations and in carrying them out. This experience in

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<sup>3</sup> See Nobel Symposium 95: *The Intervention in Afghanistan and the Fall of Détente*, Lysebu, September 17-20, 1995, transcribed by Svetlana Savranskaya, edited by David A. Welch and Odd Arne Westad (Oslo: The Norwegian Nobel Institute, 1996), pp. 80-81, 101-102, 113-114. [Editor’s note: From the transcripts of that conference, the following exchange occurred regarding the question of whether or not Amin was a CIA agent.

<sup>4</sup> APRF, f. 3, op. 82, d. 173, s. 120-122; translated by Mark Kramer; first publication in Russian in *Novaya i Noveishaya Istoriya* 3 (May-June) 1996, pp. 91-99 (document on 97-98), intro, by G.N. Sevastionov. [Translator’s note: Published in *CWIHP Bulletin* 8-9, p. 158 and CWIHP’s Afghanistan Dossier p.53]

preparing and conducting operations taught the Afghan commanders, staffs, and political organs the methods and means of organization for undertaking active combat operations in mountainous regions. Help was provided to the Main Political Directorate in organizing party-political work among the troops according to the different categories of servicemen, so that they could be mobilized for the active pursuit of combat objectives. Taking account of the combat operations, drafts were also prepared of documents providing basic guidelines for the organization of combat and operational preparations.

Despite these efforts to increase the combat capability of the People's Armed Forces of Afghanistan, a number of questions are still unresolved.

Military regulations that were codified with help from Soviet advisers have not been instilled in the People's Armed Forces, and they have no impact on the practical life of the troops. The commanders, staffs, political organs, and party organizations do not always coordinate their work in resolving tasks among the troops. Staffs at all levels, including the General Staff, have still not become a central, directing organ in the daily life of large and small units and in the troops' combat activity.

Political work in the Afghan army, especially with the officer corps, is still not conducted concretely or effectively enough. The combat morale and fighting elan of the troops, the state of military discipline, and the army's willingness to act are still low.

During the final conversation with H. Amin, M. Yakub, and M. Ekbal, Cde. I. G. Pavlovskiy once again directed their attention to the unresolved problems and our recommendations for solving them. At the end of the discussion, H. Amin said: "We are taking all measures to ensure that your recommendations are fulfilled, and we will always work in coordination with Soviet advisers and specialists. Our friendship is unwavering." Then he expressed the hope that Soviet military advisers would be assigned to every battalion of the Afghan armed forces. In conclusion, H. Amin thanked the delegation for providing help and requested that they transmit warm greetings and personal thanks to Comrade L.I. Brezhnev, and also to Cdes. A.N. Kosygin, D.F. Ustinov, Yu.V. Andropov, and A. A. Gromyko, as well as all the other leaders of the CPSU and the Soviet government.

Overall, the group of generals and officers headed by the USSR Deputy Defense Minister, Army-General I. G. Pavlovskiy, fulfilled the tasks assigned to them.

Reported for informational purposes.  
5 November 1979  
No. 318/3/00945

D. Ustinov

Pavlovskiy recalls:

Having flown into Moscow on 3 November I called the Minister right away and reported my arrival and asked to be received but he said that he would call me. However he did not call for about two weeks. Even during the parade on Red Square on 7 November he just looked at me, extended his hand, and said nothing.<sup>5</sup>

When Ustinov called me to his office I reported to him about the work done in Afghanistan, but he said: "You did not analyze it there at all. Why did you go visit Amin? [You] needed to deal with Karmal". I replied to the Minister that Karmal wasn't in Kabul; at that time he was still in Czechoslovakia. Ustinov said nothing in reply but stopped summoning me or calling me. I understood that I had fallen into disfavor and tried to clarify the situation at Chief of the General

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<sup>5</sup> [Translator's note: At these parades Ustinov, as a Politburo member and the official receiving the salute of the troops passing in review, stood on the top of the Lenin Mausoleum. Pavlovskiy would have been standing on a lower level of the Mausoleum to the side with the other commanders-in-chief of the branches of the armed forces.]

Staff Nikolay Vasil'yevich Ogarkov's, but he told me that the Minister was not consulting him and was talking only with Sergey Fedorovich Akhromeyev.

### **New Faces in Afghanistan**

Soviet authorities soon "recommended" that Ambassador Puzanov leave Afghanistan. He was recalled to Moscow on the instructions of Foreign Minister Gromyko "in connection with his numerous requests." A bit later Amin said openly that "the Soviet ambassador supported the opposition and harmed me." And actually it was he who had harbored the "Four" in the embassy and then provided for them to be sent to the Soviet Union.

On 8 November the First Secretary of the Tatar Oblast [Party] Committee Fikryat Tabeyev was appointed the new ambassador to the DRA. But no one from the Soviet leadership called Puzanov, who had returned to the USSR on 21 November, and no one was interested in his opinion although the man had spent more than seven years in this country and had analyzed the situation not at all badly. "Upstairs" there, as they say, "they knew a few things themselves" – they assessed the ambassador's work as a failure. That being the case, there was nothing to ask him.

Somewhat later a similar fate befell the Chief Military Adviser to the DRA General Lev Gorelov who was recalled by Ustinov. A Deputy Commanding General of the Transbaykal Military District, General-Colonel Sultan Magometov, became the Chief Military Adviser to the DRA. The chief of the group of advisers to the MVD General Nikolay Veselkov was replaced by Aleksandr Kosogorskiy at Amin's demand. Thus at the most critical moment, before the deployment of troops, new people appeared in Afghanistan who got there, as they say, "right off the boat and into the party."

Obviously, the CPSU CC was not satisfied with the information received from Pavlovskiy. On 22 November the First Deputy USSR Minister of Internal Affairs, Lieut.-Gen. Paputin, flew to Kabul, setting forth his estimate of the situation in Afghanistan and unnecessarily dramatizing the situation. In his report Paputin noted that the situation was close to critical; everything was collapsing, and the opposition would come to power any day now... This report evoked a sharply negative reaction from the adviser to the Chief of the Main Political Directorate of the DRA Armed Forces, Maj.-Gen. Vasiliy Zaplatin. Paputin committed suicide on 28 December 1979 after the deployment of Soviet troops in Afghanistan. The newspaper "Pravda" published only his obituary only on 4 January 1980 without indicating the cause of death. It is hard to say what circumstances forced him to take such a serious step but stories have been floated about its connection with events in Afghanistan.

The issue was placed point blank before the General Staff of the Armed Forces, the Foreign Ministry, the KGB, and everyone who dealt with foreign policy questions: what should be tried? They feverishly searched for ways to solve the problem. They made forecasts of the progress of the situation in Afghanistan and developed various alternatives of actions and recommendations. In the process they tried to consider all the factors. Of special concern was the possibility of the Amin regime's turn in an anti-Soviet direction. At the same time, preparations were being made through KGB channels for a move to remove Amin from power using this agency's resources.

On 26 November the new Soviet ambassador Tabeyev, arrived in Kabul and immediately became caught up in the maelstrom of events.

The Soviet leadership by then had formed an opinion about Amin's removal from power. This conclusion could be made on the basis of the assessments described in the CPSU CC note dated 29 November published below.

Top Secret<sup>6</sup>

SPECIAL FOLDER

to the CC CPSU

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<sup>6</sup> APRF, f. 3, op. 82, d. 173, s. 118-127. As cited in A. A. Lyakhovskiy, *The Tragedy and Valor of the Afghani* (Moscow: GPI "Iskon", 1995), p. 102. [Translator's note: The documents' true date is 29 October 1979. Passages in small types were published in *CWHIP Bulletin* 8-9, pp. 157-58 and *CWHIP's Afghanistan Dossier* pp. 52-53. Points 2, 7, and 10 were added by Lyakhovskiy's *Plamya Afgana* ("Flame of the Afghanistan veteran") [Iskon, Moscow, 1999].

The situation in Afghanistan following the events of September 13-16 of this year, as the result of which Taraki was removed from power and then physically destroyed, remains extremely complicated.

In the efforts to strengthen Amin in power, along with such superficial gestures like the beginning of the reworking of the draft of the constitution and the liberation of some of the people who had been arrested earlier, in fact the scale of repressions in the Party, army, state apparatus and civic organizations has widened. He is clearly pursuing the removal from power of practically all eminent figures of the Party and government whom he views as his real or potential enemies.

According to information which we have, at the present time the execution of a group of Politburo members (Zeray, Misak, Panjshiri) who are subject to fictitious accusations of "anti-Party and counter-revolutionary activity," is planned. At the plenum of the CC PDPA which took place recently, Amin introduced into the ruling organs of the Party people who are more devoted to him, including a number of his relatives.

These actions of Amin led to a further aggravation of the split in the PDPA, the liquidation of the healthy nucleus in the Party, and the weakening of its influence on the social and political life of the country. They are even distracting the leaders of the country from solving the urgent problem of building a new society and from the fight against the internal counterrevolution. Moreover, although at the present time the military situation in Afghanistan has somewhat stabilized, there are no grounds to think that the rebels have rejected attempts at overthrowing the government by force.

Amin's actions are provoking growing unrest among progressive forces. If earlier the members of the "Parcham" faction spoke against him, now the supporters of the "Khalq" faction and individual representatives of the government bureaucracy, the army, intelligentsia, and youth have also joined them. This has generated mistrust on the part of Amin, who is looking for way to step up repression, which will narrow the social base of the regime to an even greater degree. A considerable part of the population of the country is taking a watchful and expectant position in regard to the new leadership and the measures they are taking. This also refers to the sentiments of army personnel.

Incoming warnings about the organization of contacts by Amin with representatives of the right-wing Muslim opposition and the leaders of tribes hostile to the government are suspicious. In the course of [these contacts] he displays a readiness to settle with them about the cessation of armed combat against the present government under "compromise" conditions, which are actually to the detriment of the progressive development of the country.

Recently there have been noted signs of the fact that the new leadership of Afghanistan intends to conduct a more "balanced policy" in relation to the Western powers. It is known, in particular, that representatives of the USA, on the basis of their contacts with the Afghans, are coming to a conclusion about the possibility of a change in the political line of Afghanistan in a direction which is pleasing to Washington.

Amin's conduct in the area of relations with the USSR ever more distinctly exposes his insincerity and duplicity. In words he and those closest to him are in favor of a further expansion of collaboration with the Soviet Union in various fields, but in fact they permit actions which run counter to the interests of this collaboration. Outwardly agreeing with the recommendations of Soviet representatives, including about the issue of preserving unity in the PDPA and DRA leadership, and declaring readiness to strengthen friendship with the USSR, in practice Amin does not only not take steps to put a stop to anti-Soviet sentiments but he himself actually encourages such sentiments. In particular, at his initiative a story is being spread about the supposed involvement of Soviet representatives in "making an attempt" on him during the 13-16 September events. Amin and his closest circle do not stop at slanderous inventions about the participation of Soviet representatives in repressive actions being conducted in Afghanistan.

Thus in the person of Amin we have to deal with a power-hungry leader who is distinguished by brutality and treachery. In conditions of organizational weakness of the PDPA and the ideological immaturity [*nezakalennost'*] of its members the danger is not precluded that, thanks to the preservation of his personal power, Amin might change the political orientation of the regime.

At the same time, judging from everything, Amin understands that the domestic and foreign difficulties of advancing the Afghan revolution, the geographic factor, and the dependence of Afghanistan in providing for the daily requirements of the army and the economy, dictates an objective interest of the Afghan leadership in maintaining and developing comprehensive Afghan-Soviet relations. Amin's understanding of the fact that at this stage he cannot do without Soviet support and aid will give us the capability to exercise a certain restraining influence on him.

In the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan and in the Afghan army healthy forces have been preserved who express serious concern about the developing situation in the country, which could lead to a loss of the gains of the April 1978 Revolution. However these forces are disunited and are essentially in an illegal position.

Taking account of this and starting from the necessity of doing everything possible not to allow the victory of counter-revolution in Afghanistan or the political reorientation of H. Amin towards the West, it is considered expedient to hew to the following line:

1. Continue to work actively with Amin and overall with the current leadership of the PDPA and the DRA, not giving Amin grounds to believe that we don't trust him and don't wish to deal with him. Use the contacts with Amin to assert appropriate influence and simultaneously to expose further his true intentions.

2. Proceeding from our common policy regarding Amin at this stage and considering his repeatedly expressed desire to make an official or working visit to Moscow to meet with L. I. Brezhnev and other Soviet leaders we ought to give him a favorable reply in principle without, however, giving specific times for his visit right now.

3. Constantly direct Amin's attention to the need to maintain collective leadership, the norms of party life and law and order, and the inadmissibility of continuing unjustified repressions of Party, military, and other personnel.

4. Through the channels of all Soviet institutions in Afghanistan intensify the study of the situation in the country and also of the leading figures of the Party and government apparatus and the command staff of the army and security agencies. In conversations with people who are well-disposed toward the USSR and concerned for the fate of the April Revolution, do not create the impression that we approve of everything that is going on right now in Afghanistan and do not put such people off. At the same time avoid open criticism of one or another actions of the present Afghan leadership in order not to give Amin and his supporters grounds to accuse us of interference in [their] internal affairs.

5. Military aid is to be given to Afghanistan in limited quantities right now. Considering the real situation in the country and the need for future combat operations to be waged against the rebels, continue deliveries of small arms, spare parts, and the minimally necessary amount of ammunition and auxiliary military equipment. Consider the request of the Afghan leadership for delivery of light small arms for the DRA people's militia favorably. Hold off for now on deliveries of heavy weapons and military equipment, especially as there is no real need for them right now, but it is inadvisable to create excess reserves of such weapons and ammunition in Afghanistan.

6. The Soviet subunits located in Afghanistan (communications centers, the parachute battalion, the fixed-wing and helicopter transport squadrons) and also the Soviet institutions' security detachment are to continue to perform the assigned missions.

7. In the area of economic cooperation we should adhere to a policy of fulfilling current obligations according to signed agreements. However we should approach all new requests coming from Amin to give economic and financial aid, including delivery of petroleum products, food, and industrial goods, very cautiously and decide these questions considering our capabilities and the actual needs of the Afghan side, not allowing them to create long-term reserves at our expense.

8. Our advisers located in Afghanistan on behalf of the Ministry of Defense, KGB, and other Soviet ministries and agencies should remain there and carry out the missions assigned to them earlier. However, taking into account that Amin insistently pursues the point of “equal responsibility” of Afghan officials and Soviet representatives for the work of the corresponding Afghan agencies, the participation of Soviet representatives and advisers in measures of the Afghan side should be precluded which could cast a shadow on the Soviet Union.

Requests of the Afghan side to send additional Soviet advisers of one or another specialty should be carefully weighed and be granted only in those cases when this would correspond with our interests.

9. Continue the practice of mutual consultations and exchanges of opinions with Amin and other DRA representatives on questions of foreign policy with the idea of explaining our position on specific issues and also revealing the intentions of the Afghan side in foreign affairs. In necessary cases and in an appropriate form let Amin know of our disapproving attitude of his playing up to the West.

At the same time, though diplomatic and also through special channels, continue to take measures against the interference of other countries, particularly neighboring [countries], in its internal affairs.

10. In the Soviet press they should limit themselves mainly to reports of a factual nature about what is going on in Afghanistan, describing only favorably the measures of the Afghan government which facilitate a deepening of Soviet-Afghan cooperation, consolidate the gains of the April Revolution, and develop the DRA along the path of progressive socioeconomic reforms.

11. The Soviet Embassy in Kabul, the USSR Committee for State Security [KGB], the Ministry of Defense, and the CPSU CC International Department are to study the policy and practical activities of H. Amin and his circle regarding Afghan internationalists, patriots, and also personnel who have undergone training in the Soviet Union and socialist countries; the reactionary Muslim clergy and tribal leaders; and the foreign policy ties of Afghanistan with the West, particularly with the US...

Upon the availability of facts bearing witness to the beginning of a turn by H. Amin in an anti-Soviet direction, introduce supplemental proposals about measures from our side.

A draft decree is attached.

We request this be considered.

A. Gromyko (MID), Yu. Andropov (KGB), D. Ustinov (MO) , B. Ponomarev (CC CPSU)

29 November 1979

This document was signed by Gromyko, KGB Chairman Yuriy Andropov, Ustinov, and CC CPSU International Department head Boris Ponomarev. Such a combination was not accidental. In fact in the 1970s, in connection with Leonid Brezhnev’s illness, such a government power structure was formed when these people dealt with all foreign policy problems at the highest level. They prepared proposals and submitted them for the



consideration of the CC CPSU Politburo. In addition, all these people were members of the CC CPSU Politburo Commission on Afghanistan.

What was the mechanism of operation? Usually the rough drafts were made by representatives of these four ministries who prepared proposals for their ministers. For secondary issues no meetings were held. If the problem was important then Gromyko, Andropov, Ustinov, and Ponomarev met together, inviting everyone who was attending to [*ispolnyal*] the materials, and worked out a common policy. When issues of special importance were decided, as a rule the Chief of the General Staff (Nikolay Ogarkov or his [first] deputy Sergey Akhromeyev), deputies to the Minister of Foreign Affairs (for example, Georgiy Korniyenko) or of the KGB Chairman (let's say, Vladimir Kryuchkov), were present, reporting the proposals of the corresponding ministries and agencies.

The leaders themselves then exchanged opinions and gave instructions, – such as changes in the documents which had been prepared. Then, depending on the substance and the importance of the problem, they were signed in turn and were sent to the CC Secretariat in the form of a CC CPSU note. The proposals were then examined at a CC CPSU Politburo meeting and the final decisions concerning them were made. That's exactly how the decision to deploy troops in Afghanistan was done, although there were several peculiarities. The system being used, it would seem, would maximally consider the opinions of all parties and rely on the arguments and suggestions of various agencies. However, the analytic critiques and conclusions submitted by the corresponding agencies often turned out to be useless. The problem was that many leaders, including CC CPSU Politburo members, having their own views regarding the solution of one or another problem, always tried to “see which way the wind was blowing” by trying to find out Brezhnev's opinion ahead of time, tailoring their opinions to him, and often ignoring the recommendations of analysts and experts. Such a flawed practice led to fatal mistakes.

At the beginning of December 1979, Andropov wrote a letter to Brezhnev in which he assessed the situation in the DRA as critical, proposing steps to defend Soviet interests. Obviously, his letter gave a new impetus to the critical analysis of the issue of the need for the deployment of troops in Afghanistan.<sup>7</sup>

The note said, in part, that after Amin's military coup in September and the killing of Taraki the situation in Afghanistan had taken a turn undesirable for the USSR. A difficult situation had developed in the party, the army, and the government apparatus, since they had essentially been destroyed through mass repressions carried out by Amin. At the same time troubling information had started to emerge regarding his secret activities, giving evidence that a political turn to the west was possible. Amin's alleged contacts with an American agent, kept secret from Soviet representatives, were particularly worrisome, as were his promises to Pushtun tribal leaders to change the one-sided political orientation toward the USSR and to conduct “neutral politics” as well as closed meetings where attacks on Soviet policy and our officials, advisers, and specialists took place. According to Andropov the situation unfolding in Afghanistan created the danger of losing the gains of the April revolution within the borders of the country and a threat to the Soviet position in the DRA. It was also noted that the mood among the population was growing noticeably anti-Soviet and that at the moment there was no guarantee that Amin would not take steps toward the West in his aspiration to hold on to personal power. The note mentioned that a group of Afghan communists living abroad had come into contact with a USSR KGB representative. Through this contact Babrak Karmal and Assadula Sarvari informed the KGB that they had developed a plan to counteract Amin, create a new party and government organs. Amin, however, took preventive measures, which included the mass arrest of “suspected individuals” (300 people) many of whom were shot. Under these circumstances Karmal and Sarvari raised the question of possible Soviet aid, including military assistance. Andropov found it expedient to conduct the operation, the goal of which was to provide such aid, by using the forces and resources Soviet of the Defense Ministry and the KGB already in the country. In his view, this was enough for a successful operation. Nevertheless, as a precautionary measure against any unforeseen complications, he proposed creating a military group near the Afghan border. In the event of an escalation of military forces this group could settle certain issues and actively enter battle against armed bands. In Andropov's opinion, conducting such an operation would facilitate the settling of all questions regarding the defense of the April revolution, the establishment of Leninist principals in the party and the government leadership of the DRA, and defending Soviet interests in that country.

It seems that the note gave a new impulse for considering the introduction of Soviet troops on Afghan territory. It was considered at a meeting of the CC CPSU Politburo and corresponding decisions were taken. According to certain information, Ustinov told Andropov in the library, “You're quite the adventurer, Yura.”

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<sup>7</sup> For the text, see CWIHP Bulletin 8/9, pg. 57.

It needs to be said that the strategic situation in this region at the end of the 1970s had not developed in the Soviet Union's favor. The March 1979 peace treaty between Israel and Egypt, the electoral defeat of Indian Prime Minister Gandhi, the military coup in Iraq, the Islamic Revolution in Iran, the resignation of the center-left Ecevit government in Turkey... All this considerably weakened Soviet positions in the Near and Middle East. The possibility of losing an Afghanistan "which had started on the socialist path of development" was taken very badly. They tried to prevent such a turn of events.

In the assessments of Soviet analysts, events in the DRA had become part of a world revolutionary process. It was recommended that the USSR leadership not allow the export of counterrevolution and help the healthy forces of Afghanistan defend their revolutionary gains. Such a position harmonized with the moods of the Soviet leaders. The possibility of having a reliable ally on their southern borders tied to the Soviet Union by a common ideology and interests seemed too tempting.

At that time the leader of the "Parcham" wing, Karmal, was assuring Soviet leaders that he enjoyed the support of a significant part of Afghan Party members and the population (as became clear later there was no support or it was insignificant), who were only waiting for him to show up in Afghanistan in order to act against Amin. Karmal claimed that he would be able to retain power in the country. It was proposed to him that he head the struggle to overthrow the Amin regime. He agreed and right away became a ward [*opeka*] of the KGB. Karmal promised complete loyalty and obedience... The truth ought to be noted that similar proposals were made to Khalqis (Zeray, Panjshiri, Misak), but they refused.

Meanwhile ever newer reports arrived from Kabul with a description of requests from H. Amin for the deployment of Soviet troops to the DRA. Not having received a favorable decision of the Soviet leadership for the deployment of troops to Kabul the CC PDPA General Secretary began to invite them into at least the northern provinces bordering the Soviet Union. He also did not oppose the deployment of just USSR MVD internal troops. In particular, having invited in Chief Military Adviser Magometov, on 2 December Amin declared that the rebels in Badakhshan were getting active aid from China and Pakistan and therefore he would request the Soviet government send one reinforced regiment to this province for a short time to help normalize the situation.

#### **REPORT FROM KABUL**

(Secret)  
(Urgent)

... On 2 December 1979 H. Amin called in the Chief Military Adviser [Magometrov] and announced that in conditions where the rebels in Badakhshan are getting active support from China and Pakistan and we have no opportunity to withdraw troops from the areas of combat operations I request the Soviet government send one reinforced regiment to this province for a short time to help normalize the situation.

At the conclusion of the conversation Cde. Amin requested that [I] transmit his request to the USSR Minister of Defense and said that he was ready to turn to L. I. Brezhnev about this issue...

2.12.79

Magometov

The next day Amin again told Magometov about the desirability of sending subunits of Soviet Internal Troops capable of keeping order in the northern regions together with the DRA people's militia.

#### **REPORT FROM KABUL**

(Secret)  
(Urgent)

...On 3 December there was a meeting with H. Amin. During the conversation H. Amin said: "We intend to send part of the personnel and weapons of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> divisions (from Mazari-Sharif and Baghlan) to form people's militia subunits. In this case, instead of the of regular Soviet troops into the DRA, it is better to send Soviet militia subunits which together with our people's militia could ensure and restore order in the northern regions of the DRA."

4.12.1979

Magometov

[Translator's note: The above telegrams are also found in Lyakhovskiy's "Tragediya i Doblest' Afgana", previously translated].

On 4 December Lt. Gen. Vadim Kirpichenko, a deputy chief of the USSR KGB's First Main Directorate, was sent to Kabul. He flew on a military transport aircraft from Chkalovskiy Airfield north of Moscow to Bagram with a group of officers of the Airborne Forces Operations Group headed by Deputy Commanding General of the Airborne Forces Lieutenant-General Nikolay Gus'kov. In Kirpichenko's pocket was a diplomatic passport in the name of Petr Nikolayev. He had been given special authority since he had been appointed the senior chief to prepare the operation in Kabul to remove Amin from power. According to Kirpichenko, he never had to show this passport.

### **Brezhnev decides to save "people's" power**

The decision to deploy Soviet troops to Afghanistan to support an operation to remove Amin from power was made after long hesitation and an analysis of the unfolding situation. It was not impulsive, but many factors were not considered all the same.

Having arrived in Kabul on the morning of 5 December Kirpichenko met with the senior KGB representative General Ivanov and they assigned responsibilities. He also informed Chief Military Adviser General Magometov of the planned operation to remove Amin from power.

On 6 December a decision was made at a CC CPSU Politburo meeting: considering the develop situation and Amin's request, send a detachment to Afghanistan of about 500 men from the General Staff's Main Intelligence Directorate in uniforms which would not reveal an affiliation with the Soviet armed forces. It was proposed to transport them in military transport aviation aircraft in the first half of December.

Top Secret<sup>8</sup>

Special Folder

to Cdes. Brezhnev, Andropov, Gromyko, Suslov, and Ustinov

Extract From Protocol No. 176 of the Meeting of the CC CPSU Politburo of 6 December 1979

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About the dispatch of a special detachment to Afghanistan

Agree with the proposal on this issue set forth in the note of the KGB USSR and the Ministry of Defense of 4 December 1979. No. 312/2/0073 (attached).

CC SECRETARY L. BREZHNEV

[attachment]

Top Secret<sup>9</sup>

Special File

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<sup>8</sup> APRF, f. 89, per. 25, d. 1

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. As cited in A. A. Lyakhovskiy, *The Tragedy and Valor of the Afghani* (Moscow: GPI "Iskon", 1995), p. 107.

to the CC CPSU

The Chairman of the Revolutionary Council, General Secretary of the CC PDPA, and Prime Minister of the DRA H. Amin recently has insistently been raising the issue of the necessity of sending to Kabul of a motorized rifle battalion for defense of his residence.

Taking account of the situation as it has developed and the request, H. Amin considers it expedient to send to Afghanistan the detachment of the GRU of the General Staff which has been prepared for these goals, with a complement of about 500 men, in a uniform which does not reveal its belonging to the Armed Forces of the USSR. The possibility of sending this detachment to the DRA was envisioned by the decision of the CC CPSU Politburo of 06.29.79 No. P 156/IX.

Regarding the fact that issues related to the sending of the detachment to Kabul have been agreed with the Afghan side, we propose that it is possible to drop it in on airplanes of military transport aviation during the first half of December of this year. Cde. Ustinov, D.F. is in agreement.

Yu. Andropov, N. Ogarkov

No. 312/2/0073  
4 December 1979

On the same day a meeting was held in Washington between national security advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski and the Soviet Ambassador to the US Anatoliy Dobrynin at which they discussed the question of the ratification of the SALT-II treaty. Brzezinski anticipated that the treaty would be ratified in March 1980. They also discussed the prospects for Soviet-American cooperation: SALT-III, a visit to the US by Leonid Brezhnev in July 1980, a reduction in medium-range missiles...Not a word was said about Afghanistan. At the beginning of December, Margaret Thatcher paid a visit to the White House to coordinate the positions of Great Britain and the US at the December session of NATO where the issue of the stationing of American medium-range missiles in Europe targeted against the Soviet Union would be decided.

After the conclusion of the training of the "Muslim" battalion, Col. Kolesnik was recalled to Moscow and went to work performing his daily duties. In accordance with the CC CPSU Politburo decision of 6 December the personnel and combat equipment of the "Muslim" battalion (520 men) were transported to Afghanistan on Military Transport Aviation aircraft on 9 and 10 December, to Bagram airfield. They were all dressed in Afghan uniforms, outwardly indistinguishable from local servicemen. This uniform had been sewn from samples sent through military intelligence channels.

Soviet Ambassador Tabeyev informed Amin that his requests to send two Soviet battalions to reinforce the security of the residence of the head of state and Bagram airfield had been carried out. At the same time he informed him that the Soviet leadership was ready to receive him in Moscow on an official visit...

Meanwhile in Moscow officials increasingly calculated that without Soviet troops it would be difficult to create the conditions for the removal of Amin from power, if this were even possible; it was risky to count on domestic opposition alone. Where were the guarantees that the Afghan army would accept and support Karmal? And even if he managed to seize power, could he fight off the attacks of the armed opposition, whose resistance was growing constantly?

The leadership was leaning more and more to the opinion that without Soviet troops it would be difficult to create the conditions for removing Amin. Even if such a thing were possible, the leadership believed, it would be risky to rely solely on internal opposition. Where was the guarantee that the Afghan army would support Karmal? And even if he successfully seized power, would he be able to repel the attacks of the armed opposition? The resistance was constantly growing.

Behind the scenes there was great fuss regarding the decision to introduce troops onto Afghan territory. The leadership of the general staff tried to explain to Ustinov the situation in Afghanistan and measures for stabilizing it. V.I. Varennikov, at that time the First Deputy Chief of the General Staff and Chief of the Main Operational Directorate, wrote:

Feeling that the leadership of the country was at the threshold of changing their decision regarding the introduction of troops into Afghanistan, the Chief of the General Staff N.V. Ogarkov made a last attempt to convince the Minister of Defense D.F. Ustinov not to do it. In connection with this he invited S.F. Ahromeev and myself and informed us that he would like, in our presence, to state the inexpediency of such a move and to substantiate [his claim.] If necessary, we were to support him. When we came to Ustinov's office he was with the head of the Main Political Directorate A.A. Epishev. Nikolai Vasiilevich [Ogarkov] presented for a long time, trying to substantiate the inexpediency of such a move and to convince Ustinov of this. At the end of Ogarkov's presentation the minister did not comment, but only ask Epishev, "Aleksey Alekseyevich, do you have any questions?" The head of the MPD responded: "No I don't have any questions. The General Staff always have their own special opinion." Ustinov noted: "This is true. But I will take the opinion of the General Staff into account." I supported Ogarkov: "Comrade Minister of Defense, we feel that this is the last chance." Ahromeev was quiet. As we were leaving, Ogarkov once again turned to Ustinov: "Dmitriy Fedorovich, we're really counting on you."

