

**CPSU CC Politburo Decision of  
24 January 1989, with attached report  
of 23 January 1989**  
Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Central Committee

Top Secret  
Special File

No. P146

To Comrades Gorbachev, Ryzhkov, Chebrikov, Shevardnadze, Yakovlev, Iazov, Murakhovsky, Kriuchkov

Excerpt from Protocol No. 146 of the meeting of the Politburo of the CC CPSU of 24 January 1989

Question of the Ministry of the Foreign Affairs USSR, Ministry of Defense USSR, Committee of State Security USSR

To agree with the understandings set forth in the note of Comrades Shevardnadze E.A., Yazov D.T., and Kryuchkov V.A. of 23 January 1989 (attached)

Secretary CC

[attached] to article VI protocol #146

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CC CPSU

On the measures pertaining to the impending withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan

In the difficult situation characterizing the state of affairs in Afghanistan, one can increasingly feel the inner tension stemming from the impending withdrawal of the remaining units of Soviet troops. The attention of the regime and the forces of the opposition is totally focused on 15 February, when, in accordance with the Geneva accords, the term of stay of our military contingent must end. In addition, the given timetable for Kabul is even more constraining, as the last Soviet military units must leave the Afghan capital in the beginning of February.

Practically throughout the entire country, military engagements between the government forces and the opposition continue to take place, in the course of which the government has essentially been able to maintain its positions, although with the help of Soviet aviation. The enemy has thus been unable to capture Jalalabad, Kunduz, and Kandahar. However, everyone understands that the main battle is still ahead. Currently the opposition has even decreased its military activity somewhat, saving up its forces for the coming period. Comr. Najibullah believes that it is intent on expanding its activities simultaneously in several key directions after the withdrawal of Soviet forces.

It should be emphasized that the Afghan comrades are seriously worried as to how the situation will turn out. In general, their resolve to resist the enemy is strengthening; they are taking a number of emergency measures and trying to arrange more rationally the forces that are available. To a certain extent, the Afghan comrades are counting on the continuation of their contacts with a fairly significant number of commanding officers within armed detachments of the enemy, on the strong disagreements which continue to exist within the opposition, and on the incompatibility of some of its leading political groups, in particular the "Islamic Association of Afghanistan" ([Burhanuddin] Rabbani) and the "Islamic Party of Afghanistan" ([Gulbuddin] Hekmatyar). Armed clashes between detachments of these and other opposition groups are not just continuing, but are taking on wider proportions as well.

The president is even closely examining such a possibility as declaring martial law or taking other extraordinary measures in the country, thinking that this may facilitate the adoption and execution of difficult decisions in the critical period ahead. At first he was leaning towards implementing martial law in our presence, but in the course of the discussions with him that have taken place, he arrived at the conclusion that this would best be done after the Soviet forces have left Afghanistan.

The Afghan comrades express their understanding of the decision to withdraw Soviet forces and affirm it once again, but, in conjunction with this, having soberly assessed the situation, point out that they cannot manage completely without our military assistance. Such assistance, in their opinion, could be rendered in forms different from today's and on a limited scale, but, nevertheless, would be a serious support both practically and psychologically. The Afghan comrades believe that if, after the withdrawal of Soviet forces, the opposition is unable to capture the principal centers in a swoop, then the Peshawar "alliance of seven" and the Teheran "union of eight" will have to enter into negotiations with Kabul to work out the future government arrangement in Afghanistan, which they steadfastly refuse to do at this time. The most important thing, emphasize the Afghan friends, is to hold out for at least the first three-four months after the departure of the Soviet forces, after which the situation may gradually begin to shift to their advantage. Such an opinion is borne out by some remarks made by representatives of the opposition, in the course of contacts with Soviet representatives in Islamabad. By these remarks it was implied that if the government of Najibullah holds out, they will re-examine their current position of not recognizing it in the capacity of a negotiating partner.

In the given situation there arise for us a number of difficult elements. On the one hand, our departure from decisions, which have been made and announced, to complete the withdrawal of our forces on 15 February may cause us extremely undesirable complications in the international arena. On the other hand, there is no assurance that shortly after our departure there will not arise a very serious danger to the regime that, throughout the world, is associated with us. Especially since the opposition, during the decisive period, may well manage to coordinate its actions for a given time, which is what the American and Pakistani military circles have been persistently urging them to do. Certain apprehensions also arise due to the fact that there is still no real unity within the PDPA, and factional, tribal, and other disagreements remain. Impulsiveness and memories of past "injustices" are transparent in the thinking of some Afghan leaders. Feeble, to say the least, are the actions of prime minister M.H. Sharq and many ministers in his cabinet.

