

## **May 10, 1981**

### **Report of Military Leaders to D. F. Ustinov**

#### **Citation:**

"Report of Military Leaders to D. F. Ustinov", May 10, 1981, Wilson Center Digital Archive, Cheremnykh "Ne po stsenariyu Moskvy: Afganistan - pervyye gody tragedii". "Klint", St. Petersburg, 1995. Translated for CWIHP by Gary Goldberg.  
<https://wilson-center.drivingcreative.com/document/113138>

#### **Summary:**

This document reveals reluctance on the part of the Soviets to maintain military involvement in Afghanistan, and difficulty in shaping a newly forming Afghan government. The PDPA's efforts to establish a democratic government, Soviets analysts revealed, were hampered by tribalism and strong ethnic disagreements regarding the scope and shape of their government.

#### **Credits:**

This document was made possible with support from Leon Levy Foundation

#### **Original Language:**

Russian

#### **Contents:**

Translation - English

May 1981 report of military leaders to Ustinov  
Appendix № 8  
REPORT OF MILITARY LEADERS TO D. F. USTINOV to USSR Minister of Defense Marshal of the Soviet Union Cde. Ustinov, D. F. We report. Imperialism is waging an undeclared war in Afghanistan. Following an active policy of political and economic isolation of the DRA, the US, Pakistan, Egypt, and China are giving significant economic aid to the so-called Afghan refugees and are creating and training large contingents of rebel bands on Pakistani and Iranian territory who are then sent into Afghanistan to fight the legal government of the DRA. Political, economic, and purely military sanctions against the DRA have been especially stepped up in the last 2-3 months (in connection with coming to power of the Reagan Administration). Political circles of the US and other countries are following a rigid policy of uniting all counterrevolutionary forces in the DRA in order to concentrate their efforts at overthrowing the legal government of the DRA in the final account. Naturally, in this situation the chief subject of the political, economic, and spiritual life of the country should be the interests of defending the gains of the April Revolution and subordinating all measures in the country to the actions of the Party and government, the DRA VS [Armed Forces], SGI [State Information Service], and MVD to defeating the domestic counterrevolution, cleaning it out of provincial districts, and establishing government authority in them. The CC PDPA and the government are carrying out measures in this direction to strengthen public institutions, taking economic measures, and also organizing the combat operations of the DRA VS together with the 40th Army in order to defeat rebel groups and establish popular democratic rule in the country. As of 1 August 1980 the DRA government controlled only 134 of 286 provincial districts (46%); as a result of combat operations and work done to organize government rule in the localities, as of 1 May of this year the DRA government controlled 184 of 286 districts (64%), which are practically all of the vital areas of the country. However, as before, rebel influence remains in a majority of the districts which are controlled by the government. At the same time, we think that in the present military and political situation in Afghanistan, at the present time and in the future, to solve the problem of defeating the counterrevolution and establishing popular democratic rule in the entire country by the military efforts of the 40th Army and the DRA VS alone would take a very long time, moreover [it would be] unproductive. Thus, for the six month (from 1.11.80 to 1.5.81) 63 districts were liberated from the rebels and [government] rule was established in 31 districts. To successfully defeat the organized counterrevolution in the country and establish popular democratic rule efforts are needed from the Party, government, the DRA VS, SGI, and MVD in the organization of combat against the rebels, attracting broad sectors of the population to their side. Unfortunately, coordinated efforts which are so necessary are not at present being attempted. The political and government leadership of the DRA is not involved in solving this pressing problem in real earnest in full measure; it mainly operates at the highest levels and the rebels [operate] among the populace. As before, in all the political life of the country and also in the resolution of military and other problems a policy is being followed of achieving narrow factional goals (removal of Khalqis), which affects the status of affairs in the Party, DRA VS, and other political and government institutions of the country very negatively. In our opinion, in this complex situation the efforts of the DRA political leadership need to be directed at solving the main problems and subordinating all political, military, economic, and organizational measures toward this for positive progress and solution. The military and political situation in the DRA dictates a need for a positive understanding of the role and authority of the PDPA which ought to take upon itself responsibility for the defense and development of the April Revolution. This is possible only if the Party is united and has [close] ties with the people, which is not borne out in practice. Moreover, in recent months the actions of the CC PDPA leadership from the former "Parcham" wing are characterized as a blatant attempt to increase the numbers of its supporters by any means, including in DRA VS Party bodies. This is [also] being done in leading Party and government bodies. The attempt to change the balance of power in the Party in favor of "Parcham" is leading to unscrupulous acceptance in Party provincial and district Party organizations which, in the absence of Party cards and other Party records is connected with a gross violation of a PDPA statute and permits politically immature people or adventurers personally devoted to individual Parchamists to be enrolled on a mass basis as members and candidate members. The Party strength on 1.8.1980 was 26,000. As of 1 January 1981 it was already about 50,000 and on 1 April 1981 as many as 60,000 PDPA members and candidate members. However we have not