According to the information of the Soviet Embassy in Kabul of that period:

The Afghan opposition has considerably expanded its social base, strengthened its ranks, and created a base of operations on Pakistani territory. Anti-government uprisings have taken place as a result of the counterrevolution's influence on the personnel of a number of garrisons, predominantly those far from headquarters. For examples, mutinies occurred in the 30<sup>th</sup> Mountain Infantry Regiment (Asmar), the 36<sup>th</sup> Infantry [Regiment] (Naray), the 18<sup>th</sup> Infantry [Regiment] (Khowst), and other units which were isolated from their superior headquarters and which have received no support for a long time... The appearance of new IOA and IPA formations has been noted in the provinces of Kunar, Nangarhar, Laghman, Paktia, Kapisa, Ghazni, Zabol, Kandahar, Ghowr, Badghis, Bamian, and Herat. About 70% of Afghan territory in which more than 10 million people live is under opposition control (or outside government control), practically the entire rural population...

Moreover the fierce struggle in the Afghan leadership on the issue of the attitude toward the army led to considerable disorder in the DRA armed forces. The constant personnel shakeups, purges, repressions, and the forced conscription of youth into the army substantially undermined the cohesion and combat effectiveness of the troops. The Afghan army ended up considerably weaker and, from Amin's statements, was not in a condition to defend the ruling regime and the sovereignty of the country by itself. However the main reason for the deployment of Soviet troops was not due to the situation in the DRA. It was of a different nature.

The memoirs of Academician Yevgeniy Chazov shed light on many circumstances. He wrote in his 1992 book *Zdorov'ye i Vlast* ("Health and Power"):

When now voices are sometimes heard, including from the former leadership, that the Politburo and CC CPSU were not informed about the true state of Brezhnev's health, this is not even clever nor a subterfuge but a "white lie". For those who knew and came to terms with the situation need to justify their silence and inaction somehow. Yes, to be quite honest, what could they have done? At that time all power was in the hands of "Brezhnev's group" and this situation suited those in the leadership who were not in this group for they preserved their position and their future with an impotent Brezhnev.... This also concerns the issue of the beginning of the Afghan war which is very painful for our country.

I am not familiar with the details of the preparation for and the carrying out of the invasion of Afghanistan by our troops. If one believes some of the mass media then just four people – Ustinov, Gromyko, Andropov, and Tikhonov [SIC] – prepared and carried out this invasion and no one in the leadership or the CC knew what such an act... was to be. But... the members of the country's leadership and CC members were constantly informed of the situation in Afghanistan. Hundreds of our representatives, including Party advisers, KGB officials, and military intelligence officers, had collected extensive material and submitted it to Moscow.

For me the Afghan events began earlier than the deployment of our troops to Afghanistan. They began in the period when, on Amin's order, the head of the Party (PDPA) and state, Taraki

“was removed” by his brother Abdullah (the head of the Afghan security service) himself or at the hands of one of his people...

In spite of the reduction of his mental acuity [*sposobnost' kriticheskoye vospriyatiye*], Brezhnev dealt with this event vigorously. Most of all he was indignant that back on 10 September, not long before these events, he had received Taraki, promised him aid and support... “What scum Amin is: you smother a man with whom you participated in a revolution. Who’s the leader of the Afghan revolution?” – he said during a meeting – “And what will they say in other countries? Can they really believe Brezhnev’s word if his assurances of support and protection remain [just] words?” Andropov spoke to me in approximately the same spirit as Brezhnev had spoken in his presence and in Ustinov’s presence. These comments of Brezhnev hardly played the role of catalyst in the invasion of Afghanistan but...after these events preparations for an invasion began...

At that time I often had to meet with Andropov and never in all our 17 years of acquaintanceship had I see him in such tension. It seems to me that right before the deployment of Soviet troops in Afghanistan he had, in contrast to Ustinov, periods of lack of confidence and even bewilderment. But he trusted his sources of information very much...However everything happened the other way around, despite the information – the deployment of troops aggravated the situation...

Recalling the period before the invasion of Afghanistan by Soviet troops and the turn of events, I am confident that the decision about beginning the Afghan war was the work of many people and the assertion that only a narrow group in the leadership of the country knew is a myth...<sup>31</sup>

In my view, the key factor in the memoirs of the academician is the phrase of the CC CPSU General Secretary after the murder of N. M. Taraki: “Can they really believe Brezhnev’s word if his assurances of support and protection remain [just] words?” And in Gromyko’s opinion, the murder of Taraki produced an additional aggravation of the situation, from a government which was requesting aid. This bloody act shocked the Soviet leadership. Brezhnev in particular took his death especially badly. Without question, the CC CPSU General Secretary expressed his dissatisfaction to Andropov, who had promised, but could not ensure, the security of Taraki, which put Brezhnev in an extremely awkward situation before the entire world. Accordingly, the KGB Chairman “pressured” his officials and they quickly began to work out alternatives to rectify the resulting situation. Stories appeared about Amin’s involvement with the CIA, the external threat to the DRA from Pakistan and Iran, the penetration of Islamic extremism into Soviet Central Asian republics, the intentions of the US to place American SIGINT equipment and several types of missiles in Afghanistan if pro-Western forces came to power there...[Translator’s note: the US lost two listening posts in northern Iran when Khomeini came to power]. Decisive steps were required in order to counter them. Thus, not so much the objective necessity as the personal factor played a key role in justifying the advisability of deploying Soviet troops to Afghanistan.

On 8 December a meeting was held in Brezhnev’s office (the so-called “Walnut Room”), in which a “narrow circle of people” took part – Andropov, Gromyko, Mikhail Suslov, and Ustinov. They discussed the situation for a long time and weighed the pros and cons of deploying of Soviet troops. As evidence for the need for such a step Andropov and Ustinov could cite: the efforts of the US CIA (particularly Paul Henze, the Chief of Station in Ankara) to create a “New Great Ottoman Empire” including the southern republics of the USSR; the lack of a reliable air defense system in the south and thus, in case American “Pershing” missiles were stationed in the DRA, many vitally important objects such as the Baykonur Cosmodrome would be placed in jeopardy; the possibility of the use of Afghan uranium deposits by Pakistan and Iran to create a nuclear weapons; the establishment of an opposition government in the northern regions of Afghanistan; the joining of this region to Pakistan...

As a result they decided to work out two options: remove Amin from power using the KGB’s capabilities and transfer power to Karmal; if this didn’t work, then send a certain number of troops to the DRA for these purposes.

On 10 December 1979, Ustinov informed Chief of the General Staff Marshal Nikolay Ogarkov that the CC CPSU Politburo had made a tentative decision to temporarily deploy Soviet troops to Afghanistan and assigned him the task of preparing about 75-80,000 troops. Ogarkov was very surprised at this information and said that such a number of troops would not stabilize the situation, that he opposed such a step, and that it was reckless. But the

Minister stopped him abruptly and said, “What are you saying, are you going to teach the Politburo? Your job is to follow orders....”

The following day, December 11<sup>th</sup>, A.N. Kosygin, the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the USSR, called Ogarkov and informed him that a decision was being prepared regarding the introduction of Soviet troops into Afghanistan. He asked his position regarding such a step. Ogarkov answered that his opinion was negative. Kosygin then asked him to convince Ustinov that this must not be done. Ogarkov summoned Gen. Varennikov and discussed this problem with him, and then called Ustinov and asked him to see him so that he could report on certain important documents. Having made his report, Ogarkov once again tried to state his position regarding the introduction of troops into Afghanistan, but Ustinov rejected this and even started screaming “Are you going to teach the Politburo? You must carry out orders. You’re always building intrigues! You’re systematically sabotaging my decisions! And now you are unhappy with what the country’s leadership is preparing. What gets decided in the Politburo is none of your business. Your business is the staff...” Ogarkov objected, saying that the General Staff, being an organ of the Supreme Command, cannot stand aside when it is making such fateful decisions for the country. This irritated Ustinov even more, and he started to accuse the General Staff of all possible sins, and Ustinov told Ogarkov that he will talk to him no longer and went into the relaxation room. Although their relations had been “cool” even before that, this, essentially was the final break. After this conversation with Ustinov, Ogarkov called Kosygin and the first Deputy Foreign Minister G.M. Kornienko and informed them of Ustinov’s position, saying that it had not been possible to change his mind.

That same day Ogarkov was suddenly called into Brezhnev’s office, where the “small Politburo” was meeting. As Varennikov related to me, before going to this meeting, they spent a long time discussing the position that Ogarkov should take regarding the question of introducing troops into Afghanistan. It was agreed that he would assert until the very last the opinion that such a move was inexpedient. As an alternative it was decided to propose the introduction of small sub-divisions into the DRA to protect certain objects. With that he left for the Kremlin. Ogarkov, now in Brezhnev’s presence, tried once again to convince the Politburo members that the problem needed to be solved politically, not relying of force. He referred to the Afghan tradition of resistance against foreigners on their land, warning about the probability of our troops being pulled into military activity, but all of this turned out to be in vain. “We will pit all of eastern Islam against us,” Ogarkov said. “and we will lose politically in the entire world.” But he was sharply interrupted by Andropov: “Mind your own business! Politics will be taken care of by us, the party, Leonid Ilyich!” Ogarkov tried to protest, “I am the head of the General Staff.” Andropov once again stopped him: “And nothing more. You were invited here not so that we could hear your opinion, but so that you could take down the instructions of the Politburo and organize their implementation.” The KGB Chairman was supported by Politburo members Gromyko, Chernenko, Suskov, Ustinov, and Kirillenko. Finally Brezhnev had his word: “It follows that we should support Yuri Vladimirovich [Andropov].” It was then that Ogarkov formed the opinion that the decision had already been discussed and decided upon ahead of time, and that his efforts were in vain.

At the end of the conversation, it was agreed that for now the final decision would not be made regarding the immediate introduction of troops, but that the troops would prepare just in case. Ustinov took this as a directive to begin acting...

[Translator’s note: the last half of this paragraph appears in Lyakhovskiy’s “Plamya Afgana”, previously translated for CWIHP].

At the conclusion of the conversation it was decided there would be no decision about immediate military aid but that troops would be readied in any event. The military would be subjected to criticism in the era of glasnost but they could not display firmness in the defense of their views. The truth is, none of the officials even took responsibility for the consequences of the political decision about the entry of Soviet troops into the DRA...

Sensing that things were taking an undesirable turn, Ogarkov made sure that he had the support of Ahromeev and Varrenikov. Having prepared a written report on the Afghani problem, Ogarkov then went with them to try once again to change Ustinov’s mind. As Varennikov would later recall:

Ogarkov invited Ahromeev and myself to his office and allowed us to familiarize ourselves with the report prepared for the minister of defense which analyzed the situation in Afghanistan and surrounding it, as well as our suggestions. [We were asked to] sign it. I remember that the report stated that the General staff believes: that it would be possible to refrain from introducing Soviet troops onto the territory of sovereign Afghanistan, which was consistent with the decision made earlier by the leadership of the USSR and would allow [the USSR] to avoid heavy

political, economic, social and military consequences. We also signed the report and went to the minister of defense. When we came into Ustinov's office, Ogarkov said that we had prepared the report together in his name and handed it to [Ustinov.] Dimitry Fedorovich [Ustinov] started to read slowly, making notes in the margins. I thought that his reaction would be turbulent, but Ustinov was outwardly calm, although intuitively we sensed his internal tension. Having finished reading, the minister took some [корочки] from his table and put two sheets of the report in them. He signed at the top of the first sheet, saying "this is for you, for the prosecutor." He then closed the files, calmly returned the report to Ogarkov and said "You're too late. The decision has already been made." Ogarkov tried to protest once again: "Dimitry Fedorovich, the General Staff knows nothing about this. Our actions could be seen all over the world as expansionism." "Once again I'm telling you that the decision has already been made. Therefore instead of discussing the actions of the Politburo you should be carrying out the decision Ustinov said agitatedly and made it clear that the conversation was over. We left the office and went back [to our offices.] Sergey Fedorovich Ahromeev stayed behind in the reception area. On the way Nikolay Vasilievich [Ogarkov] said to me "If the decision has been made, we need to prepare a directive." Ogarkov went into his office (which was on the third floor – AL) and I went upstairs to the fifth floor. When I came into my office the telephone which was a direct line to the Chief of the General Staff rang: "Valentin Ivanovich, while you were going upstairs I spoke with the minister – that is, he called me and ordered me to write a directive regarding the introduction of troops into Afghanistan. It seems that Sergey Fedorovich stayed behind to suggest to Ustinov's assistance that such a document was needed. I will give the order to Abolins to write the draft of such a directive. You, also, should look at it and then come see me together."

That evening Ustinov convened the Collegium of the USSR Defense Ministry and informed [them]: a decision will obviously be made in the near future concerning the use of Soviet troops in Afghanistan and an appropriate military force [*gruppirovka*] needed to be prepared. Directive N° 312/12/00133 was urgently sent to the field. Beginning on 10 December Ustinov began to issue verbal orders to Ogarkov to form a new combined-arms army in the Turkestan Military District; prepare an airborne division, an independent airborne regiment, and five Military Transport Aviation divisions for an airborne landing operation; increase the combat readiness of two divisions in the Turkestan Military district; bring the pontoon bridge regiment in the Kiev Military District up to full strength and send it to the Termez region... Everything was done secretly and with cover stories [*legendirovalos*'].

On 10 December the Commander of the 108<sup>th</sup> Motorized Rifle Division Major-General Konstantin Kuz'min, en route to the "Krym" sanatorium, arrived in Tashkent where he remained in a hospital, expecting to fly to Simferopol' the next day. But he was unexpectedly called by the Commanding General of the Turkestan Military District General-Colonel Yuriy Maksimov and ordered to immediately return to the division.

The adviser to the Chief of the DRA Armed Forces Main Political Directorate Maj.-Gen. Vasiliy Zaplatin was urgently summoned from Kabul to Moscow on 10 December as a person who knew the state of affairs in the Afghan army thoroughly inasmuch as the new Chief Military Adviser, Magometov, was not yet sufficiently well acquainted with the situation in Afghanistan in a short period. He arrived at the Bagram airfield in the evening but he could not fly out that same day. The next day he first flew into Tashkent and then on to Moscow on another plane. He was taken right away to the office of the Chief of the Main Political Directorate of the Soviet Army and Navy, Army General Aleksey Yepishev, to whom Zaplatin reported in detail his perspective on the situation in the DRA and the Afghan army.

On the morning of 12 December Zaplatin was summoned to see Ustinov. Ogarkov and Yepishev were also there in his office. Having heard Zaplatin's report, Ustinov left, but Ogarkov, Yepishev, and Zaplatin discussed the situation which had developed in Afghanistan for a long time. According to Zaplatin, Ogarkov spoke consistently against the deployment of Soviet troops to Afghanistan.



When Ustinov returned he again listened to Zaplatin's report and then showed him a cable from a folder signed by the KGB representative and gave it to the general to read. In the estimation of the KGB representative the situation in the DRA was approaching a critical point. Having read it, Zaplatin said that he would not have put his signature to this report. Ustinov asked, "Why?" He replied that the authors of the cable overdramatized the situation in the Afghan army. The minister said: "You there can't agree but we here have to make a decision." Then Ustinov added, "You are evaluating the situation in Afghanistan incidentally but they are answering for it with their heads." Zaplatin said that he knew the sources of information the representatives of the special services were using, they did not inspire confidence, and therefore everything needed to be re-checked, but Ustinov replied – "It's too late." Zaplatin did not understand these words then and only much later did it become known to him that it was at a CC CPSU Politburo meeting, from which Ustinov had just come, that the decision to deploy troops to Afghanistan had been made.

Actually the information from various sources was very contradictory and the solutions proposed were polar opposites. Moreover there was an unwritten rule – send primarily that information which would suit the leadership, that was in harmony with its positions, and "guess" the information which corresponded to the leaders' notions about one or another issue and confirmed their presence. Often the initial information sifted through the "strainer" of various echelons changed to the point of being unrecognizable. This forced Moscow into a very difficult position. Each department defended its own interests. Even so, politicians were obliged to hear out various opinions, analyze the situation deeply and from various angles, forecast the trend of developments of the military and political situation in the region and the world, and also consider the consequences of a deployment of troops and the reaction of the West. Only on this basis could the correct decision be made. But they chose another method – they were guided by old approaches and dogmas, although by that time the situation in the world had already changed to the detriment of the USSR.

This step was insufficiently supported at informational and propaganda levels. The reference to the troops being introduced at the request of the DRA government was a propaganda ploy. There indeed were about 20 such requests in all sent via Soviet representatives. Amin made seven of them even after he had removed Taraki. In addition, there were personal appeals to the Soviet leadership at summit meetings and during telephone conversations. However, if specialists on Afghanistan had earlier cast doubt on the existence of such requests, accusing the USSR of treacherously invading the territory of a sovereign state with its troops, they later recognized that there were such requests but they had no legal force and it was wrong to refer to them since "the Russians removed and killed everyone who had invited them there." In this there is common sense and its own logic.

The decision of NATO foreign affairs and defense ministers at a meeting in Brussels on 12 December became the last drop tipping the scales in favor of the deployment of troops. They approved a scenario for stationing new American medium-range cruise and Pershing-2 missiles in Western Europe.

### **Information for reflection**

From Brussels

The ministers of foreign affairs of the NATO countries in Brussels have approved a plan for stationing new medium-range missiles in Western Europe. The meeting was called exceptionally important and successful. According to the information, the US Secretary of State [Cyrus Vance] in particular stressed: "We have decided to implement a plan for the modernization of NATO nuclear forces."

It was decided at the meeting that the US would produce cruise and Pershing-2 missiles. Taken into service in Western Europe these missiles can hit Soviet territory. At the meeting attempts by the Soviet Union to convince NATO members to reject the stationing of these missiles were mentioned. The only country where this attempt was successful was the Netherlands, although there is information that they will submit their final decision in two years. Also, Belgium postponed consideration of this issue for six months. The remaining NATO members confirmed that any delay in implementing this plan is unacceptable.

from Rosen

The same day this information arrived the CC CPSU Politburo – rather its elite, Andropov, Ustinov, and Gromyko – unanimously made the final decision about the deployment of troops to Afghanistan. In their belief, after the NATO decision to station medium-range missiles in Europe aimed at the USSR there was nothing to lose...

There was a record of this meeting stored in a special folder of the CC CPSU written very allegorically in the handwriting of CC CPSU Secretary Konstantin Chernenko. In the document Afghanistan was designated by the letter “A” and the word “measures” meant the deployment of Soviet troops to the DRA and the removal of Hafizullah Amin from power. For a long time the record was supersecret and was kept in a special safe and only several in the highest leadership of the country were familiar with it. It clears up much about who was the initiator and the executor of the “measures”.

Top Secret<sup>10</sup>

SPECIAL FOLDER

Chaired by Cde. L. I. Brezhnev

Present: Suslov M. A., Grishin V. V., Kirilenko A. P., Pel'she A. Ya., Ustinov D. F., Chernenko K. U., Andropov Yu. V., Gromyko A. A., Tikhonov N. A., Ponomarev B. N.

CC CPSU Decree N° 176/125 of 12 December  
concerning the situation in "A"

1. Approve the ideas and measures set forth by Andropov Yu. V., Ustinov D.F., and Gromyko A. A. Authorize them to introduce amendments of non-essential nature in the course of the execution of these measures.

Questions requiring the decision of the CC should be expeditiously submitted to the Politburo. The implementation of all these measures is to be entrusted to Cdes. Andropov Yu. V., Ustinov D. F., and Gromyko A. A.

2. Charge Cdes. Andropov Yu. V., Ustinov D. F., and Gromyko A. A. to keep the CC Politburo informed on the status of the execution of the outlined measures.

CC Secretary

L. Brezhnev

N° 997 (1 page)

It is believed that this document is the CC CPSU Politburo resolution to introduce troops into the DRA. However, anyone who is remotely familiar with the process of preparing documents and their evaluation at CC CPSU Politburo meetings knows that there should also be a note with the suggestions of Andropov, Ustinov, and Gromyko. In fact, such a note does not exist. Is it possible that the resulting letter from Andropov or these suggestions were discussed orally by the Politburo? Judging by the fact that his name is first on the list [of speakers], it was Andropov who was the initiator of the discussion regarding the planned action in Afghanistan.

On the basis of these facts and the development of the situation in Afghanistan I will take a risk and offer another version: at this meeting the Politburo discussed questions raised in Andropov's letter regarding the conduct of the operation to remove Amin using forces already in Afghanistan. If the operation had been conducted successfully it would not have been necessary to introduce Soviet troops into the DRA. However, the goals of the operation were not met. A telegram from Soviet representatives in Kabul stated that that it had not been possible to remove Amin using forces already in Afghanistan. It seems that after this the necessary corrections were made [to the plan] providing for the introduction of troops into Afghanistan to carry out a coup. It is possible that CC CPSU resolution No 176/125

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<sup>10</sup> [Translator's note: an image of this decree with translation and source information can be found in CWHIP Bulletin, Fall 1994 p. 46]

(dated December 12, 1979) was considered the basis for the realization of such a difficult step, and the order to introduce troops into the DRA was later given orally.

The record was signed by all CC CPSU Politburo members present at the meeting. No one then voted “against”. There was still a Stalinist syndrome in effect, the principle of mutual protection. Everyone wanted to keep his post and dissent or disagreement with the opinion of the General Secretary automatically expelled him from the CC CPSU.

One man has always ruled in Russia, as opposed to the US where the system ruled. As one Russian writer correctly noted, Russia is a country of masters and slaves because each master is in turn another’s slave according to an established hierarchy. For centuries regimes, rulers, dynasties, and ideologies changed but the principle of slaves and masters remained unchanged. In general it needs to be said that for all its long history, Russia was very rarely fortunate to have worthy rulers. Only a handful of them can be recalled with bowed head. Little changed in Soviet times. The CC CPSU General Secretary had authority and power of which even the czars did not dream. Everyone and everything was dependent on him. For example, at Stalin’s order the wives of several high Party functionaries (such as Molotov) were imprisoned and their husbands could not even say a word in defense of them. None of the services to the Fatherland of the outstanding military leader Marshal of the Soviet Union Georgiy Zhukov could save him from retirement when CC CPSU General Secretary Nikita Khrushchev desired it.

Kosygin, whose position regarding the deployment of troops to Afghanistan was negative, did not attend the decisive CC CPSU Politburo meeting. His signature is missing from the document. Soon he was sent into retirement. (He died in 1980.) This eliminates some of the interpretations regarding who made the decision. There is evidence, however, that the meeting of the CC CPSU Politburo never actually took place. When the decision had been made by a smaller group (Brezhnev, Andropov, Gromyko, Ustinov, Suslov, Chernenko) the other members were “asked” to sign it. That is, they found out about [the decision] after the fact. According to Ponomarev, who was supposedly “present” at the CC CPSU Politburo meeting,

Gromyko later admitted that the decision had been made behind the scenes (*kuluarно*). How did they manage to do this without me when I was in charge of the International Department of the CC? No one asked my advice... Andropov played a big part. His people found Babrak Karmal in Czechoslovakia and prepared him to be the leader. Brezhnev had great trust in Andropov.

Thus many false rumors and different interpretations about who was responsible for this decision are eliminated. Although there is information that a CC CPSU Politburo meeting was generally not held, yet when the decision was made by a narrow body (Brezhnev, Andropov, Gromyko, Ustinov, Suslov, Chernenko), the remaining members of the Politburo were “asked” to sign it. The dates around the signatures of several Politburo members could be indirect evidence of this. And no one refused – they were afraid. But this is only one version.

The account of CC CPSU Secretary Leonid Zamyatin could serve as confirmation of this: The four were convened. Brezhnev, Ustinov, Andropov, and Gromyko, with Chernenko as secretary. The decision was made there about the deployment of troops to Afghanistan. The materials of Yuriy Vladimirovich Andropov were used. How did the discussion go? I cannot say. There is nothing except the record which was handwritten by Chernenko... This is the first time in the history of the Politburo that a decision was handwritten and not typed.

This is what it was called – on the issue about “A”. [Translator’s note: In fact, the text reads: “K polozheniyu v ‘A’ (“Concerning the situation in ‘A’) not, as Zamyatin quotes, “K voprosu ob ‘A’.”] The letter A in quotes. There were four points, one of them concerning the deployment of troops. Well, the formulation there was about the implementation of international aid, a limited contingent, and so forth. There were assurances from Ustinov that this was a temporary deployment of troops, for a maximum of three or four months, then we would withdraw them...

... There was a note of Andropov, very detailed, since there was a KGB group in Afghanistan headed by Boris Semenovich Ivanov, a special adviser and consultant to Andropov. His telegram was, so to say, one of the first calls [that] other methods of solving the Afghan problem were needed, for this letter said: if we don’t support Taraki right now with the use of force then we might lose Afghanistan; that is, Brzezinski’s theory – create a “green” underbelly below our Central Asian republics – would be realized.

In the epoch of openness the military will be subject to groundless criticism for not having been firm in asserting their views and preventing the introduction of troops on Afghani territory. The initiative of the USSR KGB [in this matter] will gradually be forgotten. None of the higher party or government officials will deign to assume responsibility for the consequences of the political decision to introduce troops into Afghanistan and none of them will face any punishment.

The CC CPSU Politburo had embarked on such a difficult step although its members had not analyzed it themselves until the end: what revolution had they gathered to defend? In the estimation of the former chief of the KGB First Main Directorate Leonid Shebarshin: “The entire undertaking was prepared in a situation of such secrecy that there was simply no critical data analysis of the situation in Afghanistan, not only from the point of view of the factional intra-Party fighting or the fighting with the government, but also from the historic, national, religious, and ethnic points of view.” In my view, this decision was the result of opportunistic approaches to the situation in Afghanistan, mistakes, failures, and the fatal miscalculations of our special services and missions in Kabul, and also a superficial analysis of the situation and insufficient forecasting of the development of the situation in and around Afghanistan by analysts in Moscow, although it was based on the highest interests of the country.

If we assess the situation from today’s perspective a conclusion can be drawn: the transfer of power from the “Khalq” to “Parcham” did not substantially change the situation since both PDPA factions were not fundamentally distinct from one another at the theoretical level and neither had influence among or the support of the majority of the people. Objectively, the most suitable candidate for us capable of providing some stability in the country without bringing it to the point of civil war would possibly have been an influential, authoritative figure in Afghanistan not connected with the PDPA. But at that time such an alternative was not even considered; this would have been a seditious thought – a betrayal of the ideals of socialism...

Cables which later arrived from the DRA seemingly confirmed the correctness of the steps taken by the Soviet leadership regarding Afghanistan. According to a report of the KGB representative, during meetings with him on 12 and 17 December, Amin said that the Afghan leadership would welcome the presence of Soviet Armed Forces in a number of strategically important locations in the northern provinces. The forms and methods of extending military aid should be determined by the Soviet side. The USSR can have military garrisons in the locations it wishes, e.g., take under guard all facilities where there is Soviet-Afghan collaboration and protect DRA lines of communications.

## **REPORT FROM KABUL**

(Secret)<sup>11</sup>  
(Urgent)

...On 12 and 17 December 1979 the KGB representative met with H. Amin. The following statements of Amin deserve attention.

Amin insistently adhered to the idea of the need for the direct participation of the Soviet Union in deterring the combat operations of the rebel groups in the northern regions of the DRA. His reasoning boiled down to the following:

- the present Afghan leadership will greet the presence of the Soviet Armed Forces at a number of strategically important points in the northern regions of the DRA...

Amin said that the forms and methods of extending military aid should be determined by the Soviet side;

- the USSR can have military garrisons wherever they want;
- the USSR can take under guard all facilities where there is Soviet-Afghan collaboration;
- the Soviet troops could take DRA lines of communications under guard...

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<sup>11</sup> [Translator’s note: Previously published in Lyakhovskiy’s “Tragediya I Doblest’ Afgana’, previously translated]

There was no decree of the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet or other similar document adopted regarding the issue of the deployment of troops. All orders were issued verbally in order to preserve secrecy and mislead Amin. The implementation of such actions was possible due to the existing practice of making important political decisions: in practice, after the approval at the CC CPSU Politburo (the highest body of the ruling party), they were basically only formally “approved” and explained to the people. This was the era of “groupthink” – a precise system of subordination created by the Party nomenklatura was in effect which did not allow a single departure from the line worked out by the CC CPSU Politburo. People who occupied key posts in the government were under the total control of this system.

Gromyko later wrote that he believed the introduction of troops to be legitimate:

On December 5, 1978 the Soviet-Afghan Agreement of Friendship was signed.

In accordance with this the government of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan turned to the Soviet Union with a request to provide military aid to the Afghan National Army. This request was weighed by the Soviet Union thoroughly and at length. In the end the Politburo of the CC CPSU unanimously decided to provide such aid...

The situation was made more acute by the tragic murder of the General Secretary of the CC PDPA Taraki whose representatives had requested aid. This bloody act shook the Soviet leadership. L.I. Brezhnev in particular took his death very hard.

Ultimately it was in this environment that the decision to introduce a limited contingent was made. The decision was taken collectively, by the entire Politburo, and I took part in it. Even now I don't consider this a mistake... First of all we were afraid of a regime appearing in Kabul which would be antagonistic towards the USSR. Likewise, we considered it our obligation to help the National Democratic Party of Afghanistan in defending the gains of the April revolution. The leaders of the PDPA had asked us to introduce troops fifteen times.

After this decision was taken by the Politburo, I went into Brezhnev's office and said “Shouldn't we frame the decision to introduce troops along government lines?” Brezhnev did not respond right away. He picked up the phone.

“Mikhail Andreevich, won't you come in here? It is necessary to discuss something.”