A most serious factor remains the fact that violations of the Geneva accords by Islamabad have acquired not just an open, but a flagrant character. Pakistani borderguards are directly participating in military operations on Afghan territory. Bombardments of bordering regions of Afghanistan are taking place, arms flow continuously, and armed bands are crossing over from Pakistan. As before, the headquarters of the Afghan opposition parties, their training centers and bases continue to function unimpeded in Peshawar and other cities. All of this is done by inertia [concerning policies] established under Zia-ul-Haq. It is unlikely that B[enazir]. Bhutto is in a position to change the situation in the near future.

Both we and Afghanistan have been continuously, in a decisive manner, and citing concrete facts, condemning and continue to condemn such actions of the Pakistani government. Such a line is meant to be continued also in the future, including in the UN Security Council as well as in contacts with the Pakistani government itself.

1. The chief question on which depends the continuing evolution of the situation boils down to this: will the government be able to maintain Kabul and other large cities in the country, though above all the capital? The situation in Kabul is difficult; indeed, the main problems are not even military, but economic. It is very clear that the opposition plans to organize an economic blockade of Kabul, close off its supply of foodstuffs and petroleum products, and provoke discontent and even direct insurgence of the populace. Already, such a blockade is virtually being carried out by the forces of the opposition in the form of highway robberies and intimidation and bribery of drivers of Afghan ground-based freight vehicles destined towards Kabul. It should be pointed out that the present complications with flour and foodstuffs in general in Kabul are to a significant degree related to the fact that the directive to inflict defeat on Ahmad Shah, whose detachments present the greatest threat to the road between Kabul and Hairaton, was not carried out when the time was ripe.

At the present time, just the monthly requirement of flour in Kabul is around 15 thou. tons. Recently, several thousand tons of flour were delivered by Soviet motor and air transport. However, it is imperative to have stored provisions for at least 2-3 months, which would be controlled by the President and which would give the Afghan friends the possibility of feeling secure in this matter.

Since such large stores can be created only with the help of motor transport, we are talking about getting flour and other foodstuffs through the Hairaton-Kabul highway. In the words of comr. Najibullah, if the road remains functionally secured until May, the survival of the regime is guaranteed. Evidently, the Afghan friends will not be able to secure the normal functioning of the road without our help. We must proceed from the fact that a break in the functioning of the Hairaton-Kabul highway cannot be allowed. In addition, special attention will have to be paid to the most vulnerable section of the highway, which is the Salang pass with its more than three kilometer-long tunnel.

In preparation for the delivery of such assistance it is necessary, during the remaining time, to intensify through all channels the condemnation of the actions of the opposition, which is obstructing the delivery of foodstuffs to Kabul and other large Afghan cities; moreover, one should lay stress not on the fate of the present government, but on the situation of the population of these cities, which is seriously suffering as a result of such barbarous actions.

In principle, it is possible to consider the following scenarios:

First scenario. Citing the difficult situation of the civilian population, leave one division, i.e. approximately 12 thou. people, on the Hairaton-Kabul highway. The given scenario is hardly desirable, as a question may arise at the UN that we did not completely withdraw our forces. Despite the fact that Pakistan is not fulfilling its obligations under the Geneva accords, one may assume that the majority of countries in the UN would not support us because, for many, the question of the military is at the crux of the problem.

Second scenario. Citing the threat of starvation in Kabul and other cities, appeal to the UN to urgently provide a shipment of foodstuffs and petroleum products to the cities and send the UN troops to maintain the highway in operation. Until the arrival of the UN forces, leave our military subdivisions in these positions to carry out strictly humanitarian functions - provide the population with foodstuffs and petroleum products. In conjunction with this,

affirm that the withdrawal of the Soviet military contingent has taken place. Announce that, after the arrival of the UN forces, our subdivisions will immediately return to the Soviet Union.

However, this scenario is practically unfeasible, since the deployment of UN forces requires a decision of the Security Council, on which we cannot depend.

Third scenario. Withdraw all troops by 15 February, as planned; affirm this in the international arena with pronouncements by the governments of USSR and the Republic of Afghanistan. Then, under the request of the Afghan government with which it will appeal to the countries of the world, begin the escort of convoys of civilian cargo with the apportionment of Soviet military units for their defense. The escort of such convoys could start within approximately two weeks after the withdrawal of Soviet troops. Prior to this time, create a widespread general opinion with condemnations of the actions of the opposition, which is sentencing the population of Afghan cities to death from starvation. With the backdrop of such general opinion the escort of convoys by our units would appear to be a naturally humanitarian step. In addition, under this scenario, a number of sections of the road would have to be surmounted with a fight each time.

Fourth scenario. Withdraw almost all Soviet troops by February 15. Officially affirm the withdrawal of the Soviet military contingent in a corresponding statement. But, under the pretext of transferring some posts on the Afghan Side of the Hairaton-Kabul highway, leave Soviet units in some of the more important points, including in the Salang pass. Avoid creating much noise, on our part, about this action; note only that this is but a small number of Soviet military personnel who were slightly delayed by the fact that the Afghan side has not yet taken over from them the stated posts. After some time, as in the third scenario, begin escorting convoys to Kabul under our military protection.