permitted any attempt at a forced growth of the Party at the expense of Parchamist supporters in the DRA VS. Thus, on 1.8.80 there were about 13,000 PDPA members and candidate members in the DRA VS, among them 11,300 Khalqis and 1,500 Parchamists. As of 1.5.81 there were 15,000 PDPA members and candidate members, of which as before up to 70% were former Khalqis. Thus, for example, in January of this year in the 18th Infantry Division the political department instructor gathered a group of 94 men from the former Parcham wing who were supposedly in an illegal status and were submitted to CC Secretary Nur for enrollment in the Party and he demanded this be done. We halted the processing. □ Representatives of the former Parcham wing are, as a rule, appointed to leading Party and administrative positions in place of workers from the former “Khalqi” wing. Thus the governors of the provinces of Kandahar, Nangarhar, and Parwan have been replaced by Parchamists. The former secretary of the Kandahar GK [City Committee] Cde. Kayum was removed, arrested, and imprisoned without presentation of charges. In a situation which is hostile toward former Khalqis in Kandahar province (the CC PDPA and Revolutionary Council plenipotentiary in the “South” zone is Cde. Sarboland) many Party and government workers and bureaucrats have abandoned their posts, been removed from their positions, or have left Kandahar. At the present time there are practically no Khalqis left in the Kandahar provincial Party committee. The strength of the Party organization in the province has dropped from 530 to 180 PDPA members and candidate members in the past six months. In the Party committees of Kunduz, Baghlan, and several other [provinces] of the 11-13 members of the Party committee 3-4 from the former Khalqi wing are left in each. □ An unconcealed attempt to create an overwhelming majority of Parchamists in leading Party and government bodies was displayed by Minister of Defense Cde. Rafi and the Chief of the GlavPU [Main Political Directorate] Cde. Gol Aka on 6 May of this year when 17 of the 20 candidates nominated to the CC and Revolutionary Council were former Parchamists. □ With such actions the leading PDPA members have expressed a desire to quantitatively dissolve Party members on the basis of loyalty to former Parchamists and this is more easily accomplished when there are no Party cards and there is no single system of accountability for Party members. □ The main and pressing tasks are to strengthen and raise the authority of the PDPA are, firstly, to stop its “Parchamization”. This is a dangerous and harmful political game in the face of the decisions adopted about Party unity and should be decisively condemned and halted in all Party organizations. Secondly, [another pressing task is to] establish a period of no more than 2-3 months for issuing Party documents to all members and candidate members; that is, to organizationally form it, the Party, on the basis of “equal” political rights for both Khalqis and Parchamists. It cannot be tolerated and understood that a Party which has been in power for three years is not politically unified and organizationally documented. □ Any delay in the issuance of Party cards ought to be viewed as a selfish, intentional political policy of discrediting the numbers of Khalqis in the PDPA, a gradual expulsion of their representatives, and the goal of the CC PDPA's complete “Parchamization” of the Party, which could be fatal in the complex military and political situation in the DRA and lead in the final account to political revenge against their former enemies (the Khalqis) and an ideological resurrection of adventurism in the Revolution. □ Raising the role and authority of the PDPA in the everyday life of the country requires an immediate expansion of the CC PDPA by cooptation. Elections to the CC PDPA in this situation could deprive the former Parcham wing in Party of [its] leading position. □ Therefore both the CC PDPA membership and the Politburo and Secretariat ought to be expanded uniformly from both former wings. A preference to just the Parcham wing can lead to a still greater estrangement of the Party CC from the workers of the sectors of the country's population and a considerable part of ordinary PDPA members. □ At the present time the leaders of the Party and government of the country are rarely found at the grass roots. Thus, for six months Cde. B. Karmal, except for a recent trip to Jalalabad, has not once been in the provinces and has not met with representatives of the popular masses at the grass roots. □ Cdes. Keshtmand, Nur, Zeray, and others rarely travel to the provinces. □ Meanwhile the government of the republic is running the country in a passive-bureaucratic, cabinet way and therefore does not know the real state of affairs in the economy and the other processes taking place in the social and political life of the DRA well. □ Deputy Prime Minister of the DRA Keshtmand, being the best educated and businesslike, is