Suslov appeared. Brezhnev informed him of our conversation. Then he added:

“In the situation that has unfolded, it seems necessary to make a decision immediately: either we ignore Afghanistan's request for aid or we save the people's power and act in accordance with the Soviet-Afghan agreement.”

Suslov said: “We have an agreement with Afghanistan and we need to fulfill our obligations quickly since we have made the decision. We'll discuss it at the CC later.”

The plenum of the CC CPSU that took place in June of 1980 completely and unanimously approved the decision of the Politburo.

Even during the working conferences before the final decision was made regarding the introduction of troops the Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the USSR Marshall N.G. Ogarkov voiced his opinion that individual parts of the Afghan army might resist.

At first it was assumed that our troops would only help the local inhabitants defend themselves from outside bands... We never wanted to increase the numbers of our contingent nor to be pulled in to serious military activity. Most of our troops were stationed in urban garrisons.<sup>12</sup>

The CPSU leadership did not consider it necessary to submit this issue to the USSR Supreme Soviet for discussion. They declared: “international aid” – and everything ended with that. And those people are clever (even at a high level) who state in their justification that they knew nothing about the intention to deploy troops to Afghanistan and took no part in it. When *did* they find out and start to protest or express their disagreement? No, they approved.

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<sup>12</sup> Gromyko, *Afghanistan in Our Fate* (Moscow: APN, 1989), p. 97.

They were afraid and held onto their posts. This can easily be confirmed by excerpts from the speeches of many Party and government leaders of those years.

A CC CPSU plenum resolution “The International Situation and the Foreign Policy of the Soviet Union,” approved unanimously on 23 June 1980, said,

The CC Plenum completely approves of the measures taken to extend comprehensive aid to Afghanistan in the cause of repelling armed attacks and interference from without, the goal of which is to smother the Afghan revolution and create an imperialist base for military aggression at the southern borders of the USSR. The plenum calls for a political settlement of the situation which has arisen around Afghanistan, which is following a policy of nonalignment. The complete cessation of aggression against the country and reliable guarantees against subversive acts from abroad are required for this...<sup>13</sup>

This action of the Soviet Union was approved in the reports of Brezhnev and Gromyko and also in the speeches of participants of the CC CPSU plenum which touched on the deployment of troops to Afghanistan. The speech of Georgian CP First Secretary Eduard Shevardnadze from the rostrum of the CC plenum was noteworthy:

In the world they know that the Soviet Union and its leader will not leave their friends to the whims of fate, that its word matches its deeds.

Being a witness to the titanic activity of Leonid Il'ich Brezhnev, reading the transcripts of his conversations, fundamental works, and speeches on domestic and foreign problems you experience joy and pride from the knowledge that at the head of the Party and state stands a man in whom there are organically combined the broadest erudition, revolutionary courage, great humanism, and rare diplomatic flexibility. (Stormy, prolonged applause)

The deep concern of the Soviet people when the gains of the Afghan revolution were in the balance is recalled. The fate of the Afghan people, the fate of our borders, our southern borders, disturbs them. And the courageous, the only faithful, the only wise step taken regarding Afghanistan was greeted with satisfaction by every Soviet citizen. Enthusiastically supporting the measures of the Central Committee of the Party and the Soviet government described in the report of Leonid Il'ich Brezhnev in the name of preserving and furthering the gains of the Afghan revolution and ensuring the security of our southern borders, the workers of Georgia, like all the Soviet people, enthusiastically approve of the foreign policy actions of the CC of our Party, the Politburo, Cde. Leonid Brezhnev, which entirely correspond to the vital interests of our Motherland and all progressive humanity...<sup>14</sup>

Later, it is true, he spoke completely differently, advocating a fundamentally opposite position, but, as they say, you have to tell it like it is. It should generally be noted that Shevardnadze never was celebrated for the firmness of his views, changing them depending on conditions considerably more easily than a chameleon changes color. At that time in all his public statements, whether at congresses or plenums, he showered glorification and lavishly praised the wisdom and farsightedness of Party leader Brezhnev with sugar and honey to the point of indecency, lying like a “Caucasian” nightingale. Obviously he had thus secured for himself the opportunity to be at the helm of the Georgian SSR. During the period of *perestroika* Shevardnadze began to direct words of praise in another direction, Gorbachev's, subjecting his previous views to “critical rethinking.” Later, as President of an independent Georgia, he advocated completely different positions...

The officially proclaimed main purpose of the Soviet military presence in the DRA was peacekeeping and was formulated unambiguously – to help stabilize the situation and repel possible aggression from without. The Soviet troops should have become garrisons and not gotten enmeshed in the internal conflict and combat operations. It was prescribed everywhere that they were to give aid to the local population, to protect them from rebel bands, and also to distribute food, fuel, and basic necessities. It was thought that the very presence of Soviet troops would constitute a powerful stabilizing factor, significantly strengthen the PDPA regime, and exert a restraining influence on the opposition movement... Now, of course, it is understood that such an attitude was unrealistic but then they thought it

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<sup>13</sup> APRF, f. 3, op. 120, d. 44

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

reasonable. The real purpose of the deployment of Soviet troops to Afghanistan can only be guessed. It seems to me – it was to remove Amin from power and liquidate him, and to provide the conditions for the appointment of Karmal as General Secretary of the CC PDPA and Chairman of the DRA Revolutionary Council.

The reader himself will understand with what difficulty this decision was made. It was not hasty or impulsive as some journalists try to picture it. It was made only against the background of a large number of contradictory, fast-paced, and acute factors directly affecting the Soviet Union's vital interests and national security. And the situation turned out to be far more complex and serious than was presented. As further events demonstrated, the action undertaken without an adequate projection and a consideration of the entire spectrum of factors affecting the consequences of the deployment of troops on the development of the situation in Afghanistan led to a tragedy, not just for the Afghan people, but for ours, too.

The leadership of the USSR Armed Forces General Staff, in particular, Ogarkov, Varennikov, and also the Commander-in-Chief of the Ground Forces General of the Army Ivan Pavlovskiy spoke out against the deployment of troops to the DRA before the final decision was made, warning the political leadership of the country away from the temptation to throw our troops into a fight with the Afghan opposition. The military leaders thought that our military presence would provoke the initiation of combat operations and lead to a strengthening of the rebel movement, which would be directed against Soviet troops, and the poor knowledge of local customs and traditions, especially Islam, and national ethnic relations would force us into a quite difficult position. This, in fact, then occurred, but at the time the political leadership did not pay attention to the arguments of the military. Sober estimations of the situation were regarded by the Soviet leadership as a lack of comprehension or underestimation of the political importance of the processes occurring in Afghanistan. They all subsequently fell into the disfavor of Defense Minister Ustinov, who actually removed them from "Afghan affairs" and then sent Pavlovskiy into retirement and appointed Ogarkov to the post of Commander-in-Chief of the Western High Command as a demotion<sup>15</sup> ...Sergey Akhromeyev became the Minister's most trusted person. In 1983 in the post of First Deputy Chief of the General Staff he was promoted to the rank of Marshal of the Soviet Union (an unprecedented event in history) and in 1984 was appointed Chief of the USSR Armed Forces General Staff.

There exist many opinions regarding the reasons and purposes for the deployment of troops and various versions are advanced. They are quite diverse and at times polar opposites. Some of them are complete fantasies. I will touch only on facts and documents. The "Cold War" was going on. There was a strategic military confrontation between two superpowers, two systems, and two military blocs. There was geopolitical competition with China, which was then viewed as the probable enemy. The revolution against the Shah in Iran and the establishment there of an Islamic regime forced the Americans to look for new locations for military and intelligence bases. Therefore the massive aid to the Afghan rebels and reinforcement of US forces in the region in direct proximity to our borders could not have failed to alarm Soviet leaders.

By the end of the 1970s the development of the détente process in USSR-US relations had slowed considerably. The administration of Jimmy Carter had unilaterally decided to halt the ratification of the SALT-II Treaty for an indefinite period, which was regarded in the Soviet Union as a sign of a sharp change in the overall military and political policy of the US. NATO considered the issue of an annual increase of its members' military budgets until the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The Americans created "rapid deployment forces"...

We were also worried that a further rapprochement between the US and China was occurring on an anti-Soviet basis. Agreements were concluded between them about an exchange of visits at the ministerial level, and by trade delegations and military missions; a reduction of US troops on Taiwan (while preserving the right of the US to sell weapons to Taiwan); Chinese support for American peace efforts in the Near East; the development by the Chinese of a secret channel of communications with Israel; the American use of their influence to improve ties between Saudi Arabia and China; the readiness of Washington to change COCOM procedures in order to ease the transfer of the latest technology to China; American and Chinese aid to several regimes in Africa, especially those who were in a position to increase the price of Soviet-Cuban military interference; also, closer cooperation on such issues as Afghanistan, aid to Pakistan, and assistance to the efforts of Southeast Asia to counter Soviet support to Vietnam.

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<sup>15</sup> [Translator's note: However, as indicated below, Ogarkov was not removed as Chief of the General Staff and appointed to this newly-created position until 1984, shortly after Ustinov's death]

The Americans made a point of increasing their military presence in the Persian Gulf - in direct proximity to the DRA and our southern borders.

The situation in various parts of the world was assessed as tense and explosive, especially in the Near and Middle East. Right beyond the Soviet Union's southwestern border another revolution was occurring, in Iran, which worried Soviet leaders for two reasons. First and foremost, the Islamic renaissance in Iran could lessen Soviet influence there, and spread "defiance" to Afghanistan and even among millions of Soviet Muslims. Further, the fall of the Shah could require the United States to seek another place in the region for its military base. Therefore the CPSU CC Politburo showed a determination not to permit its competitor to profit from an analogous situation in Afghanistan. The overthrow of a regime in Iran friendly to the US prompted euphoric ideas among Kremlin politicians about the possibility of influence in the Middle East – to strengthen their positions quickly, decisively, and without special effort.

The Soviet leadership proceeded from the then-existing assessments in the world and the region and also the views of the prospects for competition with the US. The predominant opinion was that the stationing of American missiles in Europe made our facilities vulnerable, even as far as the Urals. But this act would permit the removal of tension and deflect attention from Europe. The reinforcement of the US carrier group in the Persian Gulf and on the island of Diego Garcia – thus posed difficulties in ensuring the air defense of industrial and primary centers for the extraction of oil, natural gas, and coal in Siberia... In the opinion of several experts there was a danger of American interference in the affairs of Afghanistan, which could create a threat to the security of the southern borders of the USSR. In my view the latter argument is improbable – they would have shared the same fate as we did.

On top of that, the personality factor played a role of no little importance, e.g., the ambitions of individual Soviet politicians (they could not forgive Amin for ignoring the appeal of the CPSU CC Politburo's and Brezhnev "personally" to spare Taraki's life). The ambitions of the CPSU General Secretary himself had a certain decisive effect on the rest of the Soviet leadership, depriving them of government wisdom and forcing them to change their convictions about the inadvisability of using troops in a domestic Afghan conflict. The desire of our leadership to avert the formation of Amin's terrorist regime, to protect the Afghan people from genocide, and also not to permit the opposition to come to power and to preserve an "ideological" ally, evidently played some role.

In addition, great power thinking predominated then in the style of the leadership. A somewhat scornful attitude toward the Afghans was noted and not just toward them. Ustinov, for example, said that Soviet troops need only show up in Afghanistan and some rebels would drop their weapons right there and the others would simply flee. Obviously they envisioned the opposition forces with this derisive attitude in mind. But in practice the underestimation of an enemy always costs very dearly.

At a closed session of the Second Congress of USSR People's Deputies at the end of 1989, with regard to the reasons causing the leadership to deploy troops to Afghanistan, KGB Chairman Kryuchkov noted:

The situation was described as extremely tense. This was a period of a retreat from détente, dragging the world into a new round of the arms race, and the organization of massive subversive activity against the USSR and its allies by the West. Of course, we too had not been sleeping.

The American leadership, encountering a serious crisis of trust within the country, had decided to look for a way out by strengthening US leadership in world affairs. Under the American aegis and the slogan of countering the "Soviet threat" three existing power centers (the US, Western Europe, and Japan) were cemented. A prohibition was imposed on selling modern technology to the Soviet Union and various sanctions were widely employed. Work on cruise missiles, nuclear warheads with increased yield, B-1 bombers, and new MX strategic missiles were stepped up and the reluctance of the American military to ratify the SALT-2 Treaty was examined. As a whole, Washington's practical actions all the more often had an unpredictable and often dangerous nature.

The centrifugal trends in NATO which intensified during the latter half of the 1970s worried the US. Right now, as you know, the attitude toward such complex ambiguous phenomena has changed. Then, the implementation of a long-range program of upgrading and rearmament had begun in Western Europe under pressure from Washington. Consequently there was a buildup of the nuclear potential of the bloc accompanied by a continuous three-percent increase in the military



budget of a majority of NATO members. It is impossible to say that there were no grounds given by us for justifying the need in the West for such military programs. But in equal measure our arguments can be recognized as justified that what was happening was an attempt by the West to undermine strategic parity...

Such a confrontational approach spread through practically the entire spectrum of relations between the two great powers and their allies. A whole series of regions of the world were regarded by the Americans as a sphere of "vital interests" of the West. Naturally, the revolutions which occurred in 1978 in Afghanistan, which the Soviet Union in no way instigated, and then in Iran were understood mainly in the context of this confrontation. Trying to compensate for the weakness of their position in the Middle East the US deployed naval forces in the Persian Gulf and developed plans for an invasion of Iran. The Americans, like many of their allies, could not have failed to ask the question of how far Afghanistan would go in its relations with the USSR.

A policy was adopted of replacing the regime in Kabul. Ideas appeared to station American SIGINT equipment [against] the Soviet Union and possibly some types of missiles in case pro-Western forces came to power. We also knew about the development of plans by American and Pakistani special services to inflame nationalistic, pan-Islamic sentiments in Soviet Central Asian republics using the territory of neighboring states. It can be assumed that in these conditions the Soviet leadership was most likely inclined to the conclusion that a fundamental change of the situation in revolutionary Afghanistan and the strengthening of the position of the US and its allies in this country would lead to an overall change in the balance of power undesirable for the USSR, not only in the region but on our southern borders. It was without doubt that the West hoped to shoot down the wave of national democratic revolutions through Afghanistan...

The Soviet leadership could not fail to also consider the development of the situation inside Afghanistan itself. Leftist excesses and a reliance on military force and repression in resolving domestic problems led rather quickly to the loss of popular support by the regime. A massive flight of refugees to Pakistan and Iran began. Discontent with the policy of the authorities was skillfully used by the Afghan counterrevolution. By the autumn of 1979 "Islamic parties" which had already appeared on Pakistani territory were able to bring the strength of their armed formations up to 40,000 men and organize combat operations against government troops in 12 of the 27 provinces of the country. The Afghan army, weakened by repression, turned out to be incapable of crushing the antigovernment movement. Mutinies in the troops became more frequent and mass desertion with weapons began...

The prospects for a change [*evolyutsiya*] of regime also aroused great alarm. The establishment in the Party and government of the personal authority of Hafizullah Amin, who in the autumn of 1979 had organized the murder of the head of state and CC PDPA General Secretary N. M. Taraki, occurred rapidly. Representatives of healthy forces in the PDPA ever more often directed the attention of the Soviet side to the fact that the reckless acts of the Amin clique were leading to the complete physical destruction of the national patriotic and progressive forces of the country. Representatives of ethnic minorities suffered especially heavily – Uzbeks, Tajiks, Turkmen, and other peoples of the north of the country related to the population of Soviet Central Asian republics. Information that Amin, trying to preserve his regime at any price, was ready to enter into a secret understanding with the Islamic opposition and make serious concessions to the West and its allies caused serious concern among our friends in Afghanistan.

By the end of 1979 it had become all the more obvious that Afghanistan was on the edge of a general national crisis. The country had come to an impasse...

This analysis of the situation in and around Afghanistan introduced as a justification for the actions of the Soviet leadership was made 10 years later but it realistically shows the views and evaluations dominating at the end of the 1970s and allows one to understand what guided the CC CPSU Politburo in deciding to deploy Soviet troops in Afghanistan.

Evaluating the situation, they reacted with alarm in the USSR to the statements of Islamic fundamentalists that if they came to power they would carry the struggle to the territory of Soviet Central Asian republics under Islamic slogans. Iranian political scientists regarded the situation in the following manner: “The Kremlin is so tied down in supporting the Kabul Marxists that they already cannot avoid direct military support to their protégé...In addition, Moscow is frightened by the prospect of the influence of a new Iran, not only in Afghanistan but also in Azerbaijan and Central Asia. Moscow’s creature in Kabul is, in the Kremlin’s opinion, an important outpost against the idea of the unity of all Muslims.”<sup>34</sup>

Of course, now these circumstances seem immaterial and the fears exaggerated – could they really talk about some transfer of the struggle to Soviet Central Asia? The Soviet Union was a great power. The Islamists could not have then engaged in such recklessness although one cannot fail to consider that the situation in and around the DRA was explosive. It could have not failed to influence the then Soviet leadership, which thought that the decision to deploy troops would save the PDPA regime from inevitable destruction. And those people are not correct who depict Brezhnev, Andropov, Ustinov, and Gromyko as fools...As I see it, they were not. They were simply placed in conditions where they could not fail to support a “fraternal” Party; our allies, the other Communist parties, would not have understood this. But they did not have sufficient statesmanship (or moral fortitude and perseverance in defending their opinion about the inadvisability of deploying troops) and they did not find another way out. But this step, it seemed to them, solved all problems. The Soviet leaders did not consider how dangerous it was to disrupt the balance of power in the country and the region which had existed for centuries, no matter on what basis it was built.

But the fates and lives of people were never considered in the entire history of the Soviet Union. They were “laid on the altar of the Fatherland” when necessary and when unnecessary. So it was in time of war and in time of peace. People were considered as a human factor. Having used them in whatever extreme situation (war, Chernobyl), they simply forgot about them. It is appropriate to note that among the troops in Afghanistan there were no sons and grandsons of the people who sang the praises of the troops. They preferred that other people’s children perish.

For a long time the foreign security policy of the USSR was constructed to a considerable degree on the basis of ideological dogmas. They acted as the criteria of correctness in evaluating the decisions then being made. It is to them that the state and national interests of the country were subordinated. The postulates of proletarian internationalism predominated. It is sufficient to recall East Germany (1953), Hungary (1956), Czechoslovakia (1968), etc.

It needs to be noted that the experience of Afghanistan taught the Soviet leaders something all the same. During the worsening of the situation in Poland in 1980-81, when the question of deploying Warsaw Pact troops there to protect Socialist gains arose, perhaps the main reason why this was not done was our presence in Afghanistan. It is possible that this averted still more casualties. As they say, perhaps it was in this respect, at least, a blessing in disguise.

The wisdom of a politician consists in averting the launching of a war by all available means and finding a peaceful resolution of conflict. Any compromise needs to be sought and the maximum permissible concessions made to keep the peace. But if a decision has already been made to begin combat operations it is not necessary to entertain illusions that it will cost few casualties. History has more than once shown: it is impossible to play at war; it needs to be fought properly. But the Soviet troops in Afghanistan conducted combat operations on a comparatively limited scale, in keeping with a policy developed by the US Joint Chiefs of Staff called low-intensity conflict. This wore down the USSR economically and morally.

It is strange, if this is not to blaspheme, that the complaints of politicians who launched the war are heard that women, children, and old men died who were no way at fault...They “did not want this – the military is not able to efficiently fulfill its responsibilities to destroy only armed formations”. One can discuss this sitting in offices but it doesn’t happen that way in war. The barbaric nature of modern war consists precisely of the weapons being used inflicting more damage on the civilian population than on troops. And recently this is the norm. For example, in local conflicts from 1945 to 2000 losses came to more than 40 million, more than 35 million of whom were civilians. In Afghanistan 85 percent of the dead were civilians. At the same time the deaths of soldiers and officers is accepted quietly for some reason, as if they were robots and not someone’s father, son, or brother. In my view politicians should be guided by the principle of individual responsibility; it provides for the right to make a decision but imposes full

responsibility for the results of this decision. One must always remember this when sending people to their deaths or launching precision bombing and missile strikes on military targets.

### **Before the Deployment of Soviet Troops to the DRA: The Abortive Operation Against Amin**

A special group of generals and officers from all branches of the Armed Forces worked in the General Staff's Main Operations Directorate (GOU), where I served in 1979. It supported the deployment of the 40<sup>th</sup> Army to Afghanistan. It is this group which prepared the draft directives of the Soviet Defense Minister and Chief of the General Staff for mobilization and to support the deployment of troops to the DRA; planned and implemented the movement of troops, equipment, weapons and materiel to the Afghan border; carried out organization measures; and also constantly kept track of the military-political situation in Afghanistan, making analyses... And although the "insiders" [*posvyashchennye*] worked "behind closed doors" many General Staff officers knew about their work. Therefore the deployment of Soviet troops to the DRA was no surprise to them. Can it be verified whether CC CPSU Politburo members and candidate members knew nothing about this, as they stated then?

At the beginning of December reinforcement in the form of a special purpose KGB "Zenit" detachment arrived in Bagram. According to their cover story, they were a technical group of the "Muslim" battalion. The newly-arrived group was headed by Colonel Aleksandr Golubev. By the start of December the strength of "Zenit" in Afghanistan was about 130 men. Overall command was exercised by Col. Aleksey Polyakov. The main complement of the detachment was housed in three villas in Kabul rented by the Soviet Embassy.

At the same time the accelerated insertion of small military subunits into Afghanistan was begun. Other subunits headed by its commander Lt. Col Nikolay Serdyukov were added to the battalion of the 345<sup>th</sup> Parachute Regiment already in Bagram. In particular, the 9<sup>th</sup> Company of Sr. Lt. Valeriy Vostrotin was inserted on 1 December. On 7 December Babrak Karmal and Anahita Ratebzad arrived in Afghanistan illegally on a Tu-134 aircraft; they remained among the Soviet paratroopers under the protection of officers of Group "A" of the USSR KGB 7<sup>th</sup> Directorate headed by Yuriy Izotov. According to Izotov:

At the beginning of December I was summoned by the deputy chief of the group, Mikhail Mikhaylovich Romanov; at that time our commander Gennadiy Nikolayevich Zaytsev was in the hospital. Romanov said that I was to go on an assignment for three days and there would be three people with me – Golovatov, Kartofel'nikov, and Vinogradov. Afterwards they put us in a car and we went to the First Main Directorate. Robert Ivanovich Ivon said that we were going on an assignment in three days. They drove us to a First Main Directorate dacha where [KGB Deputy Chief] Vladimir Aleksandrovich Kryuchkov talked with us. He brought two people to us, very dark-complexioned, a man and a woman, and said: 'Yuriy Antonovich, the responsibility for them is on your head. If a single hair falls from their head you will lose yours'. Then he introduced them – Karmal, Anahita. He introduced me to them – Major Yuriy Antonovich Izotov. Where were we flying to? Unknown. They drove us to Vnukovo and put us in the Tu-134 of Yuriy Vladimirovich Andropov. We flew to Tashkent and were quartered in the dacha of CC CPSU Politburo member Rashidov. We spent a day there and they flew to Bagram. Where we were just meters from landing the lights at the airfield were turned off and the pilots landed the aircraft blind. We landed safely. An Embassy representative met us and then escorted us to a hard stand where mud huts had been constructed. Anahita and Babrak lived in one and we in the other. The next day they took us to a warehouse where we received military uniforms. We were in Bagram for two weeks. Two men stood at a post for two hours then rested for two hours. It was –25 C° at that time because this was a mountainous region, the Hindu Kush mountains. There were very primitive conditions – they delivered food to us from the airborne battalion - a pot of buckwheat kasha. The truth is, the sometimes brought either jars of honey or Pakistani jam from the Embassy. The thing is that when we planned for the flight I decided with Mikhail Vasil'yevich Golovatov to take food with us. We took 100 rubles from Mikhail Mikhaylovich Romanov and bought food – cheeses, sausages, and canned goods. We also fed Karmal and Anahita with this food.

Another group of special forces headed by Valeriy Shergin guarded other Afghans - Nur Ahmad Nur, Aslan Muhammad Watanjar, Said Muhammazh Gulyabzoy, and Asadulah Sarwari.

According to Gen. Nikolay Guskov of the Airborne Forces Operations Group General:

When the aircraft was coming in for a landing and was already at the first beacon the lights suddenly went out at the whole airfield. As a rule, military transport and combat aircraft landed at Bagram, but this was a Tu-134. The aircraft landed in complete darkness. True, the plane's landing lights were on. The aircraft commander was forced to deploy the drag chute but the aircraft rolled almost to the very edge of the runway. Even I began to worry.

Then the aircraft's passengers were placed in bunkers at the airfield. By the way, B. Karmal and Anahita took the bunker which I had previously occupied. They lived there three days. Of course, we did not then know who he was; no one told me about this officially. Andropov and Ustinov had just said to take steps to provide security. But they warned me secretly that he was the future replacement of Amin.

According to Mikhail Golovatov, an officer of Group "A":

There was an instruction at one of the suburban First Main Directorate facilities. Initially Kryuchkov instructed us and then presented our wards. We were told that we were flying out for three days. When we were flying into Bagram the illumination at the airfield was turned off, including on the runway. The pilots made a "blind" landing of the plane. It almost went off the runway. After the plane stopped we got out and took up a defensive position around it; we were ready to go into battle if necessary.

Why did they bring Karmal to Afghanistan? The thing is that in the middle of December it was planned to implement an action to remove Amin from power with two battalions and a KGB special detachment; therefore the new leadership had to be in the DRA by that time. This operation was prepared very secretly. A strictly limited circle of people knew about it. From the memoirs of Vadim Kirpichenko: "The mission was assigned – support the Parchamists with everyone at our command in order to carry out a coup and ensure that they came to power because Amin had become dangerous."

According to a statement of the Chief Military Adviser Sultan Magometov, when he talked with Ustinov via special (secure) communications, the latter was interested in this: "How are preparations going to implement the plan to remove Amin from power?" This question put Magometov into a corner since he was completely uninformed of what this plan was. Then Ustinov told him to get all the details from Lt. Gen. Ivanov. However when the Chief Military Adviser turned to the KGB representative about this plan the latter replied that he did not have the slightest notion about it. Magometov started to argue that it was necessary to act together and that CC CPSU Politburo member Ustinov had called him about this. . . . Some time later Ivanov, having obviously conversed with Andropov, invited Magometov back and showed him the plan of operations developed by KGB officers. The Chief Military Adviser then became indignant, saying that this was not a plan but a "worthless scrap of paper," so they postponed the operation at his insistence.

Numerous highly-placed KGB representatives having worked in Kabul, the Chief of the Airborne Troops Operations Group, the Chief Military Adviser in the DRA, and officials of the military attaché's office ended up in a difficult position. They were in no position to carry out the assigned mission with the men and equipment they then had in Kabul. A cable to Moscow was sent over the four signatures of the Soviet representatives with an evaluation of the situation in Afghanistan and the conclusion that they could not remove Amin from power with the forces available in Kabul and they would not vouch for the success of the coup without military support. In case of failure Afghanistan would be lost to us forever and the Soviet Embassy destroyed (this danger was confirmed 15 years later – *author's note*). They requested reinforcements to carry out the operation in Kabul and were promised such reinforcement. According to Kirpichenko's statement this telegram was the fruit of collective work and the result of a comprehensive analysis and calculations.

According to information provided by "Zenit" officer Major Yakov Semenov it is known that on 11 December in Bagram Deputy Commanding General of the Airborne Troops Lt. Gen. N. Gus'kov assigned the "Zenit" troops the mission of seizing "Objective Dub [Oak]. A company of the "Muslim" battalion was to operate with the "Zenit" troops. As was explained later, "Objective Dub" was the codename of Amin's residence in the center of Kabul. There was no plan of the palace or its defense system. It was known only that the place was defended by about 2,000 guardsmen, too many for 22 "Zenit" troops and a company of the "Muslim battalion".

The radio and television building guarded by a tank company, four infantry combat vehicles [BMP], and four DShK [machine guns] were to be seized by a platoon of Sr. Lt. Vladimir Sharipov's company and a small group of "Zenit" forces led by Anatoliy Ryabinin. One squad headed by a sergeant was selected to seize the security service building. Similar forces were selected to seize other objectives in Kabul. Each commander knew only his own combat mission.

Preparatory organizational measures were held for two days: information was acquired, scouting was done, plans and diagrams of building security were drawn up, and coordination issues specified... At 1530 on 13 December subunit commanders were summoned to the command to receive the combat mission –the order for combat operations had arrived. They were to advance from Bagram to Kabul and seize Amin's residence and other objectives by storm according to a schedule. It is not hard to guess how all this adventure would have ended. I think it would have been a complete failure; they would have only sacrificed people in vain. Fortunately, a "stand down!" order followed at 1600.

On 14 December a second battalion (commanded by Major Tsyganov) and a reconnaissance company (commanded by Sr. Lt. Popov) of the 345<sup>th</sup> Parachute Regiment were transported to Bagram. They also were to participate in the operation. By way of illustration, the reconnaissance company was assigned the mission of blockading an artillery brigade. But the operation was postponed. According to some information supposedly a leak had occurred and Amin had quickly left his residence. By unanimous opinion if the operation had begun on 14 December without the support of the airborne units it would have inevitably failed.

According to what "Zenit" officer Valeriy Kurilov said about preparations for the operation:

On the evening of 11 December Yasha Semenov ran into our tent. He had been an instructor in tactics among us at KUOS [Advanced Officers' Training Courses] but was now the commander of our detachment. He was short and strong with an Oriental face, a very pleasant and sociable guy.

He said that we needed to go to the command tent for a meeting. When we arrived there officers from the "Muslim" battalion, senior officers of our subgroups, some military people we didn't know, and some airborne officers were already sitting there on folding aluminum chairs.

Yasha started to describe to us the plan of combat operations in which we were to participate. When the question touched on the worst imaginable, quite specific things, we all became somewhat sick. According to the plan he described, tomorrow or the day after we were to climb into the armored personnel carriers [BTR] of the "Muslim" battalion, cover the distance to the Afghan capital in a night march, and rush into Kabul. There we were to split up into small groups, and attack and seize all the vital government facilities.