Under all these scenarios we can begin with the fact that these operations would be undertaken by our regular units, but they must be formed on a volunteer basis, primarily from among military personnel who are serving out their duties in Afghanistan or those that have served their term and are now in Soviet Union. In conjunction with this, offer a salary of 800-1000 rubles per month, partially in Afghan currency, for the rank-and-file and significantly increase the officers' salaries as well.

Give international observers the right - and announce this widely - to verify whether we are actually escorting civilian goods. In the nearest future, talks should be held with the UN Special coordinator of humanitarian and economic assistance programs Aga Khan with the aim of using these programs and the mechanism of the Special coordinator in order to counteract the extremists' plans to stifle Kabul and other large Afghan cities with an economic blockade.

In the talks with Aga Khan it should be suggested that UN convoys of foodstuffs, petroleum products, and medical supplies go not only through Pakistan, but, to a significant extent, through Soviet Union.

In all of the four enumerated scenarios it is intended that at least an insignificant number of Soviet troops is to be left behind after 15 February 1989.

There still remains to be examined yet another, fifth, scenario - Soviet forces are withdrawn completely before 15 February, but we give the Afghan Side additional assistance, including financial, in the organization of the defense of the Hairaton-Kabul highway using their own forces, up to the point of completely providing for these Afghan units for a determined time-period, though, undoubtedly, this would be tied to considerable difficulties, especially in ensuring a dependable convoy escort.

As for the Kabul airport, keeping in mind its importance, it is expedient to have there, with the conclusion of corresponding agreements with the Afghan Side, our own control tower staff, numbering up to 100 people.

2. From the side of the Afghan government a question has been raised concerning the continuation of air assaults and bombardments of the armed opposition forces carried out by Soviet aviation from our territory after the withdrawal of Soviet troops. The difficulty of this question is being explained to the Afghan comrades; they are being advised to think about how to make better use of the capabilities of their own aviation under the new circumstances. On the whole, our explanations have been received with understanding, but, at the same time, they say that in some of the more critical situations, the use of Soviet aviation may be simply indispensable. It appears that this question cannot be examined without taking into account all the internal and external factors.

3. The Afghan Side assigns serious significance to having at its disposal such powerful types of weapons as the R-300 rockets and batteries of "Hurricane" multi-rocket launchers. These questions evidently require a differentiated approach to this or another type of weapon, but the general line should be directed, inasmuch as is possible, towards a more complete satisfaction of Afghan requests. It should be kept in mind that the very fact of possessing such types of weapons would strongly reinforce our friends psychologically and give them confidence in their forces. Taking this into account, batteries of "Hurricane" have already been set up in the Special Guards and the RA [Republic of

Afghanistan] army. The R-300 rocket batteries, which are currently with the Soviet military contingent, may also be transferred to the Afghan Side after modifying them to an export model and after the preparation of Afghan personnel for use and maintenance of these units, which should be quickly carried out on our territory.

4. It would be expedient to positively decide the question concerning the use of the USSR border force capacities in the Afghan border zone, keeping in mind, however that the Soviet mobile border groups currently stationed there will not remain.

5. Lately, we have been doing quite a bit to give the Afghan friends economic assistance in accordance with exactly those difficulties that Afghanistan is in. This assistance, despite all kinds of difficulties with which both we and the Afghans met during its shipment and distribution, has without a doubt averted numerous undesirable turns in the situation's development.

Nevertheless, in view of the difficulty of the Afghan situation, we must once again very carefully re-examine the current economic processes which are of the utmost importance to its internal political situation. We must determine what can be done additionally to improve the Afghan economy which is in a critical state and, in effect, on the brink of ruin; we must give operational assistance to solve the acute problems which are arising, in particular through the shipments of foodstuffs and goods of first necessity to Kabul and various provinces of the country, including Badakhshan.

6. In conjunction with all these measures, it is necessary, as before, to continue giving the Afghan Side assistance in ironing out relations with the opposition in Pakistan, Iran, and Western Europe. We must pay attention to every nuance of the opposition's mood to catch the more suitable moments when we can use the necessary influence to split it, separating the "moderates" from the extremists. In particular, right now it is important to support the mission of the representative of the Secretary-General of the UN B. Sevan who has agreed to work towards the creation of a consulting panel for resolving the future government structure of Afghanistan.

Through our diplomatic channels, it will be necessary to take continuing steps in our work with all countries which are in one way or another connected to the conflict in Afghanistan.

Special attention should be paid towards supporting contacts with the Pakistani Side, using the upcoming talks involving the USSR minister of foreign affairs in Islamabad.

8. It is essential to carry on even more goal-oriented propaganda work concerning Afghanistan, for which all scenarios of developments in the Afghan situation must be thoroughly analyzed ahead of time. Of particular importance will be the securing of propaganda concerning the decision to introduce martial law in Afghanistan, if such is taken by President Najibullah.

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