meanwhile acting in the role of Minister of Planning and does not run the government in practice. Therefore his appointment as Prime Minister of the DRA could exert some influence to increase the activity and efficiency of the government. The poor functioning of government bodies in the provinces negatively influences the stabilization of the situation in the country. CC PDPA and Revolutionary Council plenipotentiaries appointed with great powers for the country's zones do not realize their rights in practice and deal with political and organizational work unsatisfactorily. They see the chief purpose of their activity in taking leadership posts from representatives of the former Khalqi wing and replacing them with retainers who are personally trusted people, even with poor political and businesslike qualities. The plenipotentiaries, except Cdes. Layek and Barek (the "East" and "Northwest" zones), do not live right in the zones and therefore rarely deal with the people and if they meet them it is only at meetings in zonal centers, the provinces, and in offices. They do not know the economy of the zones well and do not delve into the activity of the districts. Thus, Cde. Dekhneshin, who is Chief of the CC PDPA Propaganda Department and Plenipotentiary for the "North" zone, has not visited the zone in more than six months. Cde. Sarboland ("South" zone) has been in Kandahar from time to time and broke up the administrative organizations under the guise of struggling for Party unity and then tried to do this in the 2nd Army Corps. Cde. Takhzib ("Northeast" zone) took a practically anti-Soviet position. Such an irresponsible attitude of a majority of zonal plenipotentiaries toward such great and important work in the field occasioned a need to gradually replace them with other more mature and principled people having good organizational capabilities. The poor work of zonal plenipotentiaries to a considerable degree is explained by the lack of necessary oversight over their activity. There is no demand for their work in the CC PDPA and in the Revolutionary Council of the republic. The activity of CC PDPA secretaries needs considerable improvement. The small size of the secretariat and the lack of specific direction and sectors for their work does not help at all, which takes away the initiative and businesslike nature in resolving pressing and critically important issues of the Party's and country's activity. On 5 May Cde. B. Karmal at a meeting with us proposed a system of weekly meetings between the USSR Ambassador to the DRA, the Chief Military Adviser to the DRA, and the heads of the groups of Party advisers and USSR KGB representatives with the Deputy Prime Minister and CC PDPA secretaries, and sometimes with the DRA Minister of Defense and Minister of the State Information Service to examine all issues which arise. B. Karmal himself will not take part in these meeting-conferences [SIC].