Supposedly local people were anxiously waiting at these facilities for us to show up; all of them there would surrender to us and come out with hands raised. They ought not to even shoot. Moreover, all the people were ready to rise up then and there to fight the Amin regime; we needed only to appear at the outskirts of the city and we would be joined by huge masses of people ready to throw out the rotten tyrant and his henchmen. Everything had been looked after and arranged.

The most difficult building was assigned to "Zenit" and a platoon of the "Muslim" battalion who were to seize Amin's residence in the Arg Palace in the center of Kabul.

According to plan we, operating on five armored personnel carriers, were to remove the front of the palace gate using armor, quickly neutralize the two tanks (which were reportedly dug into the earth up to their turrets) and two or three BMPs standing inside the gates with grenade launchers, then divide right and left along narrow paths along a four-story barracks where the guards were housed, and blockade them. An interpreter was to climb onto the armor and announce into a megaphone (the megaphones were delivered later) that the anti-popular regime of bloody Amin has fallen, suggest the guards surrender, and come out of the barracks without their weapons with hands raised. According to available information the guards would not offer resistance...

We needed to display maximum friendliness, goodwill, and smiling and if someone tried to make unnecessary noise and shoot, if someone's nerves failed him, then they would investigate the

guilty party with all the severity of the law! For we were on the territory of a friendly country and any accidental shot or carelessly tossed word could serve as a cause of an international scandal.

The longer I heard Yasha the more the conviction grew in me that something was wrong here. Rather, everything was wrong. Or I had lost my mind and was inappropriately evaluating reality and what Semenov said; or was it HE who was out of sorts? Everything that he had said was so divorced from reality that I somehow couldn't even find the words to comment on this plan. This was complete adventurism, elementary ignorance of the situation, and the most complete incompetence...

Of course this was not something that was Semenov's idea. Some big boss had drawn up the plan. Yasha had already told me then that the high command had put him, the chief of our entire group, in a foolish position and in a practically hopeless situation: here's your plan of operations – fulfill it...

In principle the opinion of all the "Zenit" troops was the same: the proposed plan was an absurdity born of an ignorance of the situation. An obvious dilettante had drawn up the plan. But no one then talked openly aloud about this. Everyone understood that this was a decision of some high command unknown to us. It was not precluded that our Party advisers here had also had a hand. By the way, the bespectacled briefer who was explaining to us about Amin the usurper, judging from his manners and smooth speech, completely looked like a representative of the latter [trans. note: the Party advisers]...

A day later it was explained to us in the morning that we were going to Kabul at night. However the standdown was given at noon. The adventurist version of the plan had been scuttled. Well, thank God!

The snipers from the special KGB subunits did not manage to kill Amin. "Zenit" officers Vladimir Tsvetkov and Fedor Yerokhov set the sights of the sniper rifles at Bagram at 450 meters, chose positions along Amin's usual route of travel, set up a watch, and specified withdrawal routes to the Soviet Embassy, but each time, before they passed a reinforced guard was set up along the whole route and the vehicles moved at enormous speed and the "Zenit" troops could not carry out the mission.

Through inertia, for three more days (14-16 December) work continued in Bagram to prepare to seize the palace in the center of Kabul with the forces of the special services and the "Muslim" battalion (scouting, working out the details of the assault, coordination – down to the smallest details), but this was preparation for operations which had been proposed to begin in the event of the success of a new subversive action against Amin.

However the next attempt against him on 16 December ended in failure. They tried to poison Hafizullah Amin but his nephew Asadullah Amin, the chief of the counterintelligence service, drank the Pepsi Cola with the "contents"; he was sent to the USSR for treatment with a very serious attack of hepatitis. Soviet doctors saved him but after the change of government in Kabul he ended up in Lefortovo Prison where attempts were made to learn from him the circumstances of the murder of Taraki and other information. However Asadullah Amin conducted himself worthily and firmly at interrogations and said nothing. He was then deported to Afghanistan and executed there by the new regime.

An An-12 aircraft urgently flew in from Fergana for the members of the future Afghan government headed by Babrak Karmal and they again left for the USSR.

According to Yuriy Izotov, an officer of Group "A":

We had to return to Tashkent again when the operation did not come off; it was not cancelled, but postponed. We met there with future members of the CC PDPA Politburo whom Valentin Ivanovich Shergin and his guys were guarding. I noted that the Afghans were unhappy about the inactivity and I suggested they throw knives. I led them out to the street, set up the boards, and began to train. Then I led Anahita to work in the dacha where we had been fishing with her. I had to disperse them somewhat to keep dark thoughts from them. But then they seated us in the

plane which was loaded with kerosene and saxsaul [Translator's note: a local plant] and we again arrived in Bagram.

Meanwhile measures continued in the Turkestan Military District to deploy and prepare troops for their deployment to Afghanistan.

### **Getting Ready for the Invasion**

On 12 December the 108<sup>th</sup> Motorized Rifle Division was placed on alert and its 180<sup>th</sup> Motorized Rifle Regiment was moved out to cover the border. It was proposed to conduct mobilization deployment and preparations at garrison locations but this could not be done. Mobilization was done at training centers. The leadership of Uzbekistan and the Surkhandar'inskaya Oblast gave the command of the division much help.

The USSR Ministry of Defense Operations Group (OG MO SSSR) headed Akhromeyev was formed on 13 December. It included generals and officers of the General Staff and also representatives of all branches and troop arms of the USSR Armed Forces (VS SSSR), and main and central directorates of the Defense Ministry. At 2200 14 December the OG MO SSSR was already in Termez, on the Soviet-Afghan border, and began to coordinate operations to deploy troops to Afghanistan. However soon afterwards Akhromeyev became ill and command of this group was entrusted to First Deputy USSR Defense Minister Marshal Sergey Leonidovich Sokolov, who was recalled from leave in this connection. It was Sokolov who had to exercise overall command of Soviet troops during their preparation for and deployment to Afghanistan.

The OG MO SSSR did a great deal of organizational work at the initial stage of the Afghan campaign. It oversaw the regrouping, mobilization, and deployment of troops to Afghanistan and also the implementation of measures to remove Amin from power and install the Karmal regime. In succeeding years the largest military operations were carried out under his command and also the most complex issues of a military-political nature were decided.

### **REFERENCE MATERIAL**

#### USSR Ministry of Defense and General Staff Operations Groups in the DRA<sup>16</sup>

...During the entire period Soviet troops were in Afghanistan from time to time various operations groups [OG] of the Ministry of Defense [MO] and USSR Armed Forces General Staff operated there. The first, headed by Deputy Commanding General of the Airborne Forces, General-Lieutenant N. N. Gus'kov, arrived in Bagram at the beginning of December and rebased to Kabul on 23 December 1979. From 25 to 27 December it exercised leadership of the transfer from Bagram to Kabul of airborne units, their housing, and operations during the overthrow of H. Amin's supporters.

On 3 January 1980 a USSR OG MO flew into Afghanistan from Termez headed by Marshal of the Soviet Union S. L. Sokolov (General of the Army S. F. Akhromeyev became his deputy), which was located there until November of that year. Then from time to time this group went to the DRA to coordinate the combat operations of Soviet and Afghan troops when conducting the largest operations (for example, in Panjshir) for up to six months.

Beginning with the last half of 1984 the leadership of the OG MO of the USSR and DRA was entrusted to General of the Army V. I. Varennikov, at that time a First Deputy Chief of the General Staff. At the very beginning he periodically visited Afghanistan, but beginning 2 January 1987 until the conclusion of the withdrawal of Soviet troops he was in Afghanistan permanently. The generals and officers of the USSR OG MO systematically worked in units and formations of the 40<sup>th</sup> Army to give practical aid to their commanders and staffs in preparing and carrying out combat operations, organizing combat training, considering accumulated experience, and also coordinating operations and maintaining coordination with the Afghan army. Aid was given to the advisory staff

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<sup>16</sup> [Translator's note: Previously published in Lyakhovskiy's "Plamya Afgana" ("Flame of the Aghanistan veteran") and previously translated]

in planning combat operations, increasing the combat ability of the Afghan armed forces, and resolving various problems of combat activity. In addition, this group decided the most varied problems, both of a military, as well as of an economic, political, and social nature.

In connection with the fact that the first time the USSR OG MO was in Afghanistan was only on occasion, mainly to lead large operations, in March 1985 a group of representatives of the General Staff was sent to Kabul (five men in all), headed by the general for Afghanistan-related special assignments of the Chief of the USSR General Staff, Major-General B. V. Gromov (March 1985-May 1987) and Major-General V. S. Kudlay (May 1987-January 1989).

Operations groups were also sent to work among the [40<sup>th</sup>] Army's troops from the Turkestan Military District HQ.

With the start of the withdrawal of Soviet troops in 1988 a special Operations Group of the USSR Armed Forces General Staff under the command of Lieutenant-General A. G. Gaponenko began to work in Afghanistan; it dealt with creation of a three-month emergency supply for the Afghan armed forces in key areas of the country (Kandahar, Jalalabad, Ghazni, Gardez, etc.) and at guard posts.

On 16 December the order was given to mobilize the field HQ of the 40<sup>th</sup> Army. The First Deputy Commanding General of the Turkestan Military District General-Lieutenant Yu. V. Tukharinov was appointed the Commanding General of the Army.

A plan for deployment of troops to Afghanistan had not previously been developed in the General Staff and therefore an overall directive for the mobilization of troops and their control organs was not issued. Formations and units were brought into readiness after the corresponding verbal orders, for Ustinov.

The formation of an expeditionary contingent of troops for deployment to Afghanistan began in mid-December at an accelerated tempo. Formations and units deployed in the Turkestan Military District which almost all had been cadre-strength and filled out constituted its backbone. They were brought up to strength using local resources from the reserves. Considering that as a rule the representatives of the Central Asian republics served in construction units and motorized rifle units their training was low. Troops were brought into readiness administratively, on the basis of individual instructions of the General Staff. A total of more than 30 such instructions were issued in three weeks.<sup>40</sup> Evidence of the rushed nature of the deployment is that there were no specific plans to send Soviet troops to the DRA in the USSR Defense Ministry before the middle of December.

On the evening of 17 December the "Zenit" troops and the "Muslim" battalion were given the task of moving into Kabul, into the Dar-ul-aman area where the DRA leader had relocated his residence. According to the plan the next act against Amin was to be carried out after he moved to Taj-Bek. The "Muslim" battalion and a "Zenit" group were concentrated in the designated area by the close of 18 December. On the evening of that same day Col. Vasiliy Kolesnik received an order in Moscow from the Chief of the General Staff Main Intelligence Directorate, General of the Army Petr Ivashutin – fly to Afghanistan in civilian clothing to carry out a special government assignment. They sent Lt. Colonel Oleg Shvets with him. Having quickly filled out the documents necessary in such cases (they brought the foreign passports to them right at the plane) they departed Moscow's Chkalovskiy Airfield at 0630 on 19 December on an An-12 aircraft for Bagram via Baku and Termez. KGB officers Major-General Yuriy Drozdov and Captain 2<sup>nd</sup> Rank Ehval'd Kozlov and also a military commissary official flew with them.

According to Maj. Gen. Yuriy Drozdov, Chief of the USSR KGB Directorate of Illegal Intelligence:

On 18 December 1979 at the end of a meeting Chief of the 1<sup>st</sup> Main Directorate Vladimir Aleksandrovich Kryuchkov said that KGB Chairman Yuriy Vladimirovich Andropov was summoning both of us to his office by 1900 regarding an important issue. Inasmuch as it was not acceptable to ask clarifying questions about the upcoming conversation but the management documents requiring Andropov's attention had been reported to Kryuchkov I thought that that more detailed information about the content of the documents being reported was being required.



The KGB Chairman warmly greeted us and offered some hot tea with lemon. He quickly examined the urgent documents regarding the activities of illegal intelligence and started to talk about the situation in Afghanistan. Concluding the conversation, Yuriy Vladimirovich Andropov asked me to fly to Kabul for several days, familiarize myself with the situation on the spot, and look at what the officers of the Directorate who had arrived there in November were doing. In conclusion he said: "The situation there is complex, serious events are impending, but you're the only one of us who has really fought."

I asked, when should I fly? Yuriy Vladimirovich looked at Kryuchkov, who had been included in the conversation, and said: "Tomorrow morning at 0630, Chkalovskiy Airfield." Proceeding from the content of the conversation I asked our representative in Kabul to be informed about my flight and the nature of the assignment. Andropov said this would be done by Kryuchkov and warmly bade me goodbye.

Having returned to Directorate 'S' I called and Captain 2<sup>nd</sup> Rank Ehval'd Kozlov to my office and said to him that early tomorrow morning we were flying to Kabul for several days. Kozlov replied in a naval manner, "Aye-aye", without asking a single question. They followed the situation in his department in a crisis center and it was clear without words what needed to be done before the flight. As Aleksandr Vasil'yevich Suvorov used to say, "Soldiers' meetings are short. They harnessed the carriage and went."

I returned home late that day. I replied to the inquiring and alarmed look of my wife that early tomorrow morning I was flying out to Afghanistan for several days and was confident that I would return before New Year's. She said nothing in reply, but just looked at me with increased alarm.

On the morning of 19 December sitting in the car along the road to the airport I recalled everything that I knew about Afghanistan. It needs to be noted that our predecessors regarded this country quite seriously as a region of possible operations of the Russian Army. What awaited us...

Kozlov was given an attaché case at the airfield in Moscow to hand to the KGB officer who met him in Afghanistan.

They only arrived at Bagram late at night. Drozdov and Kozlov were met by Kostromin, an official of the KGB residency in Kabul, to whom the attaché case was handed. Having spent the night in a mud hut at the airfield, the next morning they went to Kabul with embassy security officer Bakhturin. The special representative of the KGB in Afghanistan Lt. General Boris Ivanov greeted Yuriy Drozdov with a question: "Why did you fly in?" He replied there should be a cable from Vladimir Kryuchkov about this. Afterwards it was proposed that they familiarize themselves with the situation and the location where the group of "Zenit" troops were deployed. Then Ivanov asked Kozlov about the attaché case. When the latter replied that the case had been handed to Kostromin and left at the mud hut at the airfield Ivanov changed expression. Kozlov had to quickly go back to Bagram. Fortunately the attaché case was laying where it had been left – in the mud hut. As later became clear, it held a cassette with a recording of an address to the people by Karmal. If it had gotten into the hands of the Afghans the operation would have been ruined. And there were many such misunderstandings but luckily for us they all ended up well and did not influence the preparations for the operation. The truth is, Karmal also made a recording of his address while he was in Bagram.

Vasiliy Kolesnik, who had spent the night in the first hardstand they found with Oleg Shvets, also went to Kabul on the morning of 20 December where they were presented to the Chief Military Adviser Col. Gen. Sultan Magometov, Vladimir Pechenko, and Col. Aleksandr Baranayev, the Military Attaché to the DRA...

After receiving the assignment and studying the situation Kolesnik and Shvets went to where the battalion was located, near the Taj-Bek Palace, in an unfinished building with windows without glass. Instead they had ponchos drawn over them and "bourgeois" heating stoves had been installed, and cots in two circles. The Afghans gave them overcoats of camel's hair. The winter in Kabul was very severe that year and the temperature at night fell to  $-20^{\circ}$  C. They bought food in the bazaar. In general, they were satisfied. Major Dzhamilov, the deputy for logistics to the

battalion commander, displayed wonders of resourcefulness and diplomacy in order to feed the personnel in such difficult conditions and keep them warm.

Before Amin changed his residence in Arg he moved to the Taj-Bek Palace and ended up under the “wing” of the “Muslim” battalion. In Daud’s time the HQ of the Central Army Corps was located here.

The security system in the Palace was carefully thought out. It was organized under the supervision of our specialists from the KGB 9<sup>th</sup> Directorate headed by Yu. Kutepov. A personal guard consisting of relatives and especially trusted people was on duty inside. They wore a special uniform distinct from the others: there were white bands on their caps, white belts and holsters, and white cuffs on the sleeves. They lived in direct proximity to the Palace in an adobe structure next to the building where the HQ of the security brigade was located. A second line of defense was formed by seven posts, each of which had four sentries armed with a machine gun, grenade launcher, and automatic weapons. They worked two hour watches.

Outside the security ring were the deployment locations of battalions (three motorized infantry and one tank). They were situated a short distance around Taj-Bek. Three T-54 tanks were dug in on one of the commanding heights and could fire on the area adjacent to the Palace from [their] cannon and machine guns in a direct line of sight. There were a total of about 2,500 men in the security brigade. In addition, there was a regiment not far away whose weaponry included anti-aircraft artillery (ZPU-2) mounts and also a construction regiment (about 1,000 men with rifles). There were also other army units in Kabul: two divisions, two tank regiments, “commandos”...

On 21 December Col. Kolesnik and Major Khalbayev were summoned to the Chief Military Adviser from whom they received an order – reinforce the Taj-Bek Palace security with subunits of the “Muslim” battalion. They were ordered to take up a defense in the space between the guard posts and the deployment line of the Afghan battalions. They immediately began to carry out the mission.

They quickly established contact with the security brigade commander Major Jandad, an aide-de-camp of Amin’s, and coordinated the location of defensive positions and all issues of cooperation with him. Jandad presented them with a miniature Japanese radio for communications with him. The brigade commander himself spoke Russian tolerably well (although he concealed this) inasmuch as he had studied in the USSR, initially in Ryazan’, at the Airborne School, and then at the Frunze Military Academy [trans. note: This is where promising mid-level ground forces commanders study]. According to the cover story Colonel Kolesnik was “Major Kolesov”, the Deputy for Combat Training to the Battalion Commander and Lieutenant Colonel O. Shvets was “Major Shvetsov”, an officer of the Special Department [trans. note: This department is responsible for counterintelligence and was subordinate to the KGB]. One of those in the group (Drozdov) became “Captain Lebedev”, Khalbayev’s Deputy for Technical Affairs. The Afghans still expressed surprise at the fact that he was that old and still a captain.

After coordinating all the issues they got to work on practical measures. They planned combat operations and assigned missions to the companies. The scouted withdrawal routes and the positions of the subunits... In particular there was a natural obstacle along one of the routes – an irrigation ditch. They built a small bridge together with soldiers of the brigade – they laid concrete girders and then put slabs on them. This work took two days. On the evening of 22 December they invited the brigade command to a comradely dinner.

On 22 and 23 December Ambassador Tabeyev informed Amin that his request for Soviet troops to be sent to Afghanistan had been granted in full in Moscow. They were ready to begin deployment on 25 December. Amin expressed gratitude to the Soviet leadership and gave instructions to the DRA Armed Forces General Staff to give assistance to the deploying troops.

Meanwhile new subunits arrived in Bagram; in particular a special KGB group, “Grom” (30 men), was transferred there, manned with officers of the elite “A” (“Al’fa”) subunit. According to Major Mikhail Romanov, commander of the “Grom” group:

At that time I was deputy commander of the antiterror subunit, “A”. Our commander, Colonel Gennadiy Nikolayevich Zaytsev, was in the hospital and the command entrusted me with forming a group from the subunit’s officers which could fulfill a special mission of the Soviet government in Afghanistan without fail.

They told [us] about it on the morning 22 December, I formed the group during the day, and the next morning we flew out.

No one knew anything in [our] families when we left for there. Only my wife knew, perhaps. She was a KGB employee, now a retired major. But she is a creature of habit and a brave woman. And, too, then there was still no feeling of danger yet...

In the second half of 23 December Kolesnikov and Khalbayev were summoned to the Soviet Embassy. The commander of a "Zenit" subgroup, Semenov, arrived with them. There they initially reported the results of the work which had been done to Col.Gen. Magometov and then went into the office on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor where the KGB mission was located. Generals Vadim Kirpichenko and Boris Ivanov there were interested in how security at Taj-Bek was organized and examined the Palace security plan. After Col. Kolesnikov reported the solution to the security plan, they suggested that he think about alternative actions in case they suddenly had to not guard it but seize it. They added in this context that part of the battalion personnel could perform one mission but they would attach a company of paratroopers and two KGB special forces groups to them. In short, they said, go ahead and think and tomorrow come and report your ideas. The adviser to the security brigade commander Col.Popyshev also received a mission to develop his own alternative plan of operations as a person who knew the Palace security system well. And with that they parted.

They made decisions all night. They calculated long and meticulously. They understood that this was a real mission and the reason that they were here and came to the conclusion: if they take two companies and one company (less a platoon) out of the battalion, which Gen. Kirpichenko warned about, then they could not seize the Palace, even considering his reinforcements and the factor of surprise. The correlation of men and equipment was 1:15 in favor of the Afghans...All the men and equipment of the battalion needed to be in action although they were obviously also insufficient. There were 520 men in the battalion plus a company of paratroopers (80 men), and also two groups, "Zenit" and "Grom", of 24 men each. According to various estimates the Afghans had more than 2,500 men alone active in Palace security. And next to them were located an anti-aircraft artillery regiment and a construction regiment. The chief reliance was made on the surprise and the daring of the operations. A plan was developed proceeding from this [calculation]. The battalion chief of staff Ashurov entered this plan on a map with an explanatory note.

On the morning of 24 December Col. Popyshev was first to report. From his very first words it became clear that he had approached his mission only perfunctorily according to the "what would you like?" principle, since it was not he who had to carry out the mission. He argued that that the men and equipment allotted were sufficient but he could not confirm his statements with figures. Then Col. Kolesnik reported the decision to seize the Taj-Bek Palace. He justified the necessity for the entire battalion with all the attached men and equipment to take part in the assault and described the plan of operations in detail. After long discussion they told the battalion command: "Wait". They had to wait quite a long time. The leaders of the operation did not know then whether there would be promised reinforcements or not. Gen. Kirpichenko called Kryuchkov in Moscow and was interested in how this issue was being decided. The latter assured him that an airborne division would arrive as reinforcement.

According to Sergey Popov, an officer of group "A":

Part of the guys of our antiterrorism subunit had gone to Afghanistan earlier but the principle of secrecy held and we did not know much about this. When the mission was given to our group to fly to Afghanistan the leaders of the subunit selected the candidates for the trip themselves. Gennadiy Zudin should not have flown but they convinced Robert Petrovich Ivon to include him in the list.

We warned relatives that we were going to Yaroslavl' Oblast for exercises and possibly we would not be in Moscow for New Year's. We received special forces summer uniforms, winter fur [uniforms], equipment, and attaché cases with weapons. An entire day was spent in assemblies. We arrived at the airfield the next morning. When we climbed the ramp to the plane we were photographed. Having noticed this the representative of the Special Department took the camera from the photographer and exposed the film. An order was given that we were should fly inconspicuously. The issue of secrecy remained very rigid.

When we crossed the Soviet border in flight we heard an order to prepare our weapons and be ready for any surprises on landing; possibly we would have to go into combat immediately.

We landed at Bagram at night. We were met there by our guys from the groups of Yuriy Izotov and Valentin Shergin who were guarding the new government of Afghanistan in hardstands...

Only in the second half of 24 December was Kolesnik informed that the decision had been approved and that the battalion would carry out the mission in full strength with the reinforcements. But none of the leaders in Afghanistan at that time had signed this plan. It was obvious that already the vicious practice was formed of leaders giving verbal orders and then denying their own words. They simply said, "Act!" Thus they had to go into battle without a written order. Such "activity" acquired its widest usage in Gorbachev's time.

Major Khalbayev began right away to carry out the first-priority measures of preparing for the assault while Col. Gen. Magometov and Col. Kolesnik were summoned for talks with Headquarters [trans. note: Moscow]. What caused the delay became clear only much later.

The problem was that Marshal Ustinov was holding a meeting of the command staff of the Defense Ministry at this time in Moscow at which he announced the decision made by the CC CPSU Politburo to deploy troops to Afghanistan. At the meeting were deputies to the Minister, the commanders-in-chief of the branches of the Armed Forces and the Commanding General of the Airborne Troops, and several chiefs of main and central directorates. The Defense Ministry issued the order to deploy an airborne division and an independent airborne regiment of the Airborne Troops, a motorized rifle division of the Turkestan Military District, and an independent motorized rifle regiment of the Central Asian Military District to Afghanistan. At the same time the order was given to bring a number of formations and units of the Ground Forces into full combat readiness as well as aviation units of military districts bordering the DRA for a possible increase in the size of the grouping of Soviet forces in Afghanistan. On the copy of the points of the speech at this meeting preserved in the General Staff Archives there is a notation in red pencil made by Ustinov: "Special importance and secrecy."

By that time a total of about 100 formations, units, and installations had been deployed, including the HQ of the 40<sup>th</sup> Army; a composite air corps; four motorized rifle divisions (three in the Turkestan Military District and one in the Central Asian Military District); artillery, surface-to-air missile, and airborne assault brigades; independent motorized rifle and missile artillery regiments; and signals, intelligence, logistics, and repair units. An airborne division, an independent airborne regiment, and airfield technical and airfield support units were brought up to full strength.

More than 50,000 officers, sergeants, and soldiers were called up from the reserves to bring units up to strength and about 8,000 vehicles were sent from the economy...Mobilization measures of such scale had never before been conducted in the Turkestan and Central Asian Military Districts. Accordingly, local governments, directors of enterprises and farms [*khozyaystva*], draft boards, and military units turned out not to be prepared for them.

For example, during the first days of mobilization no one paid attention to the quality of the specialists filling out the subunits – everyone was confident that the usual inspection was being done and everything would end after reports of its conclusion. But when the commanders and draft boards were notified about possible further operations there began an emergency replacement of reservists already called up and sent to units. A keen shortage of scarce specialists (tank and BMP driver-mechanics, anti-tank guided missile and radar operators, and gunners [of artillery pieces]). Such a situation is explained by the fact due to poor knowledge of the Russian language soldiers from the Central Asian republics, as a rule, served out their draft obligation in construction or motorized rifle units where they could not acquire the required specialties.

A great number of the reservists were not found because of poor recordkeeping in draft boards, violations of the residential passport system, confusion in street names...Many reservists avoided receiving [call-up] notices under various pretenses, fleeing their places of residence [or] presenting false certifications of illness. Many reserve officers never had served in the army and had no practical skills in military specialties – they had trained in military departments of higher educational institutions. In short, the troops encountered a whole series of serious problems in their first months in Afghanistan and during the war this was always fraught with unforeseeable consequences.

But all the same, in spite of difficulties, by the end of 24 December the main forces of the 40<sup>th</sup> Army were somehow prepared for deployment to Afghanistan. The formations and units designated to operate as a reserve force continued to be formed. For example, the 201<sup>st</sup> [Motorized Rifle] Division stationed in Dushanbe (commanded by Colonel Vladimir Stepanov) began to mobilize only on the evening of 24 December. Having received their mobilization equipment over the period of three days and completed a march, by the end of 28 December it had formed up in Termez. The decision was made to bring the division's personnel up to strength from units of the Group of Soviet Forces in Germany and the Central Group of Forces. The registered reservists [*pripisnoy sostav*] were replaced during January and at the end of the month the 201<sup>st</sup> MSD was deployed to the northern regions of the DRA.

Here is the opinion of Yevgeniy Chazov:

It seems to me that the only mistake he made and did not recognize until the end was the Afghan war. A poor politician and diplomat, as a representative of the old Stalinist "guard" thought that all issues could be decided from a position of strength. While I saw how Andropov rushed about in connection with the Afghan war and who understood his mistake in the end, Ustinov always remained imperturbable and evidently was convinced of his correctness.

Varennikov also thinks the Defense Ministry played the leading role in making the decision to deploy troops to Afghanistan. It should be said that the attitude in the army toward Ustinov was ambiguous in military matters. [While] admiring his services in organizing and running the defense industry, they had a skeptical attitude toward him as a military leader. Is it possible that the Defense Ministry wanted to demonstrate his resolution by this action?

Directive N° 312/12/001 signed by Ustinov and Ogarkov and sent to the field on 24 December 1979 enumerated specific missions for the deployment to Afghanistan. In particular, they explained:

The latest appeal of the government of Afghanistan has been favorably considered considering the military-political situation in the Middle East. The decision has been made to deploy several contingents of Soviet troops stationed in the southern regions of the country to the territory of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan in order to give international aid to the friendly Afghan people and also to create favorable conditions to interdict possible anti-Afghan actions from neighboring countries...<sup>17</sup>

[Translator's note: Previously published in "Plamya Afgana, Iskon, Moscow, 1999, p. 153 and previously translated]

The troops were further given the missions of marching to and accommodations in Afghanistan. Participation in combat operations was not envisioned. Specific combat missions to suppress rebel resistance were given to formations and units only a bit later in Defense Directive N° 312/12/002 of 27 December.

Having familiarized himself with the Directive, Marshal Sokolov told a Deputy Chief of the General Staff's Main Operations Directorate, Lt.General German Burutin: "Eloquently written, it says nothing; everything in it is in order but it doesn't say WHEN you can use weapons."

Very little time was devoted to carrying out all the measures associated with the deployment of troops to the DRA – less than a day. Such haste could not have failed to have subsequently had a negative effect. Much turned out to be unready and not well thought out, which led to additional losses.

...S. Magometov and V. Kolesnik were summoned to the government communications telephone by Akhromeyev. They arrived at the field telephone station which had been set up in the "Klub-eh-Askari" Stadium not far from the American Embassy. It was the evening of 24 December. They entered the government communications telephone booth and started to call S. Akhromeyev. The operator refused to connect Col. Kolesnik for a long time because "he was not on the special lists" but then she connected them all the same, apparently having asked Akhromeyev beforehand. Akhromerev ordered them to report their decision. Having heard them out he began to ask questions about its justification and estimates. He was interested in the smallest details. In the course of the conversation he made comments and gave orders. Then Magometov talked with Akhromeyev. He was given the

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid. f. 48, op. 3570, d. 6. [Translator's note: Previously published in "Plamya Afgana, Iskon, Moscow 1999, p. 253 and previously translated]

mission of reporting the decision by the morning of 25 December over two signatures (his and Kolesnik's). When they were leaving the telephone booth Magometov said to Kolesnik: "Well, Colonel, this will now make you or break you."

They wrote the report right there and the cable was sent by 0200. They went to the embassy together but then Kolesnik hurried off to the battalion. He had to prepare to carry out the combat mission... He had been appointed commander of the operation by the Defense Ministry which gave it the codename "Shtorm-333."

Command of KGB special subunit operations had been entrusted to Gen. Yu. Drozdov, the Chief of the Directorate of Illegal Intelligence. Yuriy Andropov and Vladimir Kryuchkov pointed out to him by government communications telephone the necessity of thinking everything through down to the details, the main thing being to ensure the safety of the participants of the operation. In reply to Kryuchkov's question: "Can someone else be sent?", Andropov replied, "We'll handle it ourselves." But Lt. General Boris Ivanovich, who was present at the conversation, asked that Col. Grigoriy Boyarinov, the Chief of the Advanced Officers' Training Courses, command and coordinate the operations of the special forces groups, which was also done.

According to Valeriy Yemyshev, an officer of group "A":

After the first group led by Valentin Shergin was sent to Afghanistan at the beginning of December there was some tension in the group; many thought that the matter was not limited to this, but no one knew anything specifically.

On the morning of 22 December Robert Petrovich Ivon called me; he was then the acting subunit commander since Colonel Gennadiy Nikolayevich Zaytsev was in the hospital. He turned to me as secretary of the Party organization and said that a team of 30 men were needed to carry out a mission in Afghanistan. They had to fly out the next day; the specific mission would be given on the spot. Major Mikhail Romanov was the commander of the group being sent but he himself would remain on site.

I went to the subunit right away. Part of the people had already gathered there. They were coordinate the list. They began to prepare for the flight. They prepared all night and in the morning they flew to Afghanistan from Chkalovskiy Airfield [outside Moscow] on a Tu-134 which, I was told, was Andropov's personal aircraft. They first landed in Gur'yev and then Tashkent to refuel. Upon arrival in Bagram they quartered us in hardstands and tents. We met there with our guys who were guarding the future rulers of Afghanistan. Yuriy Izotov requested three men of our group. Romanov gave him Chudesnov, Vinogradov, and Savel'yev. They spent the night in Bagram and in the morning they put us in busses and went to Kabul.

Soldiers from the "Grom" group were setting the sights of their weapons; still, there were the mountainous conditions and a new climate. They brought up the gear, bulletproof vests, and helmets. They had sewn additional pockets into the Afghan uniforms in order to put grenades and weapons magazines [in them] more comfortably. According to Romanov, commander of the "Grom" group:

They moved to the Embassy in Kabul, where they stayed until the evening of 24 December. I received a specific mission – relocate to the area where Amin's external security force was and remain there for further instructions.

We ended up a kilometer from the Palace and could see it well. A convincing structure with strong walls. A real fortress standing on a high ground...

They joined up with the "Zenit" special forces group which was located in another place, next to the Palace. This was also a Committee [KGB] subunit, formed through First Main Directorate channels. Good guys. I became good friends with the commander of the group, Yasha Semenov. We had a password then: "Yasha" – "Misha", and the response "Misha" – "Yasha". There were not many of us – about 25.

And according to "Grom" officer Sergey Golov:

In Kabul they quartered us in an unfinished barracks next to the Taj-Bek Palace. We started trying to equip the place somehow because December is a quite severe month in the Afghan capital

although this is a southern country. For example, in order to wash ourselves in the morning we had to first break ice in rubber basins.

Then they issued us Afghan uniforms of coarse camel's hair wool fabric. Neither I nor Lesha Bayev could get a uniform of the right size at first, but then they stretched it (it stretches well) and we were barely able to put them on. We got acquainted with the guys from the "Zenit" group; we then had to attack the Palace together.

...Having returned from the Embassy at 0300 25 December to the battalion's location, Col. Kolesnik supervised preparations for the combat operations to seize the Palace. Lt. Col. Shvets gave him active assistance. The operations plan envisioned seizure of the defensive sectors by three companies at the designated time (initially the operation was scheduled for 25 December; the assault on the Palace was then postponed to 27 December); they were not to permit Afghan battalions (three infantry and one tank) to advance toward the Taj-Bek Palace. The company of Sr. Lt. Kurban Amangel'dyev was to act against the infantry battalion situated south of the Palace. The company of Capt. Ismat Kudratov covered from the north (tank and infantry battalions were located here); the paratrooper company of Sr. Lt. Valeriy Vostrotin was to act from the east. Also, a "Fagot" anti-tank guided missile platoon and an AGS-17 grenade launcher platoon were arrayed against the [Afghan] tank battalion. The operations of these companies were supported with the fire of two "Shilka"'s [anti-aircraft guns]. Lt.Col. Shvets was designated the one responsible for this sector. One more company of the "Muslim" battalion (commanded by Vladimir Sharipov) and the platoon of Lt. Rustam Tursunkulov were designated to support the direct assault on the Palace. The special KGB groups "Grom" (led by Mikhail Romanov) and "Zenit" (led by Yakov Semenov) were to act in concert with them. They, too, were supported by two "Shilkas." Part of the men of the "Muslim" battalion were supposed to seize and disarm the anti-aircraft and construction regiments located not far from Taj-Bek. They also provided for security and reserve forces.

One of the most important missions was the seizure of three Afghan tanks dug in south of the Palace which held all the approaches to Taj-Bek in their sights. A group of 15 men (including tank specialists) were allotted for this mission headed by deputy battalion commander Capt. Makhmud Sakhatov. It also included four snipers from KGB special subunits. The success of the operation depended on these actions to a large degree. They began first. The battalion command well knew that the mission could be carried out only if surprise and military stratagems were employed. Otherwise, no one would come out alive.

According to Gen. Yuriy Drozdov the paratroopers were distinguished by their bearing, smart appearance, organization, and discipline. I want to especially talk about Valeriy Vostrotin himself. There were many legendary commanders, sergeants, and soldiers during the "Afghan" war who were examples of bravery, valor, and comradeship. Vostrotin is one of the best. He fought three times in Afghanistan. At first he was a company commander. He was seriously wounded in July 1980. He commanded a battalion. He was wounded again. At the concluding stage of the "Afghan" war he commanded an airborne regiment. He was awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union for displaying courage and heroism.

But this was much later. Then, in order not to provoke suspicion prematurely, they developed a diversionary scenario of events. They started to carry out decoy operations: shooting, going on alert and occupying designated security sectors; deployment... At night they shot off illumination flares. They warmed up the armored personnel carrier and BMP [infantry combat] engines on schedule and moved them from place to place. At first this caused concern from the command of the Palace security brigade. For example, the first time the flares were launched the battalion's position was momentarily illuminated by the searchlights of the anti-aircraft regiment and Major Jandad arrived. They explained to him that routine combat training was going on, they were practicing guarding the Palace and they were illuminating the area in order to preclude the possibility of a rebel attack.

The Afghans subsequently regarded such actions more calmly but requested that the engines not "make so much noise" as it was disturbing Amin's sleep. The battalion commander and "Major Kolesov" themselves visited the brigade commander more than once and calmed him down. But the "maneuvers" of the battalion continued on the 25<sup>th</sup>, 26<sup>th</sup>, and the first half of the 27<sup>th</sup> of December. They thus ensured the surprise of the special forces personnel's operations.

Only Kolesnik, Shvets, and Khalbayev in the battalion knew the new mission. The KGB special subunits were also preparing to assault Taj-Bek. The signal to begin the operation in Kabul was the demolition of the “communications lines conduit.” According to Aleksey Polyakov, who headed the “Zenit” group in Kabul:

*The responsibility for sabotaging the lines of communications was entrusted to me personally by KGB Chairman Yu. V. Andropov. There were 15 reconnaissance saboteurs and KGB officers in the diversion group besides me.*

[Translator’s note: The Russian root “divers-“ can apply to both sabotage and diversionary operations and is translated here as best suits the context]

*In starting to carry out the mission we first of all tried to identify the place in the Kabul communications system which was most vulnerable and easily accessible and also would not require much time to place an explosive device to obtain a great effect from the diversion.*

*A Soviet communications specialist was found through security officer Bakhturin with whose aid we managed to determine the location of the central line communications center. The long-distance and local communications lines were laid out from this center which had their source in a specially-constructed bunker or, to put it more simply, conduit. The entire communications system in Kabul had been organized under the supervision of West German specialists and therefore the arrangement of this conduit and the principle of the cable distribution in it were a mystery to us.*

*They began with scouting this conduit. It was situated 5-6 meters from the communications center building right on a sidewalk but the entrance to the center was on the opposite side. Opposite the conduit, across the road, was an Afghan bank and 30-50 meters away at a street intersection was a traffic control post, but in front of the conduit, along our travel route, was a hotel (about 100-120 meters [away]). There were no other residential structures near the conduit. However the conduit was under constant observation by the communications center security post. This imposed additional difficulties.*

*A brief visual survey gave this result: the conduit hatch was covered by a rectangular concrete slab about 10 cm thick with four holes which initially appeared to us that they should go all the way through. But it turned out in fact the holes in the slab did not go through. In the process of further surveillance they had to use an elementary method such as depicting smoke around the conduit. In this regard I took a handkerchief with Afghan coins from my pocket along with a lighter. With the set of coins I determined the diameter of the openings, their depth, and, what is interesting, the holes were not strictly aligned vertically but at an angle of about 15 cm from one another.*

*There was a guy in the detachment nicknamed “Kulibin” [Valeriy Volokh] – author’s note). On arrival at the villa I summoned him and told him about the situation. “Kulibin” did not let us down. On the second or third day he brought in two tongs which he had fashioned in the Soviet Embassy repair shop. We had to test them in action. We needed to find an analogous conduit in Kabul to do this. Such a conduit was soon found on the edge of the Afghan capital.*

*The entire diversionary group actually drove to the site of the conduit’s local in the dark in three UAZ [military transport] vehicles. Unexpectedly two taxis formed up with us in the center of Kabul and started to follow persistently. We figured: surveillance was sitting on our tail. What were we to do?*

*Along the route near the conduit in question was a small store near which we stopped under the pretext of buying vegetables or fruit. The taxi drivers also stopped and approached us. We purposely spoke loudly in Russian and distracted the taxi drivers while the reconnaissance personnel tested the tongs. They turned out to be necessary. After testing our “diversionary” instrument we made further plans for the diversion and began to implement them. First and foremost, they closely studied all the routes of approach to and withdrawal from the target, the presence of military units and institutions, fixed security posts, traffic control posts, mobile patrols,*



*and also level of vehicle and cart traffic along the way in daytime and nighttime. Then they calculated the time to approach along the routes studied.*

*At the conclusion of the preparatory measures I reported our readiness to carry out the diversion at the assigned target.*

*New unforeseen circumstances unexpectedly appeared. First, a stationary two-man police post appeared around "our" conduit and second, we received information from the Soviet specialist that there was water in the conduit but its depth was not known.*

*They began to calculate the required quantity of explosives for assured destruction of the conduit but then on the recommendation of Ehval'd Kozlov they decided to use the entire 40 kg of explosives available. To forestall attempts by the Afghans to remove our charge from the conduit in case they noticed it we planned to lower a smoke grenade with tear gas into the conduit together with the charge. Thus all the verification and preparatory measures for the diversion were finished.*

*Simultaneously with the work on "our target" we were searching for cable communication lines laid out on the surface in the direction of Amin's residence and the Afghan Army General Staff. Soon the Army communications cable line was discovered. Moreover, we found a metal box about 0.5 m x 1 m through which this cable passed...*

## **SOVIET TROOPS ENTER AFGHANISTAN**

### **How it began...**

The plan of operations for the deployment of our troops which was developed by the General Staff provided for the deployment of two motorized rifle divisions along two axes; the 5<sup>th</sup> from Kushka to Herat and Shindand and the 108<sup>th</sup>, from Termez to Pul-e Khumri and Kunduz. Simultaneously the 103<sup>rd</sup> Airborne Division and the rest of the 345<sup>th</sup> Parachute Regiment landed at Kabul and Bagram airfields.

On the night of 24 December the Commanding General of the Turkestan Military District Col. Gen. Yuriy Maksimov reported to Ustinov and Akhromeyev by telephone regarding the readiness of the troops to carry out the assigned mission and then sent them a cable with a readiness report.

Beginning at 0700 25 December two pontoon bridge regiments in the area of Termez began to lay a floating pontoon bridge. Troops and equipment were to cross over this very bridge... The Commanding General of the 40<sup>th</sup> Army Lt. Gen. Tukharinov met in Kunduz with the Chief of the Operations Directorate of the DRA Armed Forces General Staff Gen. Babajan and Abdullah, the elder brother of Amin.

At 1200 a directive came to the field signed by Ustinov. It ordered the crossing and overflight of the DRA border by the troops of the 40<sup>th</sup> Army and aircraft of the Air Forces to begin at 1500 25 December (Moscow time).

The deployment of Soviet troops began precisely at the set time. The first to cross were scouts and the airborne assault battalion of Capt. Leonid Khabarov, who were ordered to seize the Salang Pass; next the remaining units of the 108<sup>th</sup> Motorized Rifle Division under the command of Maj. Gen. Konstantin Kuz'min came across the pontoon bridge. Simultaneously, Military Transport Aviation aircraft began the airlift and debarkation of the units of the 103<sup>rd</sup> Airborne Division (commanded by Maj. Gen. Ivan Ryabchenko) and the remnants of the 345<sup>th</sup> Independent Parachute Regiment at the airfields of the capital and Bagram.

Three hundred forty-three sorties were made to carry the personnel and equipment and it took 47 hours to unload the Airborne Forces units and subunits (the first plane landed at 1625 25 December and the last at 1430 27 December). Col. Gen. [of Aviation] Ivan Gaydayenko supervised Military Transport Aviation operations. Unfortunately they were not without losses – at 1933 on 25 December an Il-76 struck a mountain and exploded

while coming in for a landing at Kabul (the crew commander was Captain Golovchin); 37 paratroopers were on board. All the paratroopers and seven crew members died.

A meeting of chiefs of advisory bodies was held on 25 December. In the course of the briefing all the advisers received orders – do not allow Afghan units to act against our troops in Kabul. Military advisers and specialists who had worked in the DRA Air Defense Forces established control over all anti-aircraft equipment and ammunition storage locations in order to prevent possible hostile actions by Afghan servicemen during the airlift of the airborne troops. They even took several anti-aircraft installations out of service temporarily (they removed sights and [firing] locks). Thus, the unhindered landing of aircraft with paratroopers was ensured.

A group of officers worked around the clock in the USSR Armed Forces General Staff which followed the situation and the fulfillment of the measures to deploy Soviet troops, prepared reports, and made suggestions to Varennikov; the latter, in turn, reported to the leadership of the Defense Ministry and the CC CPSU.

The Defense Minister was vitally interested in the progress of the fulfillment of the assigned mission. Ustinov summoned the deputy chief of the lead directorate of the Main Operations Directorate Gen. German Burutin to his office and studied the situation for an hour, asking for clarifications: “Why are troops going across the pontoon bridge so slowly? They reported to me that they would be going much faster. . . How much time can the paratroopers hold out in Kabul if there is active resistance on the part of Afghan troops loyal to Amin?”

Improvised meetings arose in the course of the march of the combat columns (when they stopped at population centers). Many residents greeted Soviet soldiers with flowers. Soldiers of the DRA army and members of the Committees to Defend the Revolution were especially friendly to us.

On 26 December a combat collaboration meeting was held in Pul-e Khomri where our troops and the troops of the [Afghan] 10<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment of the 20<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division were present. In their speeches the Afghan servicemen expressed gratitude for the international aid and readiness for collaboration. They chanted slogans of Soviet-Afghan friendship.

But it was not so everywhere. Some Afghans regarded the appearance of Soviet troops with suspicion and did not enter into contact with them. There were also displays of hostility. Our troops began to come under fire from individual detachments of the armed opposition. But the General Staff Directive did not specify the procedure and conditions for the use of weapons and they were forced to return fire.

For example, on the morning of 26 December at the Salang Pass a group of rebels attacked subunits of the airborne assault battalion of Capt. Khabarov. The commander of a reconnaissance patrol, Lt. Nikolay Krotov, died while repelling this attack. A motorized rifle regiment under the command of Lt. Col. Viktor Kudlay en route from Khorog to Fayzabad was constantly subjected to attack by small groups of rebels who destroyed the only road in the mountains and obstructed traffic. As a result [the regiment] made only 10 km a day.

On 26 December the CC CPSU General Secretary held a meeting at his dacha in which Andropov, Ustinov, Gromyko, and Chernenko participated. They discussed the progress of implementation of CC CPSU Decree N° P176/125 of 12 December. Chernenko made the record of this meeting.

**DOCUMENT**

Top Secret

Ref N° P176/125 of 12 December 1979

On 26 December (Cdes. L. I. Brezhnev, D. F. Ustinov, A. A. Gromyko, Yu. V. Andropov, and K. U. Chernenko were present at the dacha) the progress of implementation of CC CPSU Decree N° P 176/125 of 12.12.79 was reported by Cdes. Ustinov, Gromyko, and Andropov.

Cde. L. I. Brezhnev, having approved the plan of action in this matter scheduled for the time being by the comrades, expressed a number of wishes.

It was recognized as advisable that the CC Politburo Commission is to act with the same membership and direction of the reported plan, carefully weighing each step of its actions. Proposals are to be submitted to the CC CPSU in a timely manner.

[signature] K. Chernenko

N° 13-op (1 page)  
27.12.79

At that time much was not clear about what plan they were implementing. If it had consisted solely of removing H. Amin from power then the deployment of troops would have been sufficient but if they were to stick to the official version then they were obviously too few to repel external interference.

The units of the 108<sup>th</sup> Motorized Rifle Division were to have occupied temporary bases in the areas of Doshi, Pul-e Khomri, Kunduz, and Taloqan. But in the process of the march the mission was changed and the division was sent to an area northeast of Kabul where they had formed up by the morning of 28 December.

### **The Operation in Kabul**

The operations plan in Kabul provided for the seizure of the most important facilities: the Taj-Bek Palace, the CC PDPA buildings, the DRA Ministries of Defense, Internal Affairs (tsarandoy), Foreign Affairs, and Communications, the General Staff, the HQ of the Air Forces and the HQ of the Central Army Corps, military counterintelligence, the political prison in Pol-e Charki, the radiotelevision center, the post and telegraph office, ... It was planned to blockade Afghan units and DRA Armed Forces formations located in the capital at the same time.

What happened then in Kabul has long remained a secret to the world. Many various opinions have been expressed and the most improbable rumors and conjecture have been floated. Soviet leaders categorically denied their participation in this action, saying that it was done at the hands of "healthy" forces of the PDPA. And only after the Soviet Union was no longer was much made clear. But not everything.

For history is a prediction of the past and even documents do not always give a true picture. Moreover, many documents written by hand in single copy have already been destroyed. Only the people who participated in those events know in fact what and how it was there. One can draw a general picture of those events from the accounts of the leaders and participants of the operation to seize the important facilities in Kabul, although they interpret them differently even now. It has been said for a long time they did not have the right to say anything about the operation in Kabul and that for many years they were weighed down by a psychological burden. Some who have something to conceal do not want to recall it and are silent. Others at times give accounts which, to put it politely, are far from reality. Everything is washed in memory and sometimes all that is left is what was said many times when it was impossible to tell the truth. Telling either a half-truth or generally a fabrication some believe it themselves. When it became possible to tell the truth it became somehow uncomfortable for them to reject their previous words and for many, disadvantageous. For their accounts are subjective, often contradict one another, and are based on conjecture and unverified facts. Much has been said incompletely or generally omitted. Several participants of those events are no longer alive. In the memoirs of soldiers there is the personal perception of what occurred, their view of the picture of battle, also an evaluation of the role of each in this operation. Not having information and not knowing the overall situation many thought that there were only a small handful of soldiers, who were actually suicide soldiers. Strange as it may seem, but among some such a feeling has remained until now, although it is now known, that there were considerable forces in the Afghan capital by the start of the operation: an airborne division, the "Muslim" battalion, subunits of the 345<sup>th</sup> Independent Parachute Regiment, and military advisers. Of all the officers and soldiers practically none of them knew the entire operations plan but each operated in his own narrow sector, actually in the role of an ordinary soldier. Therefore each of them had his own "target", his own "bit" of the battle, his own "window", his own "door", his own "breastwork", his own "stage [*prolet*]", his own "ladder", and his own "episode". For a majority of them this was their "baptism of fire", the first battle in their lives. Hence the gush of emotions in memories, the "clustering" of colors. Having ended up in an extreme situation each of them showed what he was worth and what he had done. Many performed their combat mission with honor, displaying heroism and courage.

In the opinion of Yu. I. Drozdov: “The decision that was made on 27 December was an improbably difficult decision. This decision matured over a number of months. It was the result of an analysis of the historic and intelligence information and the actions of neighboring states by the highest political leadership of the country”.

### **The Preparations to Storm Taj-Bek Palace**

The most difficult and important target to be seized was the Taj-Bek Palace. On the evening of 25 December a reception was held in the “Muslim” battalion for the command of the Afghan brigade. They prepared a pilaf; it is true there were problems with the alcoholic drinks. The KGB officers helped out. They brought in a box of “Posol’skoy” vodka, cognac, various delicacies (caviar, fish) – the cuisine turned out beautifully.

There were 15 people from the security brigade including Commander Jandad and the Deputy for Political Affairs Ruzi. During the reception [we] tried to get the Afghans to talk. Toasts were raised to Soviet-Afghan friendship, combat collaboration... Sometimes soldiers serving the reception served Soviet officers water instead of vodka. The deputy for political affairs was especially talkative; in the spirit of openness he told “Captain Lebedev” that Taraki had been smothered on Amin’s order. This was important information. Jandad quickly gave an order and the deputy for political affairs left for somewhere... We parted, if not as friends, at least as good acquaintances.

On the evening of the same day General Drozdov held a meeting with commanders of the KGB sabotage reconnaissance groups regarding the results of reconnoitering the targets and determined the location for each of them during the seizure of Taj-Bek. Everyone was ready. Only the layout of the Palace was lacking.

The next day the advisers to Amin’s personal guard, officers of the KGB 9<sup>th</sup> Directorate, led the scout-saboteurs into the Palace where they surveyed everything, and Yu. Drozdov compiled a story-by-story layout of Taj-Bek. However, at his request the adviser to the brigade commander Yuriy Kutepov refused a request to reduce the Palace guard.

Officers of “Grom” and “Zenit” Romanov, Semenov, Fedoseyev, and Mazayev surveyed the terrain and nearby firing positions. Not far from the Palace on a vantage point was a restaurant (casino) where senior officers of the Afghan army frequently congregated. The special forces visited there under the pretext of needed to book New Year’s reservations for our officers. From there Taj-Bek was clearly visible and they looked over all the approaches to it and the locations of all the security posts carefully. The truth is, it almost ended tragically for them. According to Romanov: *“Yasha and I were taken prisoner before the operation itself. The problem was that we had no information about the Palace and not done any scouting but it was necessary to go into battle. You don’t lead people blindly. I selected a “GAZ-66” [truck] and took Mazayev and Fedoseyev with me. However an Afghan security battalion disarmed us and took us prisoner. The situation was dramatic and the group could have been left without commanders. The whole operation had been put in jeopardy only because we wanted to see with our own eyes where the tanks, firing positions, etc. were.*

*A road led past the Palace into the mountains. In the mountains there was a famous exclusive restaurant with a swimming pool. According to the cover story I, the subunit commander, was inviting the officers to a New Year’s party and wanted to reserve a table. We made our way there and noted everything that was necessary. The restaurant was closed.*

*They took us to a room and suggested we await our fate. Our driver spoke some Dari and I advised him: “Listen. If there’s anything, advise us”.*

*We said to the Afghans through the driver that we were wasting time, let’s see the restaurant and what service you offer. They called the restaurant owner. We selected the appliances, the glassware, and ordered a menu for 20 people. As a result they believed us. Well, we also worked out arguments that we were guarding Amin... The truth is, they tried to check this.*

*I wasn’t using my surname, nor was Yasha, it seems. But he had a document that he was in Amin’s guard but I had no other documentation besides my officer’s badge. I had nothing to present and this deepened suspicion. My nerves were on edge for we were already in position with our groups and there were only hours left until the operation and we were here... But evidently fate took pity on us and we got out somehow”. Actually, because of their independent*

action the commanders of the s almost put the entire operation in jeopardy. From the account of Vladimir Fedoseyev about this same episode: *“On 26 December Mikhail Mikhaylovich, Zhenya Mazayev, Yakov Semenov, and I went to do some reconnoitering since there was information that a “wild” division was preparing to advance on the location of Amin’s palace in his defense. It was already clear that we would take part in one or another measure in the assault on the Palace. We left early in the morning about 8 and passed one guard post but they stopped us at the second; we talked with the Afghans a bit and they let us pass on. The cover story for the trip was that we were going to the restaurant located above to buy provisions for the New Year. And we accordingly invited [them]. I don’t know whether the Afghans caught on to the ruse or whether indeed they weren’t born yesterday but they didn’t say anything and gave us the opportunity to pass onward. The restaurant turned out to be closed. We turned around and began to go back but when we approached the second guard post an Afghan army officer invited us in as a guest and we spent about four hours there with him talking about life and drinking tea. There were attempts to take our weapons but at that moment we had AK-74’s which we liked very much and naturally we didn’t hand the weapon to them. Tension was quite high. As soon as we got approval to leave this guard post we breathed a sigh of relief. We passed the next guard post without stopping. We arrived back at our place in the subunit safely”*. The cover story under which they had gone to the restaurant did not stand up to any criticism since it was in complete contradiction with local conditions and Afghan reality. The problem was that Soviets never visited the restaurant and Afghans celebrate New Year’s on a completely different date – 21 March.

The same day Kozlov, Karpukhin, Boyarinov, Shvachko, and Klimov brought in two representatives of the future government of Afghanistan from the Embassy to the “Muslim” battalion’s location.

Klimov recalled: *“Right before the assault we brought in future members of the Afghan government to the location of the “Muslim” battalion. Ehval’d Kozlov, Boyarinov, Karpukhin, Shvachko, and I took part in this operation. They issued weapons and grenades to us. I got in the vehicle right away and began to screw the fuses into the grenades. Kolya Shvachko and Boyarinov were in the back seat with me with Karpukhin and the driver in front.*

*We drove to the Soviet Embassy at about 7 P.M. in two Jeeps. We arrived at the Embassy and had to wait. All the senior officers, our leaders, got out of the Jeeps but we remained as escorts. We had to wait quite a long time. At about 11:00 or 11:30 P.M. we again went to the “Muslim” battalion’s area. We went back in a single column. A single Jeep was at the front and back and in the middle was a truck with Soviet license tags. In general it was an ordinary “heated truck” – a duct protruded and there was a little window in the back in which some faces appeared from time to time. We had to pass several Afghan security posts and stop at each of them. We were very tense and ready for immediate action because they said that in case it was necessary to force our way through we should open fire and not stop. We were carrying two leaders of the future Afghanistan under the floor and therefore if they had been stopped at the posts and their identity then discovered our fate would have been somewhat different.*

*The most difficult situation developed at the last security post in front of the entrance to the grounds adjacent to the Taj-Bek Palace. For about ten minutes the officer who was the post commander detained us in front of the traffic control barrier. We sat and observed, ready to enter into combat at any moment. Evidently it was a special post. It was well reinforced and under cover of tanks. So in that case our small group would have been in a tight spot there. The officer didn’t let our vehicles through for a long time. He was saying something to Kozlov through an interpreter and then went into a room and evidently began to call on the phone and report to someone. All this time our nervous tension was increasing but an expenditure of energy was improbable. Finally the traffic barrier was raised and our vehicles passed without inspection in any event. Obviously the Afghans did not want to spoil relations with the “Shuravi [Soviets]” and they displayed caution. But this carelessness, as during the assault on the Palace – put them in a corridor with a machine gun and it could cut us all down – helped us. In any event, there is a God.*

*Then M. Romanov assigned Kolya Shvachko and I to guard them [the future Afghan leaders]. They lived in a room next to our barracks. No one except us we allowed to go there so that no one find out about their presence. We carried food to them, played checkers, etc. We guarded them for a couple of days and then took part in the assault in Amin’s palace”*.

Late in the evening Kolesnik, Drozdov, and Shvets again discussed all the subtleties of the operations to seize Taj-Bek, devoting special attention to issues of coordination and command and control. Constant agent and visual observation was set up inside and outside the target.

Before the start of operation “Shtorm-333” the KGB special forces knew the target to be seized (Taj-Bek) thoroughly: the most suitable approach routes; the sentries’ routine; the overall strength of the guard force and Amin’s bodyguards; the location of machine gun “nests”, armored vehicles, and tanks; the internal structure of the rooms and mazes of the Palace; the location of the radiotelephone...

Before assaulting the Palace, as I have already said, the KGB was to have exploded a “conduit”, in actuality the central secure center for communications with the most important DRA military and government facilities. The scaling ladders, equipment, weapons, and ammunition were prepared. The combat equipment was also carefully inspected and prepared under the supervision of the Deputy Battalion Commander for Technical Affairs Senior Lieutenant Eduard Ibragimov. The main thing was secrecy and stealth.

The Taj-Bek Palace was located on a high steep hill overgrown with trees and shrubbery and all approaches to it were mined. Only a single road led to it, which was guarded around the clock. The Palace itself was also not an easily accessible structure. Its thick walls were capable of withstanding an artillery strike. If you add to that that the surrounding terrain was within range of tanks and large-caliber machine guns then it becomes clear that it was not at all easy to seize it.

On the morning of 27 December Drozdov and Kolesnik in an old Russian custom before battle washed themselves in a bathhouse and changed their underwear. A mobile bathhouse was set up for the remaining soldiers. Fresh underwear and striped undershirts [Translator’s note: Soviet special forces and paratroopers wore these distinctive undershirts] were issued. Each of them again reported their readiness to their commander. Boris Ivanov got in touch with Moscow and reported that everything was ready for the operation and then handed the phone to Yuriy Drozdov. Andropov said, “Are you going yourself? Don’t take unnecessary risks, think about your own safety, and take care of your people”. He had a similar conversation with Vasiliy Kolesnik.