We think that the proposal of these weekly meetings with the participation of the above people will not be advantageous for the Soviet side for the following reasons: First, the system which has already been in existence for six months [whereby] any of the four named Soviet representative or their deputies meet with senior Afghan leaders allows for not only a mutual exchange of information but for necessary measures to be quickly taken; Second, meetings of the top people on the Soviet side with just CC PDPA and DRA government officials who do not actually have the right to make important decisions, even one more time per week, will lead to the consideration of a considerable number of problems which have arisen possibly being dragged out and turned into lengthy and fruitless discussions. The attitude toward our proposal of 30 April about creating an extraordinary commission headed by one of the CC secretaries to restore Party and government control in Kandahar can serve as an example of this. Everyone agreed with the proposal but the commission has not been created; Third, Cde. B. Karmal has announced that at these meetings he foresees the possibility of criticism of not only Afghan leaders but also of Soviet [leaders], and thus is not afraid of accusations of anti-Sovietism. This could be used to blame existing shortcomings and oversights in the leadership of the country on Soviet comrades; Fourth, the decision of B. Karmal not to participate himself in the work of these meetings ought to be viewed as an attempt to place himself above all the Soviet representatives in Afghanistan. Under such a system the tendentious provision of information to B. Karmal is not precluded, and accordingly unjustified and ill-advised decisions. All the more, at no level can the military aspects of our activity approved by the USSR Ministry of Defense be examined. Cde. Karmal did not comment on personal meetings with Soviet managerial personnel in the DRA; Fifth, if B. Karmal does not delve into the socioeconomic problems of the country right now

then his intention not to participate in the Soviet-Afghan meetings which were proposed to him and the reduction of meetings with them could lead to him further distancing himself from current problems and a loss of authority in the Party. □

□ Thus, if at the outset of the second stage of the April Revolution the concentration of Party and government authority in a single person's hands and the narrow makeup of the Politburo corresponded to the goals and tasks of the Revolution then at the present time an urgent need has come to defend and advance the Revolution in the country when multifaceted activity and an increase in the collegial leadership of the Party and government are required: □ First, relieve Cde. B. Karmal of the post of DRA Prime Minister; □ Second, appoint a DRA Prime Minister (Cde. Keshtmand) and increase the responsibility of the government for solving the problems facing the country; □ Third, expand the composition of the CC PDPA Politburo and Secretariat, distributing functional responsibilities among them. □ A delay or procrastination in deciding these very important political and organizational measures ought to be viewed as the preservation of the totalitarian power of one person, which is not appropriate to the current military and political situation in the DRA and slows down the revolutionary process in the country. □ [We] ought to also pay the most serious attention to other very important problems. □ 1. The problem of relations with the tribes is the most important and decisive in political and national life in the DRA and in the nationality issue in the country. More than 60 tribes numbering more than 4,500,000 live and roam on the borders with Pakistan and Iran. The DRA government's problem of relations with the tribes has not been studied and is not being resolved with due diligence. Only the Ministry of Borders and Tribes is dealing with this issue right now. A minister has not been appointed to [lead] this Ministry for about a year now, which reflects the indifference of the leadership toward improving relations with the tribes. Although several tribes in the provinces of Kunar, Nangarhar, Paktia, Paktika, and Zabol like the Nuristani, Sofi, Khugiani, Wazir, and others, could have already been cooperating with the government if [it] had a different attitude toward this problem. A number of tribes (Jadran, Tani, Mangal, Jaji, and others) have begun to take a position hostile to the government and they are facilitating the penetration of rebel detachments and caravans into the DRA with weapons and they themselves are waging armed combat against the authorities (within their territory). The tribal militias (malishi), which were created for the protection of district capitals and individual border sectors are not commanded by anyone in practice and therefore the effectiveness of their operations is extremely low or harmful. Counterrevolutionary organizations are conducting active ideological recruitment of the tribes but the DRA government is not undertaking the necessary efforts to work with the tribes and their leaders and is not countering the work of the rebels with a well-reasoned position in order to draw the tribes to their side. □ Up to now the DRA VS and the 40th Army have not waged active combat operations in the areas where the tribes live, local governmental bodies have not been established, and the borders with Pakistan and Iran in the areas where the tribes live remain open. □ It is necessary to solve the problem of relations with the tribes politically, economically, and organizationally (a national front) on a national scale, which would on a whole facilitate the stabilization of the situation in the country. The delay in solving this problem is leading to a further distancing of the tribes from the DRA government and their rapprochement with the rebels. □ 2. The CC PDPA and the DRA government are dragging their feet in putting land reform into practice in the interests of the main part of the country's population and hence drawing the peasants to their side. As is well known, the first step of land reform was carried out in 1979 and a number of important mistakes were made in the process. The preparations themselves for the second stage of land reform are now in their second year. A department of land reform (600 workers), and a commission for work in the provinces have been created, but all the organizational and preparatory measures are of a formal nature, but meanwhile more than half of the plowed land is still not being used. A quick solution to this problem, even if only in the main agricultural areas controlled by the government, would facilitate the strengthening of government authority in the provinces. Any red tape in deciding this problem is impermissible; the class division among the peasantry and the enlistment of its broad masses to the side of popular democratic rule is being delayed by this. In a country with a semi-feudal and tribal structure the main problem has not been resolved – land and water – and its resolution has been entrusted to secondary people (the chairman of the