At midday Colonel Kolesnik, General Drozdov, and the battalion commander again went visited the positions and informed the officers in the concerned units about the operations plan. Then he explained the order of the operations. Kolesnik ordered that one of the “Shilkas” be moved to a more advantageous position at twilight.

When they were reconnoitering they saw Jandad and a group of officers in their binoculars studying the defense of the “Muslim” battalion. Lt. Col. Shvets went to them to invite them to dinner, supposedly in honor of the birthday of one of the officers, but the brigade commander said that they were conducting an exercise and would come in the evening. Then Shvets asked that the Soviet military advisers be allowed to leave and be taken away with them. He thus saved many lives. After the assault on the Palace Jandad would say: they received information about our intentions [but] didn’t believe it, but decided to reconnoiter in any case ... Obviously they reported to Moscow about the Afghans’ scouting activities. They were told: begin the assault at 1500.

Having received this information they quickly gathered all the company, assault group, and fire support subunit commanders on the second floor of the barracks. General Drozdov gave a favorable assessment of the situation and revealed the overall mission, making an estimate of the Taj-Bek guard force’s men and equipment. Colonel Kolesnik issued a combat order to the subunits, assigning each of them a specific mission, described the procedure of coordination, identification, and signals. Major Khalbayev, the commander of the “Muslim” battalion and the commanders of subgroups Romanov and Semenov assigned combat missions to subunit and subgroup commanders and organized preparations for the assault. All the soldiers were in a determined mood. No one refused to take part in the assault on the Palace. According to Karpukhin, a soldier of the “Grom” group: *“Gennadiy Yegorovich Zudin wrote everything down scrupulously from the beginning before the start of the assault – to whom he gave two grenades, whom he gave three, and how many rounds. But then he spit and said, ‘Yes, go ahead and take all you want’. And we took the entire load of ammunition. There was some aloofness in the man. You know, such a feeling had developed that he would soon leave this life. Zudin was about 10 years older than us and was sort of considered the granddaddy. He was then 42 years old. Probably life experience was telling and evidently a person with years takes situations associated with risk to life more seriously. I didn’t understand this then, but I do now. I wanted all this to end quickly. It was impossible to refuse but by nature this was not the question then although many, it is true, said that it was necessary to talk our commanders out of it saying ‘This is crazy, we can’t do anything and everyone will die there’. I won’t name names as there’s no point in it. Let them all remember this themselves if they wish. I remember it. Of course we understood – it’s possible to say anything you want but you have to do it all the same. And there was no alternative for us because if a decision has been made it needs to be carried out”.*

From the memoirs of Valeriy Yemyshev: *“Mikhail Mikhaylovich gathered all of us together and assigned the mission of assaulting the Palace. They broke us up into crews and each crew was specified an approach route to the building, specific places to attack, and targets in the Palace itself. The mission of my crew was to put the telephone communications on the first floor next to the duty officer’s room out of order. They postponed the start of the assault several times. Before landing I remember that Gennadiy Zudin, Dmitriy Volkov approached and asked for a smoke. I gave Zudin a package of “Dymok” cigarettes and he smoked them all”.*

From the memoirs of Vladimir Fedoseyev: *“When Mikhail Mikhaylovich gathered us together he gave each of us 100 grams of vodka, sausages, and bread. But the mood was so strong that the vodka ran out and no one began to eat the bread and sausages. Afterwards they again formed into crews. I ended up in Balashov’s crew.”*

At that time Hafizullah Amin, not suspecting the events taking shape, was in a state of euphoria because he had managed to achieve his goal – Soviet troops had entered Afghanistan. On 27 December during the day he held a lavish dinner, receiving several Politburo members and ministers with their families in his luxurious Palace; in particular Panjshiri, the wives of Zeray and Shah Wali were present. The formal occasion on one hand was the anniversary of the founding of the PDPA and on the other the return of CC PDPA Secretary Panjshiri from Moscow. He assured them that the Soviet leadership approved the version of the death of Taraki and the replacement of the country’s leader. The visit had strengthened relations with the Soviet Union. They had confirmed in Moscow that the USSR would give broad military aid.

Amin, in spite of the fact that he himself had deceived Brezhnev and Andropov in September (he had promised to save Taraki’s life when the latter had already been suffocated), trusted the Soviet leaders. Why? If you don’t throw out the version that he was tied to the CIA then most likely he received such instructions. Or thought they don’t put victors on trial, they make friends...with them. It’s possible that he did not doubt that “the Russians recognize only force”. In any case he did not only “surround himself” with Soviet military advisers and consult with senior KGB and Soviet Ministry of Defense officials but completely trusted...only doctors from the USSR. And in the final account he rested his hopes on Soviet troops. He did not trust Parchamists and expected an attack from them and from the mujaheddin. But he became a victim of political intrigue from a completely different direction.

At the reception Amin triumphantly told those present: *“Soviet divisions are already on their way here. Paratroopers are landing in Kabul. Everything is going beautifully. I am in constant touch by telephone with Cde. Gromyko and we are discussing together how to best formulate the information to the world about the extension of Soviet military aid.”*

A speech by Amin was expected during the day on Afghan television. The most senior military officers and political leaders had been invited to the Palace to record his speech. But the action carried out by the KGB interfered with this.

During the dinner, which was prepared by Soviet chefs, Amin, his children, sister-in-law [Translator’s note: *nevestka*, which can also mean daughter-in-law], and many guests unexpectedly felt ill. Several lost consciousness, including Amin. His wife immediately summoned the commander of the Presidential guard Major Jandad who began to call the Central Military Hospital (Charsad Bistar) and the Soviet Embassy polyclinic in order to get help. The food and pomegranate juice were immediately sent for testing. Cooks under suspicion were detained. Security was intensified. However the main culprits had already managed to escape.

At 1500 the Soviet Embassy informed Yuriy Drozdov that the time to begin the assault (“H-hour”) had been set at 2200 and then changed to 2100. Later it was periodically confirmed and finally became 1930.

Then, at the request of the Chief of the Main Political Directorate Muhammad Ekbal Waziri and at the insistence of the Chief of the Political Department of the Chief Military Adviser in the DRA General-Major Sergey Tutushkin, Soviet doctors in Kabul, the Chief of the Central Military Hospital of the Afghan army Lieutenant Colonel Weloyat Habibi, and the Chief Surgeon of the Hospital Abdul Kayum Tutahel arrived at the Palace.

When the commander of plastic surgery [khirurgicheskoye usileniye] group of the hospital Colonel Viktor Kuznechenkov and other doctors arrived at the outer guard post, and usual, started to hand over their weapons they

still were searched, which had never been done before. And they were dealt with in a rather harsh manner. Their documents were examined more carefully than usually when entering the Palace and they were searched again. Had something happened?

They understood when they saw people lying and sitting in the entrance hall, on the stair steps, and in the room in unnatural positions. Those who “had come to their senses” were writhing in pain. The doctors decided right away: mass poisoning. They decided to give the victims medical aid but Lieutenant Colonel Weloyat Habibi ran up to them and led them away to Amin. In his words the chief of state was in serious condition. Amin was lying in one of the rooms undressed to his undershorts with his jaw dropped and eyes rolled. He was in a serious coma. Had he died? They felt his pulse – the beating was barely perceptible.

Colonels Viktor Kuznechenkov and Anatoliy Alekseyev, not thinking that they were disrupting any plans, started to save the head of “a country friendly to the USSR”. First they put his jaw in place, then restored breathing. They took him to a bathroom, washed him, and began to pump his stomach and force diuresis. After this they moved him to a bedroom. Injections and again injections, medicine droppers, and needles in the veins of both arms... This work continued until 6 P.M.

They managed to save Amin’s life, but feeling that some alarming events were about to happen, Alekseyev sent the women out of the Palace in a timely manner, referring to the need to do laboratory analyses...

The incident alarmed the officers (Jandad, Ekbal) greatly as they were responsible for protecting the Chairman of the DRA Revolutionary Council. They set up additional (even external) posts comprised of Afghan servicemen and called the tank brigade – have them be ready to help. But they could not expect help from anywhere. Our paratroopers had completely blocked off the Afghan military units located in Kabul.

This is what Vladimir Salkin said about what happened in Kabul, for example: *“In the evening, at about 1830, an order came to brigade commander Ahmad Jan to deploy one battalion to the city. At this time the adviser to the brigade commander Colonel V. N. Pyasetskiy and I were constantly next to the commander. He ordered the commander of the first tank battalion to be in full combat readiness and he would issue the order to leave later. Momentarily the tank engines roared. The first battalion was ready for action. From time to time Pyasetskiy looked at his watch, expecting new orders to the brigade. At 1900 Viktor Nikolayevich himself asked Ahmad Jan to get in touch with his command...However the latter could not call because of a lack of communications.*

*Pyasetskiy advised him to check the status of the telephone wire at the brigade’s base. A signals platoon was quickly summoned and the soldiers started to carefully inspect communications. This took about 30 minutes.*

*...Suddenly four airborne combat vehicles at full speed broke through the gates of the military compound and encircled the brigade HQ building without slowing down. A Soviet captain jumped out of the first vehicle. Entering the building, he presented himself, called Pyasetskiy aside and talked with him. Then he delivered a small flask containing an alcoholic beverage and suggested drinking it. Turning to the brigade commander, the captain said there was trouble in the city and it was inadvisable for the brigade to leave. After consulting, the commander gave a “standdown” order to the first battalion...*”

Quite a bit of time would pass while they shook Amin a long time and, when he came to his senses, asked with surprise, “Why did this happen in my house? Who did it? Was it an accident or sabotage?”

About 6 P.M. Magometov summoned Kolesnik to talk and said: in connection with unforeseen circumstances the time for the assault was postponed and it needed to start as soon as possible. And so they began the operation before the set time. After literally 15-20 minutes the seizure group headed by Captain Sakhatov went in the direction of the hill where the tanks were dug in. Among them were two men each from “Grom” (Dmitriy Volkov and Pavel Klimov) and “Zenit” (Vladimir Tsvetkov and Fedor Yerokhov). The tanks were protected by sentries but their crews were in barracks located 150-200 meters away from them. The KGB officers – Vladimir Tsvetkov from “Zenit” or Dmitriy Volkov” from “Grom” were to shoot the sentries. One company of the “Muslim” battalion laid in a designated area ready to support Sakhatov’s group with effective fire.



Klimov recalled that *“Immediately before the operation some drank vodka, others valerian, but all the same it didn’t help. The excitement and stress was great. For many this was the end of their biographies; everyone understood the danger.*

*I was put in a group of 14 men who were first to carry out their mission. We had two from the “Grom” group (myself and Dima Volkov), two guys from “Zenit”, and two crews of five men each from the “Muslim” battalion.*

*About 20 minutes before the start of the operation we drove in a truck in the direction of one of the security battalions’ barracks, not far from where the tanks were dug in. We had the mission of seizing these tanks and not giving them the opportunity of opening fire on the assault groups. In addition, we were to make the Palace defenders who had been fooled by the situation think that the brigade’s servicemen had mutinied and attacked the Palace. We needed to create the appearance that the first salvos were coming from the barracks itself.*

*The snow was waist-high, which hindered our advance. I didn’t start to put on my bulletproof vest because neither the soldiers of the “Muslim” battalion nor the guys from “Zenit” had them. I could not be in a bulletproof vest when the rest were without them and, yes, we then needed to run through deep snow and I was afraid that I could fall behind. I was like everyone else. Therefore I left my bulletproof vest with my friends from the “Zenit” group who had none. The truth is, they then cursed me for this”.*

At the command post Col. Grigoriy Boyarinov was visibly nervous. He had arrived in Kabul only the day before and had still not yet sized up the situation but it’s possible that a foreboding suggested trouble to an experienced soldier. In view of this, Ehval’d Kozlov asked General Drozdov permit him to take part in the assault on the Palace, saying that he would go with Boyarinov and help him. Drozdov thought for some time and then said, “Good, go, but be careful”. Having checked his Stechkin pistol and not finding that anyone had bulletproof vest Kozlov quickly ran to the BMPs in which there “Grom” troops were already sitting. V. Kolesnik had barely managed to issue him his helmet. Neither Ehval’d Kozlov nor Grigoriy Boyarinov then yet knew that they would become Heroes of the Soviet Union after the assault and, it is true, the latter was not fated to return from this battle. Ehval’d Kozlov said that he *“felt that it would be very difficult for Boyarinov to coordinate the operations of the s but I knew the soldiers of both groups and therefore it was easier for me. I should have been in the battle”.*

### **“Shtorm-333”**

When the vehicle of Makhmud Sakhatov’s group was approaching the location of the third battalion suddenly shooting was heard, which unexpectedly intensified. Col. Kolesnik immediately gave the order for the soldiers and officers of the “Muslim” battalion and the KGB special forces groups: “Fire!” and “Forward!” Red flares flew through the air. It was 1915 by the clock. The signal “Shtorm-333” had been given on the radio nets.

Two self-propelled anti-aircraft ZSU-23-4 (“Shilka”) guns were the first to open fire on the Palace in a direct line of sight on command of Senior Lieutenant Vasiliy Praut, raining down a sea of shells. Two other guns hit the infantry battalion, thus supporting the paratrooper company. AGS-17 automatic grenade launchers began to open fire on the tank battalion without letting the crews get to their machines.

Subunits of the “Muslim” battalion began to advance to designated areas. The company of Senior Lieutenant V. Sharipov was to have been first to advance; it had five BMPs as an assault force of several special forces subgroups consisting of “Grom” headed by Oleg Balashov (Aleksey Bayev, Nikolay Shvachko, and Vladimir Fedoseyev); Valeriy Yemyshov (Sergey Kuvylin, Gennadiy Kuznetsov, Andrey Yakushev, and Grigoriy Boyarinov); Sergey Golov (Viktor Anisimov, Leonid Gumenny, Gennadiy Zudin, Mikhail Sobolev, and Vladimir Filimonov); and Viktor Karpukhin (Nikolay Berlev, Aleksandr Plyusnin, Vladimir Grishin, and Sergey Kolomiyets). Major Mikhail Romanov had overall command. Aleksandr Repin, Gleb Tolstikov, and Yevgeniy Mayev were also with him in a BMP together with Ehval’d Kozlov and Asadullah Sarwari.

Major Yakov Semenov with a “Zenit” subgroup of four armored personnel carriers of Rustam Tursunkulov’s platoon were to advance toward the western part of the hill. Then they were to climb up to the side part of Taj-Bek on a ladder and both groups were to join up on the façade of the building and operate jointly.

But everything became confused at the last moment. The platoon of the three armored personnel carriers of Senior Lieutenant Tursunkulov began to advance first. In the BTRs were also “Zenit” subgroups, the commanders of which were Aleksandr Karelin (A. Agafonov, V. Antonov, N. Kurbanov, S. Chernukhin, and N. Kimyayev); Boris Suvorov (V. Poddubnyy, V. Drozdov, V. Ryazantsev, A. Kolmakov, A. Novikov, and T. Gulov); and Vladimir Fateyev (S. Chizhov, Yu. Lysochenko, F. Il’inskiy, M. Tsybenko, and V. Makarov) with Yakov Semenov having overall command. They were to seize the first floor of the building. The fourth “Zenit” subgroup headed by Vladimir Shchigolev (V. Bykovskiy, A. Ivashchenko, B. Ponomarev, U. Charyyev, V. Kurilov, and V. Zakharov) ended up in the “Grom” column.

Yemyshev recalled: *“On command we began to take our places in the combat vehicles. At the very last moment Grigoriy Ivanovich Boyarinov jumped in right next to me and asked me to move. I said that we were completely full but he sat down all the same. Besides us the crew contained the BMP commander, the driver-mechanic, and the gunner-operator from the “Muslim” battalion. Interpreter Andrey Yakushev from the KGB First Main Directorate was sitting next to me. The vehicles advanced on signal”.*

The first combat vehicle passed the traffic barrier successfully, crushing the Afghan soldier rushing to close it; shot up the remaining external security posts, and hurried along the only road which snaked upward into a mountain ending in an area in front of the Palace. The road was strongly defended and had a good field of fire [*khorosho pristrel’yana*], but other approaches to the Palace were mined. The first APC had just passed a turn when large-caliber machine guns struck it from the building. Rustam Tursunkulov, leading the operations of the platoon leaning out a port from his waist suddenly heard how bullets were starting to “click” on the armor. He understood right away that games were over - a real battle had started. The APC containing Boris Suvorov’s group was suddenly knocked out and started to burn. The personnel quickly began to get out and several were wounded. The subgroup commander himself received a wound in the groin just below his bulletproof vest. They could not save him because of the loss of blood. Having jumped out of the APCs the “Zenit” troops were forced to lie down and shoot at the windows of the Palace. They began to climb up the mountain with the aid of the scaling ladders. At this time the “Grom” subgroups were also climbing the winding road toward Taj-Bek.

A BMP, having passed the gate on the approach to the Palace building, got caught on the brickwork and died. Company commander Sharipov gave the order to hurry. The soldiers were forced to get out quickly. There were still 20 meters to the Palace. At this moment the signalman was killed and radio communications with Colonel Kolesnikov were lost. Sharipov could not stop the fire of the “Shilka”’s. Romanov recalled that he *“had created several subgroups, each of which had a BMP. Ehval’d Kozlov joined us; he was in my crew. The vehicles were to support us with machine gun and automatic weapons fire. They also had scaling ladders.*

*The approach to the Palace area was supposed to be from two directions. I and my “Grom” team were to twist along the winding road and Yasha was to assault the side of the Palace with a ladder. Then, joining up at the façade, we were to break into the Palace together. But, as always, the situation made its own corrections. Semenov’s break-in group was hindered. The APC had been put out of action and the crew had gotten out. Several soldiers had approached the designated area but the rest were scattered, pinned to the ground by fire.*

*But we were approaching the side part, climbing along the winding road. I gave two snipers to the group that was to seize the tanks. Thus I had 22 men left with me. The assault groups were formed. They broke into the Palace in one breath. There was a delay only when one of our BMPs was put out of action. They rushed in from the second approach.*

*The barrage was such that you couldn’t move....A “Rafik” bus was parked at the Palace so it was turned into a sieve. You could see right through it. It’s a pity they didn’t save it for a museum.*

*Bulletproof vest didn’t save anyone. A bulletproof vest is symbolic, not a serious device. The pistol, antipersonnel version as well, and an automatic weapon penetrates it easily. The West German helmets were not bad...”*

At 7:30 P.M. strong explosions thundered through Kabul. The KGB subgroup had blown up the so-called communications “conduit”, cutting off the Afghan capital from the outside world. And Polyakov recalls that: *“Having*

*received the order to carry out the diversion I again reconnoitered the target visually, but upon returning to the villa noticed that everyone except those in my group had gone off somewhere, including the leaders of the opposition.*

*I gathered the group, announced the time the diversion would take place and assigned the mission to also cut the cable at 1930.*

*At about 1845 we drive in three vehicles to carry out the command's mission. Only one officer was left at the villa whom I ordered, in case the mission failed, to hide everything and go to our Embassy, specifically to the Border Guards post. Although there were not enough interpreters in the detachment I nevertheless begged for an interpreter to be assigned to my group.*

*The further development of events showed that had there not been an interpreter in my group the operation would not have gone without bloodshed.*

*Having arrived at the target of sabotage the cover subgroup and I situated ourselves in an UAZ-469 around the traffic control post. The second cover subgroup stopped around the hotel in a "Volga" [automobile] and Boris Pleshkunov's subgroup with interpreter Khayatov in an UAZ-450 directly approached the conduit. At the moment the conduit hatch was opened the sentry of the communications center security post unexpectedly hailed the saboteurs. The interpreter ran to the sentry and explained that they were checking communications, offered him a cigarette, and distracted him with conversation.*

*The operation to open the hatch, lay the charge in the conduit, and then open the hatch again to throw a grenade in with tear gas (in their haste they did not put the grenade in with the charge) was carried out, as they say, in a matter of seconds, although it seemed like quite a long time to all of us. The position of the cover [force] and the perpetrators and the distance between them allowed us to use visual means of communication. Therefore as soon as the UAZ-450 with the saboteurs left the site our cover groups also began to move simultaneously.*

*We returned to the villa without adventure and began to await the explosion without worry. At the moment we returned two officers of our [KGB] residency and several Afghans were at the villa who were to greet their supporters, so we armed them.*

*Among the Afghans was one who spoke Russian quite well. The rest of the Afghans did not know Russian or gave the appearance that they didn't understand Russian.*

*At 1930 a strong explosion thundered rumbled and soon a second one, not far from us, blowing up the army communications lines.*

*I reported to the leadership via radio about completion of the mission. And then it began. The shooting in the area of Amin's palace was especially intense..."*

*The explosion was to have served as the start of the assault on Taj-Bek but the special forces had begun somewhat earlier. According to Sergey Golov: "We had hardly begun to move when our vehicle stopped. The driver-mechanic was frightened, jumped out of the BMP and fled, but I hadn't yet managed to decide on his replacement when he returned - it turned out to be even more frightening outside the vehicle. We started to climb upwards. When we stopped and began to get out the two Tajik interpreters sitting on the edge were killed right away. It turned out that behind the BMP was an Afghan guard post whose soldiers opened fire on us. We had to eliminate this guard post and turn around right away because the main shooting was from above, from the direction of the Palace. Gena Zudin was rather heavy when he jumped out of the BMP; his legs fell under the track and were crushed. Who gave him [medical] aid I don't know because the main mission then was rouse the subunit into the attack and advance. The fire was very intense. When we managed to make it to the Palace walls to a "dead" space we began to feel a bit better".*

*The break-in took place under a hurricane of fire. The combat vehicle of Viktor Karpukhin made it to the Palace first although it was third in the column. Karpukhin recalled: "I was the commander of one of the subgroups. When the BMP stopped I scared the driver-mechanic a bit. I told him not to spare the ammunition just shoot as fast as you can. And he tried; it was impossible to breath in the vehicle from the smoke. All the shells and rounds for the machine gun coupled with the gun were expended very quickly. But we had left something else entirely in order to get*

*to the target. I forced the driver-mechanic to drive closer to the Palace because it was foolish to even be exposed to such heavy fire. And the driver-mechanic moved the BMP almost to the main gate itself. Thanks to this only two more in my crew were slightly wounded. All the remaining subgroups suffered much worse. I jumped out first and Sasha Plyusnin ended up next to me. We began to shoot at everyone who was exposed and was shooting from the windows, allowing all the rest of the soldiers of our subgroup to get out. They managed to quickly make it under the walls, break into the building, and continue the mission further..."*

The special forces quickly climbed to the area in front of Taj-Bek. They make it under the heavy fire of large-caliber machine guns. It turned out that they were firing from every quarter.

According to Kolomiyets: *"We had barely gotten out of the BMP when a shaped-charge grenade hit it. I then encountered a machinegunner who was sitting inside; his jaw was down and there was a terrible wound in his stomach. I don't know whether he remained alive. A fragment had pierced my bulletproof vest but I ran under a deflector [kozyrek], and like everyone else not even noticing whether I was wounded or not. There was great excitement and the desire to go even further"*.

The first minutes of battle were the most serious. The KGB special forces went to assault Taj-Bek but the main forces of Vladimir Sharipov's company and the platoon of Rustam Tursunkulov covered their operations. The other subunits of the "Muslim" battalion provided an external covering ring.

According to Grishin: *"We began to climb the winding road. It was dark. When we approached the Palace I saw the guys who had gotten out earlier – Sasha Repin and Zudin. We passed them. Luckily it turned out that the column had kept somewhat to the right; we had gone around them and drove up to the entrance itself. Bullets hit the "armor" and there was a feeling of unreality: everything around was lit up, searchlights were blinking, and the guys were moving quite openly...The guards evidently also valued their lives and were also afraid to expose themselves, although they threw grenades. There were explosions"*.

The bulletproof vest of one of the "Grom" subgroup commanders, Oleg Balashov, was hit by a fragment but in the excitement he did not feel pain and threw himself at the Palace together with everyone else; however he did not have enough strength for long and he was sent to the medical battalion. Eh. Kozlov was sitting on the side of the combat vehicle, still in the BMP; he barely managed to put his leg outside when it was shot but, paying no attention to it, he jumped out of the BMP, clearing the way for his comrades-in-arms..."

According to Vladimir Fedoseyev: *"I was sitting last in the BMP; Bayev was opposite me with a machine gun. We were ready to open the hatches at any moment to jump out in time if the vehicle was put out of action. We had just begun to move, but had not gone probably ten meters when they opened fire from the direction of the Palace. They knocked out our BMP. The passage was so narrow that two automobiles could separate with difficulty but generally combat vehicles couldn't at all. The vehicle began to spin and the BMP commander shouted that an armor fragment had hit him in the thigh. When the driver tried to get out of the vehicle he was killed immediately. There was a pause and a dead silence. I turned to Balashov and said: "Oleg! This is an iron coffin. We need to jump out". But he said to me: "Where did they say? There's been no order". I said "What order could there be? Just one more round and we're dead men; or we can do something else. Open the hatches". We jumped out of the vehicle. Bayev took a position right away with the machine gun and went behind the BMP and opened fire from a rifle. Balashov lay right next to me. Afterwards a second grenade hit our vehicle and it began to smoke. An interpreter was also with us. He had been killed in the first second when he tried to climb out of the vehicle through the upper hatch.*

*We fired until the magazines were out of rounds. At this time some sort of explosion occurred next to us. I felt a sharp pain in my legs. My right leg was wrapped around my left. After some time I felt blood trickling down my legs. A shell landed on the vehicle right next to us and exploded. The terrible impact and shock wave threw me down from this breastwork. Aleksey Bayev was standing on the breastwork and firing a machine gun. Suddenly there was some sort of snap and he fell. I started to call him but he did not answer. I tried to drag him to a sentry box; he was big, about 120 kg, and I couldn't do it. It's good that Shvachko helped. We dragged him to the sentry box and I gave him an injection, and bandaged his thigh. I did not know then that he also had a wound in his neck. We left Bayev in the sentry box and again went to assault the Palace.*

*We had barely gotten out of the sentry box when an explosion rang out and threw us into the breastwork again. I lost consciousness. One of the guys dragged me to the sentry box where Bayev was lying. When I came to Kolya Shvachko asked me whether I could go into battle but I couldn't. I shot at the windows of the Palace with a sniper rifle. Bayev and I remained in the sentry box until the end of the assault.”*

The “Shilka”s hit Taj-Bek but the 23-mm shells which were not designed for such purposes bounced off the thick walls, carving out granite chips. And all the same they exerted a psychological influence on the Afghan defenders.

Yakov Semenov confirmed that *“Gulyabzoy Said was in my crew from the very beginning of the assault on the Palace and he travelled the same path that we did”*.

The hurricane of fire continued from the Palace, pinning the special forces to the ground. This was the culminating moment of the battle, which was necessary to rouse people to the attack no matter what the cost. The main part of the soldiers were wounded at this moment. The commanders, Eh. Kozlov, G. Boyarinov, V. Karpukhin, and S. Golov were first to make an assault. But the people climbed only when a “Shilka” neutralized a machine gun in one of the Palace windows. This continued for a short while, possible five minutes, but it seemed an eternity to the attackers. Ya. Semenov and his soldiers also threw themselves at the Palace and were met at the entrance by M. Romanov's group...He recalls: *“Initially the situation was on the edge of panic. I saw that we could not get a large number of people to the Palace. The shooting was horrible. The firing locations, which should have been neutralized by the army guys, were shooting at everything. If we had flinched just a bit everything would have turned out differently. And suddenly a general outburst: we needed to get to the entrance! We made a dash to the Palace entrance but Viktor Karpukhin was already standing there. Many Afghan bodies were next to him. It is good that Yasha and his soldiers showed up here. We, too, had several guys too.*

*I was in shell shock when I began to organize a second approach to the Palace, either from an RPG round or a grenade burst whose shock wave threw me on the BMP, which my head and the left side of my body struck. The blow was sharp and blood flowed from my ears and nose. I felt its salty taste on my lips. I started to hear badly as there was a constant buzzing in my ears. I even sort of lost consciousness for some time. I regained consciousness – explosions, shots, the cannonade. But the mission was still not accomplished, the very heat of the battle. As they say, here I wasn't up to it...*

*We didn't go by the side but through the windows, on the right side. The guys acted desperately and clearly. There were various situations...”*

Something inconceivable was happening. It was a picture of Hell. The “Shilka”s were firing well. Everything was confused. But everyone acted in a single outburst; there was no one who would have tried to shirk or sit it out in shelter and wait out the assault. Zudin was killed back on the approaches and Kuvylin, Fedoseyev, Bayev, and Shvachko were wounded. Things were no better with “Zenit”. Ryazanov, who received a perforation wound in the thigh, bandaged his leg himself and went on the attack. But nevertheless they managed to overcome the resistance of the Afghans and break into the Palace building.

A group of special forces consisting of Kozlov, Boyarinov, Golov, Sobolev, Karpukhin, Plyusnin, Grishin, Anisimov, Kurilov, Bykovskiy, and Filimonov attacked through the main entrance and Romanov, Semenov with the “Zenit” forces of Ryazantsev and Poddubnyy broke in through a window on the right side of the Palace. Karelin, Shchigolev, and Kurbanov attacked the Palace from the rear. Rustam Tursunkulov: *“We ran into heavy fire. The personnel of the platoon hid behind the APCs and began to dig in because it was simply impossible to raise one's head”*.

All the groups and soldiers were confused and each was already acting at their own discretion. There was no single command. There was a single goal – to make it to the walls of the Palace as quickly as possible, hide behind them somehow, and carry out the mission. The special forces were in hostile territory, in a foreign uniform, without documents, and without any recognition signs; there was nothing except white armbands on their sleeves. The fire was so heavy that the safety glass on all the BMPs was shot out and the skirting was punctured in every square centimeter. That is, it had the appearance of a strainer. They special forces were saved only by being in bulletproof vests, although they were practically all wounded.

Yakushev and Yemyshev were first into the central entrance of the building. The Afghans were throwing grenades from the second floor but the special forces jumped into the entrance hall. Yemyshev recalls that: *“Practically no one was left in our crew; they had all jumped out. Under cover of the BMP Yakushev and I rushed to the central entrance and jumped into the building. He wanted to rush upstairs right away but I said to him: ‘Let’s go to the left here; we need to destroy the communications center.’ There was no one in the entrance hall besides us. I ran to the left and opened the door to the duty officer’s room; the lights were all on but there was no one in it. On the right was a hall and further on, the telephone center. I suddenly saw Yakushev fall and ran to him but at this time I was hit by something large in the right arm: my automatic weapon fell, my arm was hanging, there were bits of flesh, and all the bones had been broken. I fell and started to crawl to the entrance door. At this time Sergey Kolomiyets jumped into the entrance hall, shot a round from his automatic weapon to the right, a round to the left, and left. Then others rushed in. The guys saw me and helped me. Kolya Berlev wrapped a bandage on the wounded arm and put me in a BMP which had been parked right across from the entrance. The shooting was not as strong as in the beginning and we were able to move. But the guys went upstairs.”*

According to Grishin: *“We jumped out of the BMP and rushed to the Palace entrance. Viktor Anisimov was shooting from a ‘Mukha’ grenade launcher. I was behind him and, although he yelled for everyone behind him to go move away, could not manage to avoid it. Evidently I was in shell shock then but I quickly came to my senses. We hid behind an overhang on the first floor of the entrance hall. It was lit up and there was shooting everywhere. We advanced on Karpukhin’s order. Yemyshev was lying at the ladder which was resting on the second story. But in reply to the question posed at the briefing before [the operation] ‘What do we do with the wounded?’ there was dead silence and I don’t remember what an Embassy representative said, as I remember, ‘Generally speaking, you need to carry out the mission’. No one said that you don’t need to render aid but no one answered. We understood that the main thing was to carry out the mission.*

*Running to the ladder around which Valeriy Petrovich was lying I simply saw his eyes, how he looked at me. Both Vitya Anisimov and I simply grabbed him and it seemed the hand of his left arm was torn off. We dragged him to under an overhang and tried to bandage his arm, but he said: ‘Volod’, my arm was torn off there, don’t look so it doesn’t shock you’. We were all in a first battle for the first time and had seen wounded people for the first time. We bandaged him and left him. When we started to enter the entrance hall again I saw a soldier lying on his back with a huge hole in his forehead. It turned out to be Yakushev. When I saw him I were aware of the whole seriousness of this operation and felt that all of us were now on the edge of life and death; feelings of danger and caution appeared. I then became more attentive and, casting aside fear, reacted to the slightest movement without giving the enemy a change to shoot first”.*

Sergey Golov recalls that: *“All the soldiers of my crew except Zudin were able to make it to the building and started to operate according to the previously developed plan. We broke in through the center. Sergey Kuvylin and Grigoriy Ivanovich Boyarinov ended up next to me. The group which was to have put the communications center out of commission could not manage to break in and they were practically all wounded. Grigoriy Ivanovich was also wounded by that time. Kuvylin and I helped him – they showered the communications center with grenades. If I recall right now, there were so many grenades and cartridges hanging on us as each could carry. I was next to Misha Sobolev who was throwing grenades and I was “working” the rooms with a machine gun. The rest were also doing the same. The first order was “Don’t take prisoners. No one should be left alive.”*

Likewise, Kurilov remembers: *“The roar of battle covered a well-known tenor voice: ‘Forward, men!’”*The old soldier Grigoriy Ivanovich evidently felt some mistake in the actions of the defenders. The return fire actually started to seem less intense.

*I leaned out of the parapet, let go a long burst just before jumping, but suddenly felt a strong blow on my left which turned up at my elbow; the automatic weapon jerked to the left and the butt hit my shoulder painfully. Such an effect I had from a shell exploding in the weapon! I squeezed the cock from inertia but the weapon didn’t fire...I dived under a parapet, laid on my side, and began to jerk the bolt – but it wouldn’t move. And there I saw that my weapon had been jammed! The bolt had been completely jammed! My left arm had grown numb. I took a glance – my hand was all bloody. I felt with the fingers of my right hand. Ugh! The edge of my palm was double its normal size! I imagined: probably the bullet had gone through the left hand which was on the front grip of the stock, and hit the weapon and jammed it. But where had the bullet come from? Could it have ricocheted around my face?*

*Probably...Right! So what was I to do without a weapon? I had a pistol, I remembered, and I mentally swore: This toy pistol wasn't good for anything with such an opinion! Perhaps only to shoot myself if the operation was a failure!*

*But Volodya Bykovskiy managed to jump into the entrance and ran around there, not knowing where to go. Our guys began to gather there. Boyarinov ended up next to me. He was always in that leather flight jacket with a helmet on his head and a Stechkin automatic pistol in his hand.*

*"Upstairs, men! We need to go upstairs! And defend the corridors here on the first floor!", he shouted.*

*...I looked around. Next to me lay a soldier from the "Muslim" battalion among unexploded grenades and some rocks. From appearances he was dead. The butt of an automatic weapon protruded from under his hand. I touched the butt with my right hand and pulled the weapon out from under the immobile body. I moved the fingers of my left hand. They moved. And suddenly it was like there was no special pain. Only the elbow ached: a strong impact was evident...But the entire hand was sticky with blood. I wiped my hand on my trousers and looked. I needed to go!*

*I untangled the strap on the automatic weapon to make it longer, threw it behind my neck, and rushed forward. I almost ran on all fours, squatting and dodging, like they taught us in KUOS, firing bursts. And right here I was hit in my left arm, my bad one, as if by a giant hot needle!*

*I don't remember how I ended up under the arch of the Palace entrance. I was next to a wall. My arm was almost completely separated. I simply didn't feel it! My sleeve was swollen with blood. Here's the devil for you, a second wound, and both in the same arm! I probed it with my fingers. They moved just a bit! But I almost didn't feel my arm!*

*I stood up, leaning on the wall with my arm. Our guys ran past in the semidarkness.*

*Where was I to go now? What was I to do? Ah, yes! According to the order our group was to operate on the first floor. We needed to neutralize enemy resistance and clear it from all the rooms, and take the safe with its documents under guard!*

*Having stood up the stock of the automatic weapon in front of me and holding it by the grip with my right hand - the left had finally fallen off - I moved along the corridor.*

*Ahead one of our soldiers was firing an automatic weapon into the door of an office. Then he came running up, put a grenade under the door, and jumped behind a corner. I also hugged the wall. It exploded with a deafening rumble and suddenly the lights went out on the entire floor. Pitch-black darkness. After a bit the lights blinked and again went out...The power had been cut. Thank God!*

*I ran several steps more along the corridor, which seemed to me to be endlessly long, and yanked the handle of some door toward me. The door opened and inside it was semidarkness but I saw that there were tables and a couch there...I pulled a grenade out of my pocket, tore off the pin with my teeth, and launched it deep into the room with the counterrecoil. Knocking about, the grenade rolled on the parquet floor but I slammed the door and jumped to the doorpost. It burst inside, and the door creaked and was thrown open, throwing puffs of smoke and dust from the office...*

*Here an automatic weapon round hit me. They were shooting from the left apparently, from an partly-open door. The bullet pierced my morally and physically obsolete bulletproof vest and, having played havoc with its metallic plates, hit me in the left side, right under the lowest rib. The force was such that it hit like a crowbar. It knocked me off my legs and I fell on the floor on my right side and everything dimmed in my head for a second, but I didn't lose consciousness. Instinctively, having raised my weapon in the direction of the presumed enemy, I let loose a long random burst in the semidarkness and listened to some wild howl. Like someone had stepped on a cat...*

*I felt sick. On my wounded side, it was as if someone had played around with a hot poker, such was the pain. I tried to raise myself. It worked.*

*The hell with it! What a shame! Just a little more - and victory, and I was out of action. There was shooting going on around me, the thunder of a grenade explosion, and plaster beginning to fall on my helmet from the ceiling.*

*Thinking fuzzily about what I was doing, I poked into some dark secluded corner. Directly ahead of me was a metal ladder. Two soldiers from the "Muslim" battalion appeared next to me. Their appearance was somewhat disoriented but sufficiently combative. I mechanically noted under my breath that the soldiers seemingly did not have orders to enter the Palace. They were to finish it off from the outside... These were young guys who could have gotten ahold of themselves and entered the Palace and now probably should be good warriors... If they remained alive...*

*They looked upon me with fright:*

*- Comrade officer, are you wounded? – one asked.*

*- Everything's normal! Forward, men! – I said to them, trying to seem optimistic, cheerful, and confident.*

*At this moment, a fireball exploded literally five steps to the right of me. Evidently this was a RGD-5 grenade which had been hurled down the ladder opening. I distinctly remember that for a hundredth or a thousandth of a second, as the grenade fragments flew toward me I convulsively and strongly folded into a ball, squeezing for ages. The fragments lashed my face, arms, and legs badly... The shock wave knocked me from my legs...*

The battle in the building itself right away took on a fierce and uncompromising nature. The special forces acted desperately and decisively. If they didn't come out of the rooms with hands raised then the doors were broken down and grenades thrown in. Boyarinov, Golov, Karpukhin, and Kuvylin accomplished the most important mission, putting the Palace communications center out of commission. As Karpukhin recalls: *"I didn't hurry up the ladder, I crept up it like all the rest because it was impossible for us to run there; I'd have been killed three times if I'd run there. Each step there had to be fought for, just like in the Reichstag. It's probably comparable. We moved from one place of cover to another, shooting all around and then to the last one. What did I do personally? Well, I remember Boyarinov who became a Hero of the Soviet Union posthumously. He was wounded and slightly shell-shocked and his helmet lay to the side. He tried to say something but nothing was audible. The only thing I remember is how Berlev shouted to me: "Hide him, he's a colonel, a war veteran." I was thinking that he needed to be hidden somewhere; nevertheless we were all somewhat younger but where they were shooting there it's in general hard to hide." Golov was literally "flogged [poseklo]" by grenade fragments; then they counted nine intact [grenades]. Berlev's magazine was hit by the bullet of an automatic weapon; he was lucky that Kuvylin was next to him and managed to give him his magazine.*

Berlev remembers: *"I stayed on the first floor but Karpukhin and Plyusnin ran up to the second floor. And suddenly a guard jumped out around a turn from somewhere. He began to shoot at me practically point-blank, from about 10 meters, and let loose a burst of about 10-12 rounds. It penetrated the hand guard and hit the magazine, and the shells flew from it. The guard stopped, frightened, and looked at me because he was shooting and I wasn't falling. He had such glazed eyes; they were right in front of me, such dark hazel, even brown eyes. He himself was dark-complexioned. And I was struck dumb for a second. Then I thought that I had rounds in my chamber. And in a fraction of a second I lifted my weapon and fired. He fell.*

*I sat down and started to gather the rounds. At this time Sergey Kuvylin ran up to me and asked what was the matter; he gave me his own double magazine. I fastened them into the weapon and started to continue to carry out the mission.*

*When we had broken into the Palace and losses occurred a sort of frenzy came to me – to "mow down" everyone. Yes, and there was an order – don't leave living witnesses".*

Soviet Ambassador Tabeyev was not informed of the plan of the operation and therefore when he heard an explosion and the lights went out in the Embassy he was confused. He recalls: *"It was very awkward for me in front of my wife. She then said to me that no one is taking you into consideration and they are even keeping you in the dark".* The Ambassador called KGB representative Kirpichenko and demanded an explanation about what was going on in the city. The latter told to him that there was no opportunity to talk right then and he would give a detailed report in the morning.



...The “Shilka”’s shifted their fire to other targets. The BMPs left the area in front of the Palace and blocked the only road. Another company and two platoons of AGS-17 grenade launchers fired on the tank battalion and then seized the tanks, simultaneously disarming the tank crews. A special group of the “Muslim” battalion seized the weapons of the anti-aircraft regiment and took its personnel prisoner. Lt. Col. O. Shvets oversaw the combat operations in this sector.

In the Palace the officers and soldiers of Amin’s personal guard and his bodyguard (about 100-150 men) resisted stubbornly, not surrendering. Their undoing was because they were all mainly armed with MG-5 submachine guns and they did not penetrate our bulletproof vests.

The “Shilka”’s again shifted fire, beginning to hit Taj-Bek and the area in front of it. A fire began on the second floor of the Palace and this exerted a strong influence on the defenders. As the special forces moved toward the second floor of Taj-Bek the shooting and explosions intensified. The soldiers of Amin’s security force, having taken the special forces for an Afghan rebel unit, heard Russian speech and swearing, and surrendered to them... As soon became clear, many of them had trained at the Airborne Forces School in Ryazan’ where they obviously remembered Russian swearing for their whole lives.

Kozlov, Golov, Karpukhin, Semenov, Anisimov, and Plyusnin rushed to the second floor. The target of the “first line” was their main objective there. The special forces attacked boldly, shooting from automatic weapons and throwing grenades in all the rooms. According to Sergey Golov: *“I climbed upstairs together with Ehval’d Kozlov and the “Zenit” group leader Yasha Semenov. I don’t know why he had ended up without a bulletproof vest but Eh’vald bravely forged ahead with a pistol in his hands. I didn’t notice when I myself was wounded. Possibly it was when, having thrown a grenade into a window and got into trouble and it rolled back; I quickly managed to throw a second grenade and lie on the floor. The grenades detonated and we stayed alive. The main goal was to reach Amin’s location at any cost.”*

The lights were on everywhere in the Palace. All the attempts by Nikolay Shvachko to turn them off came to nothing. The electrical power was independent. Somewhere in the depths of the building, possibly in the basement, there were electrical generators operating but there was no time to search for them. Some soldiers were shooting at light bulbs in order to shelter themselves somehow since they were in plain view of Palace defenders. By the end of the assault only a handful of sources of illumination remained but they were burning.

According to Ehval’d Kozlov: *“In general, impressions from events, the perception of reality in battle and in peacetime differ greatly. Several years later in a quiet situation I walked through the Palace with General Gromov. Everything seemed different, completely opposite of what it had been then. In December 1979 it seemed to me that we had overcome endless “Potemkin” stairs but it turned out that the staircase was narrow, as in the entrance of an ordinary house. How we eight travelled up it together I don’t know; the main thing is we stayed alive. It happened that I was fighting without a bulletproof vest, which even now is horrific to imagine but on that day I didn’t remember it. It seemed, I had become empty inside and everything was forced out by the desire to carry out the mission. Even the noise of battle and the shouts of people were perceived differently from the usual way. Everything in me operated only for battle and I was to be victorious in the battle”.*

Soviet doctors in the Palace hid where they could. Initially they thought that the attackers were mujaheddin and Taraki supporters. Only after hearing Russian swearing did they understand that their own servicemen were fighting. Alekseyev and Kuznechenkov, who were to be helping Amin’s daughter (she had a baby), found “refugees” at the bar counter after the assault. They saw Amin, who was going along a corridor, completely in the reflections of a fire. He was in shorts and a sports shirt, holding his hands high, wrapped in tubes, vials with saline solution as if they were grenades. It is possible to imagine what effort this cost him with the needles put in his elbow veins.

Alekseyev, having fled from cover, took out the needles as his first act, pressed the veins with his fingers to keep them from bleeding, and then led him to the bar. Amin rested on a wall but then heard a child’s cry somewhere from a side room. His five-year-old son came out, washed with spots of tears. Having seen his father, he ran to him and embraced his legs. Amin pressed his head to him and they sat down together at the wall.

Many years after these events Alekseyev said: they could not stay around the bar any longer so they hurried to leave there; when they were travelling along the corridor an explosion rang out – the shock wave threw them toward the door of the conference room where they took cover; it was dark and empty here. A broken window brought in the sounds of shooting. Kuznechenkov stood in the partition next to the window, Alekseyev to the right. Thus they shared their fate in this life. In any event, some soldier who had jumped in there shot in the darkness. One of the bullets hit Kuznechenkov. He cried out and immediately fell dead. Alekseyev lifted the body of his dead comrade to him and took it to the courtyard where he placed it in an APC which was taking the wounded away. “We don’t take the dead”, the soldier who was supervising the loading of the wounded cried to Alekseyev. “He’s still alive, I’m a doctor”, the Colonel objected. They took Kuznechenkov’s body to a [military] hospital and Alekseyev went to an operating table and gave aid to the wounded.

It is clear from the memoirs of his adjutant that Amin had ordered him to notify our military advisers about the attack on the Palace. In the process he said: “The Soviets will help.” But the adjutant reported: “The Soviets are shooting.” These words caused the General Secretary to lose his composure; he grabbed an ashtray and threw it at the adjutant, crying: “You’re lying, it can’t be!” Then he tried to call the Chief of the General Staff on the telephone... There were no communications. Amin quietly muttered: “I suspected this; it’s all true.” If Amin was a CIA agent, he did not give himself away in the last minutes of his life.

... At a time when the assault groups were breaking into Taj-Bek the soldiers of the “Muslim” battalion had created a rigid ring of fire around the Palace, destroying everything which offered resistance. Bursting into the second floor they heard a woman’s cry: “Amin, Amin!...” Evidently his wife was shouting.

When a group composed of Kozlov, Semenov, Karpukhin, Golov, Plyusnin, Grishin, Gumenny, Anisimov, Karelin, Drozdov, and Kurbanov, throwing grenades and firing continuously from automatic weapons, rushed into the second floor of the Palace resistance rose to its highest level. There was shooting from every direction, some figures appeared in the smoke, and shouts were heard. According to Viktor Karpukhin: *“It was quite hard for us to converse during the battle; we had other concerns. There simply isn’t enough time to talk. You were to reload faster and in any case look in order to orient yourself and not get a bullet from somewhere. How did I feel that Amin was killed? How was I generally supposed to feel? I saw it all with my own eyes...”*

And according to Grishin: *“There was shooting from every direction. Lenya Gumenny, who gave me shells, was standing on the span of a stair step and I reloaded my magazines. There were also other guys there. We began to group together at the entrance to the door into the corridor which led to the second floor rooms. We had to open the door and rush inside. Getting ready, we reloaded our magazines. It was dark there. We were taught before we rushed in – either shoot from an automatic weapon or throw a grenade. We opened the door with a leg but the door was on hinges. Sergey Aleksandrovich threw in a grenade but the door had been opened so sharply that it knocked against a wall, suddenly closed, and therefore the grenade struck the door and rolled toward us. Lenya and I managed to jump to a level below and lie down. Everyone also laid down and the grenade exploded. Possibly it also brushed against someone; it then turned out that someone was wounded, someone else got caught, and for the rest everything turned out OK. But then after the explosion we jumped into the corridor right away. In this group were: Plyusnin, Gumenny, Anisimov, Karpukhin, Golov, and Berlev. There were also guys from “Zenit” of whom I knew only Yasha Semenov. I saw him on the second floor but I didn’t know anyone of the rest. Sasha Plyusnin and I operated as a pair. Shooting, we ran a bit along the corridor and fell down as if on command. This is how we moved along. A recess appeared on the right, like a shelter. This was the bar. We ran in there. At the bar counter a man was laying on his back. He was in a sport shirt and shorts. I didn’t see any signs of blood in general, I don’t remember; in any case, there was nothing there in my opinion. He was still alive but his movements were sort of convulsive. As it turned out later this person was Amin.*

*At that time women’s and children’s voices rang out and everyone ceased for as if on command. Probably in the spirit of normal Russian people, even soldiers, pity on women and children always remains; that is, human qualities are never lost. It then turned out that one boy was wounded in the thigh and a woman was barely scratched; the rest were unharmed. Letting them go, we continued to clear the room.*

*We again ran into the corridor. I ended up paired with Lenya Gumenny and we “cleaned” all the rooms in sequence. First we opened the door, threw in a grenade, and shot everything. Then we stopped throwing grenades and*

*just shone a flashlight since there was no more resistance. We ran through the entire floor and then returned. The carpet was wet. I don't know whether this was from water or blood.*

*Much has been wiped from my memory. When now veterans of the Great Patriotic War talk I am surprised at their good memory. I have switched off several episodes. Some of it remained there in my memory; for example, for a long time I felt the smell of flesh and blood for a month or two”.*

The gunpowder smoke gradually cleared and the attackers saw Amin lying around the bar counter in his “Adidas” shorts and sport shirt. He was dead...It's possible a bullet from one of the special forces or a grenade fragment hit him. Some express a version that Amin was killed by the Afghans. What the cause of his death really was is quite hard to ascertain right now.

According to Golov: *“Romanov gave me, as a former medical student [medik], an order to help our men. And I, as a commander at one time, actually disengaged from the battle and began to help the wounded: Gennadiy Kuznetsov had a wound in his thigh, Sergey Kolomiyets had a bullet go through his bulletproof vest into his thorax, Aleksey Bayev had a bullet right through his neck, and Vladimir Fedoseyev had a grenade explode under his legs and break his foot. We found a first aid kit and bandages. Everyone was given first aid.”*

After they seized the second floor it began to be somewhat easier since practically no one was left in the entire Palace; everyone had been shot down. And those who managed to be spared began to be taken prisoner.

The battle in the Palace was not long (43 minutes). “Suddenly the shooting stopped”, remembered “Zenit” group commander Major Ya. Semenov. “I reported to General Yu. I. Drozdov by radio that the Palace had been taken, that there were many dead and wounded, and the main thing was ended”. Company commander Sr. Lt. V. Sharipov climbed up to the second floor in order to be personally convinced of the death of Amin. He then started to call Col. Kolesnik on the radio to report completion of the mission. He managed to get in touch with battalion chief of staff Ashurov and allegorically reported that Amin had been killed. Ashurov understood him and reported completion of the mission to Col. Kolesnik.

...A group headed by Captain Sakhatov arrived at the Palace building in two of the tanks which had been seized from the Afghans. He reported to Kolesnik about completion of the combat mission and informed him: when they passed the third battalion of the security brigade they saw that an alert had been declared. The Afghan soldiers had received ammunition. Next to the road along which the special forces passed the battalion commander and two more officers were standing. A decision came quickly. Jumping out of the vehicle they seized the Afghan battalion commander and both officers and threw them in the vehicle and continued. Several soldiers who had managed to receive shells opened fire on them. Then the entire battalion also hurried to the pursuit, to free their commander.

Then the special forces hurried and started to shoot at the pursuing infantry with machine guns. The soldiers of K. Amangel'dyev's company also opened fire, supporting the operations of Sakhatov's group. They “put down” a great many – about 250 men; the rest scattered. At this time “Zenit” member Vladimir Tsvetkov “removed” the sentries guarding the tanks with a silencer-equipped automatic weapon and the soldiers seized them. The Afghans opened return fire. Sakhatov's group had to lie down. During the crossfire Dmitriy Volkov was killed, Pavel Klimov from “Grom” was wounded, and Vladimir Tsvetkov from “Zenit” was wounded in the head.

As Pavel Klimov recalls: *“When we drove up to the place designated for us the vehicle stopped on a slope not far from the barracks and we quickly jumped out of it through the back. There turned out to be four, not two, sentries around the tanks. Dima Volkov and one more guy from “Zenit” went to “remove” them. We laid in readiness to cover them with fire. Shots were heard. Soldiers dashed out of the barracks. A battle started.*

*We had sniper rifles and one of the “Zenit” troops had a “Mukha”. We deployed and began to shoot on the Palace. I managed to shoot four magazines. I remember there being a guy from “Zenit” not far away. Then a grenade flew in, probably an RGD-5, and exploded next to me. A red lightning blazed in my eyes and a sharp pain seized my entire body. I lost consciousness for some time. Then I periodically regained consciousness and then lost it again. The last time I came to I saw that our “Shilka”'s were firing on the Palace. Their shells did not penetrate the stone walls of the Palace but simply bounced off them, carving out chips. There was a hurricane of fire coming from the Palace side but our guys went on the attack.*

*Then I lost consciousness and when I came to I saw a soldier from the “Muslim” battalion who leaned over me and asked: “You’re not wounded?” I said: “It’s nothing, comrade; probably I’m wounded. I’m simply deafened or shell-shocked.” But my head was so heavy and there was a whistling in my ears, and my entire body was weak. I still don’t remember the details. I was in shock, in a semi-conscious state. I only recall that I showed them the 6P9 silencer-equipped pistol but they had never seen such a weapon. One of them took the pistol, turned it over in his hands for a long time, and even pointed it in my direction. He could not understand how the pistol fired. Then I told him to return the weapon to me since I was still alive. He handed me the pistol.*

*The soldiers bandaged me and left. The battle continued. They began to fire from automatic weapons in the direction of the Palace. I lay in the snow and bled. Then when I started to feel a little better I tried to get up – and managed to do it. Purely intuitively I wandered to my comrades. This saved my life; otherwise I would have shared the fate of other dead comrades. The doctors then were saying that I was mortally wounded, like Bagration.*

*About 100 meters from us were three BTRs in which soldiers from the “Muslim” battalion were sitting. I don’t know what their mission was. Probably it was second-echelon defense in order to restrain an Afghan attack and not let them go toward the Palace if our group was all killed. I even went over to them and asked that they help me get into the APC. One of the soldiers helped me, pulled me inside the APC, and put me in the back seat. My arms and legs were all cold. I laid there and put my legs in a warm exhaust pipe, and a soldier warmed my hands with his breath. I shivered and felt sick. I laid in the dark APC, my body burned and felt somewhat weightless. As before, the soldier gave me some help. But all this time I had “disappeared” somewhere but, exerting my will, tried not to finally lose consciousness. However the wound turned out to be quite serious. Then it became clear that I had lost three liters of blood and I had been given first aid in the process. Then I lost consciousness and regained it only for a moment back in the Embassy. As of yet I do not know how I ended up there. Evidently soldiers from the “Muslim” battalion brought me there on an APC.”*

Company commander Sr. Lt. Vladimir Sharipov also reported that the mission had been accomplished. Col. Kolesnik gave the order to cease fire and moved his command post immediately into the Palace. When he and Drozdov drove up to Taj-Bek the commanders of the assault groups began to approach them with reports in front and around the Palace. Karpukhin pointed out the bullet which had stuck in the safety glass of his helmet, saying: “Look how lucky I was”. The special forces and the assault group members walked around the Palace checking whether it was harboring any of “Amin’s people.”

After Sarwari and Gulyabzoy arrived at the Palace and were convinced and confirmed that Amin was really dead the body of the head of the DRA government and leader of the PDPA was wrapped in a carpet... The main mission was accomplished. Success in this operation was secured not so much by force as by surprise and swiftness of pressure.

According to Vladimir Grishin: *“When I saw General Drozdov I calmed down right away and understood that everything would be OK. He had a German ‘Schmeisser’ and a radio in his hands and was without his helmet. I didn’t know that it was Drozdov but simply saw a gray-haired man, obviously one of the senior leaders, who went through the Palace quite boldly although the shooting had still not stopped everywhere. It inspired confidence that we had done the main part of our work and had carried out the mission.”*

During the entire assault on the Palace Drozdov maintained radio contact with Ivanov, who was at the communications center. Communications were very unstable. All the time they had to change the batteries, which quickly “quit” for some reason. It was good that Kolesnik had selected a soldier who was always next to him and supplied him with batteries. Karpukhin recalls that *“The command with us was – Yuriy Ivanovich Drozdov...He was our senior commander, he inspired optimism...This was a man of the highest courage, a legend. He had been an army officer in the [World] War and then an illegal [agent] - in Germany. He knew three languages well. A very literate, erudite man. I have already talked about Boyarinov...But we had a common fate...”*

Right after the seizure of Taj-Bek Drozdov reported to Ivanov about completion of the mission and then handed the radio to Ehval’d Kozlov and ordered him to report the results of the battle to the leadership. When Kozlov, who had not yet left the battle, began to report to General Ivanov the latter interrupted him with a question “What about ‘Dub’?” Ehval’d started to select a word in order to tell him about the death of Amin in a veiled way, but

Ivanov again asked, "Was he killed?" Kozlov replied, "Yes, he was killed". And the General immediately cut off communications. It was necessary to quickly report to Moscow, to KGB Chairman Andropov about completion of the main mission.

According to Golov: *"After we found out that Amin was dead we gathered downstairs; we had to repel a tank attack. But what does it mean to lie on frozen ground on a winter night after a heated battle? It was telling then, of course, since besides a wound I had double pneumonia. Initially I didn't feel feverish and then, when everything had sort of quieted down, the guys looked at me and said, "Serezha, why are you so pale? Take off your shirt". I took off my jacket and I saw I was all bloody. They sent me to the barracks of the "Muslim" battalion right away where we had been living before. They bandaged me there and said that I needed to go to [either a civilian or a military] hospital. In the morning Berlev and Shvachko sent me to the hospital at the Embassy. I was operated on there. They removed grenade fragments."*

...After the battle they counted the casualties. Five men in the KGB special forces groups which had assaulted the Palace had been killed, including Col. Boyarinov. Almost everyone was wounded but those who could hold a weapon in their hands continued to fight. Five were also killed in the "Muslim" battalion and 35 wounded. Twenty-three who were wounded remained on duty. The battalion medical officer initially took seriously wounded soldiers out in a BMP to the battalion and then to various medical institutions which were then in Kabul.

I don't know the fate of the officials of the KGB Ninth Directorate who were directly guarding Amin. According to some information they all managed to evacuate earlier.

According to Viktor Karpukhin: *"We took up a perimeter defense and collected everything which could shoot and prepared. During the battle I was not aware of the ammunition at all, although there was about 50-60 kg of it hanging on each of us considering the packs, ammunition, bulletproof vests, helmets, etc. But after the battle such a deadly fatigue came over us that we simply fell down in a "dead faint". And, as I saw it, everyone slept where they had fallen into some shutdown mode [v otklyuchku], like in resuscitation."*

During the night the special forces guarded the Palace since they were afraid that the divisions and the tank brigade stationed in Kabul would try to storm it. But this did not happen. The Soviet military advisers working in Afghan army units and the airborne units which had been airlifted to the capital did not let them do this. Moreover, the special services had paralyzed the command and control of Afghan forces beforehand.

Probably one of the Soviets suffered from his own: in the darkness the personnel of the "Muslim" battalion and a KGB special forces group recognize one another from the white armbands on their sleeves, the "Misha-Yasha" password, and...swearing. But since everyone was dressed in Afghan uniforms and shooting they had to throw grenades from quite a distance. Try to follow in the darkness; isn't there confusion about who has a white armband on his sleeve and who doesn't? In addition, when they started to lead Afghan prisoners away their sleeves also had white armbands.

Kolomiyets adds: *"I would like to put in a good word about the now-deceased Volodya Filimonov. We had orders not to assist the wounded but just [move] ahead. I was already wounded on the second floor and I suspect from a bullet of one of the men of the [KGB] First Main Directorate. They only had 7.62 mm automatic weapons but Amin's security force had different weapons. Filimonov took me by the leg and dragged me down the stairs. I hurt my head on the steps. I told him: 'Volodya, take my weapon'. He took the weapon, added a magazine, and delivered it in a safe place."*

Valentin Braterskiy recalls: *"There were five of us from the First Main Directorate and two groups of 30 each who were carrying out the operation. "Grom" is a unique group which included rated athletes and was to operate right in the Palace. The "Zenit" group was to secure the approaches to the Palace. It had guys from the Balashikha School which trained the special forces. Of the 60 men, 14 remained on duty."*

*There were high casualties on the other side. There were 300 men in Amin's security force. One hundred fifty were taken prisoner. The dead were not counted.*

*Amin had also driven in a 2000-man regiment and they were entrenched around the Palace. We cut through the regiment like a dagger. It scattered somehow during the assault. Karmal promised that 500 guerillas loyal to him would support us. They brought in weapons and grenades for them – and waited. Only one of the 500 came.*

*There was one other group under the command of a KGB major. Their mission included delivering several members of the Afghan leadership to confirm the story of a domestic coup.*

*The story which was impressed on us was – Amin was in touch with the Americans; we would get one more dangerous neighbor from the South. There are no documents confirming this story and nothing has been presented.*

*It all seemed finally clear to me that when the man who had shot Amin told me that there was an order: don't take Amin alive. By the way, Amin's approximately eight-year-old was wounded in the chest at the same time during the shootout and died. I bandaged the wound of his daughter with my own hands – she was wounded in the leg. We left a Palace in which the rugs were soaked with blood and slogged our way through. This is hard to imagine...*

*We were all promised the stars of Heroes [of the Soviet Union] before our departing flight. As far as I know, two of us did receive them, one posthumously; everyone in the KGB involved in this affair, 400 people, received awards, even the typists and secretaries.*

*All the men who survived that night agreed that they would meet every year on 27 December at 7 P.M. at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. Kryuchkov forbade it – 'There's no use whining'...*

*Commenting on these recollections General Drozdov said: "I very much doubt the correctness of individual statements of V. Braterskiy. He was not in the assault groups. I see nothing in his scathing pronouncements except an ignorance of the facts, carelessness, and incompetence. They didn't promise us the stars of Heroes, they simply assigned us the performance of an operational assignment. Those who write weren't there themselves but know everything and more than everyone.*

*Actually, for a good five years the "Afghans" marked this day in spite of the prohibition, but in another place. They did not share this point of view of their leadership. KGB Chairman V. A. Kryuchkov in his conversations with me agreed with them but not everything was in his power."*

On that same day, 27 December, airborne units and subunits of the 103<sup>rd</sup> Division and also men from the KGB "Grom" and "Zenit" groups selected to help them went to the locations of military units and formations, and important administrative and special facilities, and established their control over them. The seizure of these key facilities took place in an organized fashion with fewer casualties.

### **The Seizure of Important Facilities in Kabul**

The General Staff of the Afghan army turned out to be another difficult target whose security force had been considerably strengthened and the situation inside the building itself was quite tense.

The mission to seize the General Staff building was assigned back on 14 December but it was located in a different place then. It was simply senseless to carry out an operation with the forces then available and it was postponed.

This time during the course of preparations to carry out the mission the senior of the "Zenit" subgroup Maj. Rozin, accompanying the adviser for combat training Gen. Vlasov was inside the building where the General Staff had relocated not long before. A museum had been located here earlier. Rozin managed to look over only certain portion of the building. Thanks to the fact that he had previously been a construction specialist, however, saw he compiled a plan of the entire building story by story indicating the locations of the guard posts on the basis of what he saw.

They developed a detailed plan of operations. Each "Zenit" officer was assigned a specific, clear-cut mission. They worked out problems of coordination in detail. This helped very much because there's no time to ponder in battle. The most difficult one was to break into the building. Yakub displayed special vigilance and was in the General Staff all the time, even spending the night there. They decided to use the presence in Kabul of Soviet paratroopers.

At 1850 a “Zenit” detachment of 14 reconnaissance saboteurs headed by Valeriy Rozin and two Border Guards officers in automobiles left the Soviet Embassy grounds for the General Staff building. An Afghan, Abdul Wakil, was with them. They arrived at the site about 1900. One “Zenit” group climbed up to the second story in the left wing of the building where the staff of the Chief of the General Staff M. Yakub was located. The rest remained on the first floor in the entrance waiting for the established time.

They paid attention to the fact that the Afghans in the building (the external guard force, the posts in the entrance and on both floors, people in civilian clothing, and officers) were considerably more than had been determined when scouting the target. In the communications center room, besides three signalmen on duty, there were about 15 Afghan soldiers with automatic weapons. In the side parts of the building at the left and right entrances besides the usual two sentries there were 7-10 more Afghan soldiers each. Several soldiers were in rooms on the first floor.

Probably there had been a leak about the operation, possibly even about the hour it was to begin. From indirect signs the Afghans were awaiting our operations and took specific steps to organize resistance. Opposition was considerably weakened thanks to the unexpected change of the beginning of the operation to an earlier time.

The operation was carried out with a cover story of the Commander of the 103rd Airborne Division General Ivan Ryabchenko becoming acquainted with the Chief of the Afghan army General Staff General M. Yakub.

About 1900 the division commander, the adviser to the Chief of the General Staff Gen. Kostenko, Gen. Vlasov, Col. Letuchiy, Maj. Rozin (he wore an airborne camouflage uniform over his special forces uniform and he posed as the deputy to Ryabchenko for technical affairs), and interpreter Pliyev walked into the office of the Chief of the General Staff. They handed over their weapons before they entered the reception room. The Afghans searched them. Officer P. Lagoyskiy escorting Gen. Ryabchenko and also Zenit officers Irvanev and Vasil'yev stayed in the corridor in front of the reception room. Yakub greeted his guests affably and invited them to a table. There was a radio in Yakub's office with which he maintained direct communications with division commanders. They reported to him about readiness from time to time. A conversation began. Gen. Vlasov presented the division commander to the Chief of the General Staff of the DRA Armed Forces. They began to discuss issues of mutual cooperation and coordination. Ryabchenko had not been informed about the operation which had been prepared and therefore behaved naturally and seriously. The presence of Yakub's radios [SIC, plural] was a surprise for the military advisers; they did not know when the Chief of the General Staff had obtained them. As the time for the beginning of the operation approached Gen. Vlasov and Kostenko left Yakub's office under various pretexts.

At this same time the reconnaissance saboteurs had collected in the entrance and corridors of the first and second floors of the General Staff. They covered the majority of the Afghans located there. In order to distract their attention and achieve the effect of surprise they established contact with the Afghans, treated them to cigarettes, held conversations with them about their having arrived with the division commander and ensuring his security.

At 1930 a strong explosion rang out in the city. Judging from the facial expression Yakub also heard it but continued to talk. Obviously had already guessed everything but did not lose his self-control. Then he hurried to the table where a German 9 mm MG-5 automatic weapon was lying. Major Rozin threw himself in the way. Hand-to-hand combat began. It needs to be said that Yakub himself was physically very strong (almost two meters tall and more than 100 kg) and with well-rounded training. At one time he had graduated from the Ryazan' Airborne School, and he spoke Russian well and was a great friend of the Soviet Union. Of course, it would have been difficult for Rozin if at that moment Lagoyskiy, Irvanev, and Vasil'yev, who had remained in front of the reception room, had not burst into the office with several Afghans. Not understanding what was going on, Gen. Ryabchenko was sitting in his seat but interpreter Pliyev also entered the fray. First they put the radio out of commission, depriving Yakub of the opportunity of giving an order to division commanders to begin combat operations. In the ensuing firefight Yakub's assistant was killed and Yakub himself was wounded. The Chief of the General Staff quickly hid in a lounge where, as it turned out, there were several more senior Afghan army servicemen as well as the Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs. Pliyev suggested that the Afghans who had hid in the Chief of the General Staff's lounge surrender. And they began to come out one at a time with hands raised.

At that time the group consisting of V. Kudrik, V. Stremilov, and A. Mashkov disarmed the sentry at the entrance to the communications center on the first floor in brief hand-to-hand combat, cut the outgoing telephone wire trunks in the landing, and suppressed the resistance of the guard force with automatic weapons. The “Zenit” troops put the most vulnerable and important parts of the communications center out of commission. The command and control of formations and military units located in Kabul was paralyzed which to a large extent ensured the success of the operation in the Afghan capital.

“Zenit” officers Kim and Nam covered the entrance to the first floor of the right wing of the building, not letting soldiers from the security company enter. The entrance to the left wing was controlled by Baranov and Povolotskiy. At the same time they did not let Afghan servicemen out of the rooms.

Pestsov and two Border Guards remained in the entrance and helped liquidate the guard force at the main entrance.

After the communications center was put out of order Kudrik, Stremilov, and Mashkov run up to the second floor to help support Titov and Klimov of the “Zenit” detachment operating there. Hand-to-hand combat and shooting in the rooms of the second floor were the most prolonged and fierce. The Afghans, concentrated in the rooms of the second floor, fired furiously. Some part of the Afghan servicemen hid on the third floor.

Meanwhile the situation in the office of the Chief of the General Staff had somewhat calmed. The wounded Yakub was lying in the lounge and the remaining Afghans surrendered. They were tied up and placed under guard in a separate room.

Shots and grenade explosions were heard through the entire building. General Kostenko hid in his office and almost fell victim to his own countrymen. When the battle situation in the office of the Chief of the General Staff was actually over Abdul Wakil appeared. He talked in Pashto to the wounded Yakub for a long time and then shot him with a pistol.

As they managed to put down the resistance of the Afghans in various places in the building they gathered the prisoners in a large room. In the final account they collected about 100 people there. Many of them were in shock. And although they were all disarmed they nevertheless presented a real threat to the small handful of “Zenit” troops. Then Rozin ordered that they all be quickly tied up [but] there was no rope. They used communications cable for these purposes which was found where possible.

They did not begin to assault the third floor of the building. The Afghans stuck there could not leave since all the exits were controlled by “Zenit” troops.

The battle lasted more than an hour. When the shooting had started to die down a company of paratroopers, who had arrived about 40 minutes later than the time set in the plan, quickly advanced on the General Staff building in airborne combat vehicles [BMDs]. The paratroopers opened massed intensive fire at the windows from machine guns and automatic weapons. The “Zenit” troops were forced to lie on the floor and find cover in order not to fall victim from their own soldiers. Tracer bullets piercing the walls of the rooms glowed like red fireflies, creating an inimitable sight. Maj. Rozin began to shout at the division commander that he needed to take some measures to cease fire. Gen. Ryabchenko gave a mission to one of his officers to quickly get in touch with the company commander. After some time signalmen with an R-105 radio arrived in the building and the division commander assumed control himself. The paratroopers quickly put down the remaining hotbeds of resistance and occupied the third floor. They “cleaned” the rooms.

The Afghans lost 20 men. Many hundreds of officers and soldiers were taken prisoner. Two men in the assault groups were slightly wounded.

On conclusion of the battle the General Staff building and the prisoners were put under guard by the paratroopers. Captured equipment was also handed over to them – automatic weapons, machine guns, grenade launchers, ammunition, and silent weapons. Rozin gave documents, valuables, and money from the safe to Gen. Vlasov and he handed them over to Gen. Kostenko the adviser to the Chief of the General Staff for storage. Two days later Gen. Vlasov handed over everything taken from Yakub’s safe to the Embassy for Gen. Ivanov.



A reconnaissance company of the 345<sup>th</sup> Independent Parachute Regiment, augmented by a ZU-23 anti-aircraft squad and nine “Zenit” troops was selected to seize the radiotelevision center. The reconnaissance company had been transferred from Bagram to Kabul on 21 December with this end in mind and situated not far from our communications center.

The company commander Sr. Lt. Aleksander Popov and the head of the “Zenit” group Maj. Anatoly Ryabinin were briefed about the upcoming mission ahead of time. It was stipulated that the seizure of the outer grounds of the target and the destruction of the weapons were to be performed by the paratroopers, but the “Zenit” troops were to operate inside the buildings.

They understood that the success of the battle could be ensured only by careful preparation and therefore they took it very seriously. Ryabinin had twice managed to visit the facility earlier. As an automation engineer he discovered where the radio and television studios were located from which broadcasts were made; their switching networks; and the main and reserve electrical power supply.

First, Popov drove around the radiotelevision complex with “Zenit” troops, determining its general layout and the main approaches to it. Changing into civilian clothes, the company commander, together with platoon commanders Lts. Devyatovskiy and Chibinov, then conducted detailed reconnoitering of the routes leading to the facility, the location of entrances and exits, guard posts, and weapons.

Popov and Lt. S. Loktev drew up a plan to seize the target, a diagram of the guard posts, and the location of combat equipment and barracks, and allocated men and equipment and calculated the time to reach the target via various routes.

They planned to seize the grounds of the radiotelevision center from two directions: from the right – from the direction of the American Embassy two platoons under deputy company command Lt. Loktev would cut off the crews from their tanks and then either them or seize them; from the left – from the direction of the main entrance with the men of a reconnaissance platoon, the HQ section, and the anti-aircraft squad, they would break down the gates, burst into the target’s grounds and support the operations of the seizure group. Two alternatives were provided: on the march in BMDs and on foot at night without firing.

In the middle of the day on 27 December the company commander received the combat mission from the Chief of Intelligence of the Airborne Forces Col. A. Kukushkin, informed the platoon commanders, and then in turn specified a particular task for each paratrooper. The BMD drivers and the gun operators were especially instructed. A. M. Watanjar operated together with the Soviet soldiers.

The order to begin operations came at 1830. They were ordered to begin attacking the target at 1930, seize it, and organize a defense. Maj. Ryabinin was in the company commander’s BMD. A group of “Zenit” reconnaissance saboteurs were located in an APC together with A. M. Watanjar.

The combat vehicles began to advance at the established time but were unexpectedly cut off by a column of an advancing paratroop battalion. The APC with the “Zenit” troops and Watanjar stopped. Aleksandr Popov, recalling that time, said: “We did not know then that there were other Airborne Forces units in Kabul besides us and therefore were quite surprised and could not understand where these paratroopers here had come from.” And all the same the reconnaissance company advanced to the target on time and the paratroopers rushed onto its grounds from both directions, crushing the gates and shooting down the sentries. The reconnaissance personnel acted daringly and rapidly. They immediately opened massed intensive fire. They destroyed three tanks and one BMP using the “Mukha” hand-held anti-tank grenade launcher. They seized one tank around the checkpoint and took the crew prisoner. The remaining tanks and BMPs (there were 11 tanks and four BMPs at the facility) did not offer resistance. Not one tank fired its gun although all the guns were loaded and the crews were in full combat readiness. They had been alerted back at 1700 but were not told against whom they were to fight. Having fired their machine guns the combat vehicles withdrew from the facility and stopped, expecting something.

Meanwhile the “Zenit” group rushed into the radiotelevision building, seizing it by storm.

The battle lasted about 40 minutes. After the building was seized the Afghan radio and television personnel were searched and gathered in a separate room and a guard posted.

The group was given a great deal of help by Watanjar, who sent the captured tank crews to tanks in the distance with an order to surrender. He explained the situation to them and assured them that soldiers who switched to the side of the new government were to be guaranteed safety. All the crews of the remaining seven tanks and three BMPs surrendered. Afterwards the soldiers from the facility's security force laid down their weapons. There were 106 taken prisoner, seven killed, and 29 wounded. On our side one soldier was wounded in the leg. He was later sent to a hospital.

Then Watanjar spoke to the officials of the radiotelevision center and organized work with Afghan specialists to transmit an appeal to the people by Karmal and a number of announcements of the new government. The paratroopers monitored these transmissions and guarded the buildings. Subsequently the radiotelevision center was handed over to representatives of the new government of Afghanistan and its security was entrusted to one of the companies of the 103<sup>rd</sup> Airborne Division. On 29 December the reconnaissance company of the 345<sup>th</sup> Independent Parachute Regiment left for Bagram. Thirteen servicemen of the company received government awards for courage and heroism displayed in carrying out this operation (Popov and Loktev were awarded the Order of the Red Banner).

At 2020 a paratrooper platoon and nine "Zenit" troops led by Aleksandr Puntus drove up to the telegraph building, but the entrance to it was closed. Puntus and an interpreter got out of the vehicle and started to explain to an Afghan officer who approached them that the group had arrived to reinforce the telegraph office's security force and asked to be let into the facility. However the officer replied that he had orders not to let anyone into the facility. In his words, about an hour before a strong explosion had occurred near the telegraph office, as a result of which a large crater had formed and the building had been damaged. No arguments worked on the Afghan officer, so they were not able to get inside the building peacefully.

After reporting the situation an order was received to seize the telegraph office by force. The operation began at 2100 with an APC knocking down the gates and entering the courtyard, neutralizing the guard force located around the building and in the sentry room. Then the paratroopers and "Zenit" troops swiftly rushed into the building and quickly seized its three floors. The entire operation took 20 minutes and was carried out successfully although Afghan soldiers, and there were 32 of them at the facility, offered armed opposition at first.

The Afghan soldiers were disarmed and placed under guard in the sentry room. Besides the guard there were support personnel inside the building (20 men and 12 women). They were all searched and placed in rooms on the third floor of the building. They did not offer resistance. The equipment was disconnected with the help of Afghan specialists. They were fed, calmed down, and put up for the night. The next morning all of them were released to go home. There were no casualties on either side.

After the seizure of the telegraph office outer [security] posts were set up which monitored the entrances to the building. There were no attempts to seize the building.

And already on 29 December, by agreement with Yusupov, the senior adviser to the Ministry of Communications, support and technical personnel of the telegraph office were admitted to the building; they cleaned up the rooms and adjusted the equipment.

At 1930 two paratrooper platoons and 14 "Zenit" troops headed by Yuriy Mel'nik began to seize the Ministry of Internal Affairs (Tsarandoy) building. They acted suddenly and swiftly. They approached the target in three open trucks and stopping sharply at a checkpoint let loose a salvo from seven "Mukha" hand-held grenade launchers. This caused brief confusion among the guard force numbering about 350 soldiers and officers, which helped the paratroopers to quickly make it from the checkpoint to the MVD building, from which the attackers were fired upon. The group drove the guard force from the first floor in several minutes with a decisive assault and seized it. Then the paratroopers hurried up the stairs, firing without interruption and throwing grenades. It took literally 15 minutes to occupy the remaining floors. The Afghans were demoralized, not understanding what was happening. After this resistance ceased immediately.

During the firefight “Zenit” soldier Capt. Anatoliy Muranov was shot through both thighs. MVD adviser Major V. Sisin tried to help him and delivered him to the Embassy polyclinic but Muranov died from pain shock and loss of blood.

A large number of Afghans were taken prisoner and a guard was posted around the building. Soviet MVD advisers assisted the paratroopers and “Zenit” troops.

Senior MVD adviser Kosogorskiy had ordered the arrest of Minister of Internal Affairs A. Sh. Payman but he was not in the building. He had fled in his underwear to where Soviet MVD advisers were living and was identified there by Maj. Nazarov. The next morning Payman was delivered to the command staff of the operation where Gen. B. S. Ivanov suggested he sign an appeal to the Afghan people for the need to maintain peace and order in the country. At 1400 28 December this appeal was broadcast over the radio.

On 29 December the new Minister S. M. Gulyabzoy and Commander of the Tsarandoy Lt. Col. Asgar, who had previously been held in Pol-e Charkhi Prison, arrived at the MVD and got down to work.

The HQ of the Central Army Corps (TsAK) and its security subunits were deployed in the “House of the Peoples” building complex – in all, more than 1000 men with artillery, APCs, and small arms weaponry. A paratrooper company, six “Zenit” troops, and six military advisers were allocated for its capture.

The mission included: seizure of the facility, establishment of control over the command and control system of TsAK HQ; involvement of the staff sympathetic to the new government in verification of personnel loyalty [*fil’tratsiya*]; isolation of Amin’s supporters; and ensuring the HQ’s activity was in the interest of neutralizing [any] actions of military units against Soviet troops.

The entire group was broken into subgroups. At the start of the operation the first subgroup took the barracks and the guns of the anti-aircraft battalion, the artillery depot in the “House of the Peoples” courtyard, and the signals battalion barracks under guard. The commander of the subgroup summoned a senior Afghan officer who turned out to be the deputy for political affairs of the artillery battalion and informed him via an interpreter that Amin had been overthrown. A democratic government had come to power in the country at whose request Soviet troops were helping it maintain order in Kabul. In the curt form of an ultimatum the commander demanded that conditions be met which precluded bloodletting. The Afghan officer readily accepted all our conditions and organized their fulfillment together with the chief of staff of the [signals] battalion. The military adviser to the signals battalion commander convinced him not to offer resistance. At 2015 the situation in this sector was completely under control of the subgroup.

While driving into the groups of the Corps HQ the other subgroup encountered fire from an APC and small arms. The paratroopers and “Zenit” troops opened return fire and quickly suppressed resistance. The APC was destroyed.

The commander of the group summoned a staff officer and through an interpreter congratulated him on the victory of the victorious forces of Afghanistan, demanded he disarm his company and the officers of the Corps HQ.

One of the captured officers said on his own initiative that Corps commander Dust had hidden in one of the HQ rooms with nine members of his personal guard. When an assault group rushed into the building and suggested that Dust surrender the Afghan defenders returned fire. In the ensuing battle the assault group suppressed resistance with automatic weapons fire and grenades and took the HQ personnel prisoner except for the Corps commander and his bodyguards who had helped him escape over rooftops to the grounds of a military publishing house.

Making use of the calm, the commander of the group organized the extinguishing of a fire and the rescue of communications equipment and weapons with the aid of Afghan officers and soldiers who had expressed loyalty to the new regime.

By the morning of 28 December the fire in the building had been put out and the communications center had been brought into working order. All the combat vehicles of the group took up positions to defend the facility. On the rear side of the building two BMD crews suppressed hotbeds of resistance by Afghans using machine gun and automatic weapons fire.

With the coming of daybreak they began to comb the HQ building and the surrounding terrain in the course of which they detained an Afghan soldier who informed them that N. Dust was hiding in a building of the military publishing house. The commander of the group suggested that the Afghan soldier pass on a demand to Dust that he surrender, explaining to him in detail the situation in the country.

Convinced that the Soviet officers were speaking the truth, Dust handed over his weapon and was taken under guard.

The commander of the group together with the military advisers immediately began to use the Corps commander to issue orders to TsAK formations and units to recognize the new government and cease resistance. Dust issued orders to the following units: the 88<sup>th</sup> Artillery Brigade; the 4<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> Tank Brigades; the Pukhantun Military Academy; the 26<sup>th</sup> Airborne Regiment; the 37<sup>th</sup> “Commandos” Regiment; the 7<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Infantry Divisions; the 190<sup>th</sup> Artillery Regiment; the TsAK intelligence battalion; the 9<sup>th</sup> Mountain Infantry Division; the 41<sup>st</sup> Infantry Regiment; and also individual units and subunits deployed in the provinces of Bamian, Wardak, Parwan, Kapisa, Kabul, Lowgar, and Nangarhar.

On the morning of 28 December TsAK HQ intercepted a telegram with an order of the governor of the province of Nangarhar in which an infantry division and the 444<sup>th</sup> “Commandos” Regiment were ordered to march on Kabul. The TsAK HQ advisers were informed that division commander Sabur was the brother of the captured TsAK signals battalion commander. They convinced him to get in touch with his brother and explain the political situation to him and draw him to the side of the new Afghan government. The division’s march on Kabul was halted.

By morning of 28 December HQ security was being carried out by dual Soviet-Afghan posts. And the next day the Corps HQ was relocated to the “House of the Peoples” and functioned normally. Operationally significant information came into the HQ constantly and was relayed to the command of the operation.

The seizure of the Afghan Military Counterintelligence (KAM) building turned out to be a quite difficult mission. The forces selected for this target included two paratroopers platoons, 12 military advisers, and 6 “Zenit” troops headed by Rafaehl Shafigulin, who had at his disposition 3 BMDs, 2 GAZ-66 automobiles, and 2 anti-aircraft guns. They began to advance at 1830.

According to the plan to seize and blockade the target developed by the group and coordinated with the advisers, it was proposed to get in through perimeter entrances. The BMDs breaking in were to pull up to the main building and blockade it. The personnel who rushed in were to disarm the security force along the perimeter and the seizure group (21 men), having broken into the main building, were to disarm the facility’s workforce and seize designated people. It was decided not to enter into combat with the security force, limiting themselves to cutting them off from the main target with the BMD-mounted machine guns and anti-aircraft guns.

When breaking into the grounds one of the combat vehicles received damage and lost the ability to move. The seizure group commander, who was in this vehicle, decided to assault the nearest door with part of his group. Under the cover of fire of the BMD the group broke into the building where it linked up with adviser Chuchukin, who had been there since before the operation. Then the group began to carry out its main mission and put out a fire which had broken out. The “Zenit” troops and paratroopers of the second group broke into the building through the main entrance. The operations of the combined group were quick and decisive. The enemy inside the building decided not to resist and surrendered their arms. Among the captured Afghans were all the designated people, even several members of the government. The facility’s security force, which had been cut off, heard the noise of battle and abandoned their location. During the night about 150 Afghan soldiers returned in individual groups and surrendered their weapons. The security force of the remaining buildings and services surrendered after an appeal via a megaphone.

The remaining facilities in the Afghan capital were seized without any special problems.

Shooting at night did not surprise anyone in Kabul then and therefore residents of the capital and Embassy officials slept quietly and when they woke up in the morning Afghanistan already had a new government.

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[Selected lists of people Lyakhovskiy talked to]:  
(Ranks as of the moment the book was written)

**Under USSR Ministry of Defense Auspices**

Leaders of Working Groups and Other Officials Who Were in Afghanistan Before the Deployment of Soviet Troops

Hero of the Soviet Union [HSU] General of the Army I. G. Pavlovskiy  
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General-Colonel P. I. Bazhenov  
General-Colonel M. D. Popkov  
General-Major V. P. Zaplatin  
General-Major S. P. Tutushkin  
Colonel Z. K. Kadyrov  
Colonel A. M. Kuznetsov

Participants of the Operation in Kabul of 27 December 1979

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General-Colonel G. I. Shpak  
General-Lieutenant N. N. Gus'kov  
HSU General-Major V. V. Kolesnik  
General-Major A. V. Popov  
Colonel of the Medical Service A. V. Alekseyev  
Colonel Eh. A. Ibragimov  
Colonel V. A. Sharipov  
Colonel O. U. Shvets  
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**Under USSR KGB Auspices**

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Colonel O. A. Balashov  
Colonel L. V. Gumenny  
HSU Captain 1<sup>st</sup> Rank Eh. G. Kozlov  
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Bo Pelines - Representative of a UN Mission  
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General-Colonel S. M. Gulyabzoy – RA Minister of Internal Affairs  
General of the Army A. M. Watanjar – RA Minister of Foreign Affairs  
General-Colonel M. Rafi – RA Vice-President  
General-Colonel G. F. Yakubi – RA Minister of Security  
General-Colonel N. Olyumi – Governor-General of Kandahar  
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Alexander Antonovich Liakhovsky is a retired Major General and a leading Russian historian on the Soviet War in Afghanistan. General Liakhovsky was born in Tbilisi, Georgia, and was graduated from military school in Baku in 1968. He served in Czechoslovakia and in Germany with the sixth tank division. In 1977 he graduated with honors from the Frunze military academy. As an adviser he traveled to zones of armed conflict in African countries, including Ethiopia in 1983 and twice to Angola in 1984. In 1985 he entered the military academy of the Voroshilov General Staff of the Armed Forces of the USSR. After graduating in 1987 he was assigned to the working group of the Soviet Defense Minister in Afghanistan and worked as the group director's chief advisor until troops were withdrawn in 1989. In May of that year he was wounded while observing an arms test and spent almost a year in various military hospitals. It was while undergoing treatment that he was asked by Army Gen. Valentin Varennikov to write an analytical paper on the military's role in Afghanistan which became the article "On the Scorched Afghan Earth" published in *Communist of the Armed Forces of the USSR* in mid-1990.

Since 1989, Liakhovsky has conducted research on the Soviet war in Afghanistan in the Russian Defense Ministry archives, the General Staff archives, and the Russian Military Archive, and interviewed numerous veterans and participants in the events. He has published numerous scholarly articles and books on the conflict, including *Tragediya I Doblest Afgana* [*The Tragedy and Valor of Afghanistan*] (1995) and *Plamya Afgana* [*Afghan Fire*] (1999). A new edition of *The Tragedy and Valor of Afghanistan* appeared in July 2004. He has also published widely in newspapers and served as consultant for news networks such as the BBC. His work represents the most comprehensive attempt to document and analyze the Soviet narrative of the Afghanistan war. Most documents in his books were published for the first time, including reports of Soviet Defense Ministry representatives, the KGB, and military commanders. The books also include extensive interviews with Soviet military officers and representatives of secret services. Among the subjects covered in his books are Moscow's efforts to stabilize the situation in Afghanistan in 1980 while keeping the mission limited to protection of government buildings and main installations, expansion of the mission to include combat operations, the emergence of the Mujahadeen resistance, and Soviet efforts to negotiate secretly with the rebel leaders, most notably Ahmad Shah Massoud.

Gen. Liakhovsky joined the reserves in March 2002. He is currently the Editor-in-Chief of the cultural magazine *Lyubimaya Rossiya* [*Beloved Russia*]. He may be reached via e-mail at [alya46@mail.ru](mailto:alya46@mail.ru).