commission is the Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Land Reform, Cde. Lakanwal).<sup>3</sup> An undeclared war is underway in Afghanistan and naturally the general political and socioeconomic situation in the country is reflected in the condition of the armed forces. In this situation [an important concern of the Party and government, and Cde. B. Karmal personally [sic], should be the strengthening of the fighting ability of the armed forces and the fulfillment of the laws concerning them so that they can independently and in coordination with detachments of Party activists and SGI and MVD subunits defeat the counterrevolution and protect the country's borders.

□According to the table of organization approved by the VS DRA there should be 206,000 men; at the present time they have 124,000 men (60% manning); as of 1 May of this year there are 4,700 deserters from the army. [The desertion rate] in MVD subunits is still worse - up to 32%. □The DRA Revolutionary Council has adopted two laws - "Universal Liability to Military Service" and "Criminal Responsibility for Crimes Affecting the Military Preparedness of the DRA". The laws are not being enforced. They were adopted under pressure and actually serve as political camouflage for other intentions. □Thus, the draft of young men for military service is only occurring at a forcible manner (dragooning [otlov]). Nothing changed after the adoption on 7 January of this year of the "Law of Universal Liability to Military Service". The number drafted in 1359 (21.3.80-20.3.81) is less than those discharged from the ranks of the VS DRA and the deserters (60,000 and 67,500, respectively). No one is dealing with the draft of young men into military service, that is, enforcement of the law, except Soviet military advisers. The extraordinary commission which was created has not received the necessary authority and is not capable of solving this problem. The CC PDPA Politburo and DRA government are not dealing with the problem of the military draft in a businesslike manner. Therefore the CC PDPA and Revolutionary Council zonal plenipotentiaries, the secretaries of Party provincial committees, and the governors of provinces have removed themselves from deciding this most important problem and bear no responsibility for it. The "Law on Criminal Responsibility for Crimes Affecting the Military Preparedness of the DRA" was adopted on 6.9.80, but was effective, and just formally, only since 1.1.81. As a consequence of the poor explanatory work, like the inertia of the procurators and courts, the effectiveness of this law boiled down to nothing. In the VS DRA thefts, losses, and the sale of weapons and ammunition are not ceasing, draft-dodging has become widespread, and many other crimes are being committed. However the preparation for examination and the examination itself of criminal deeds do not give tangible results. In 1359 only 112 criminal cases were examined with pronouncement of sentence. □The non-enforcement of laws by the DRA government ought to be examined as an intentional policy of reducing their armed forces in order to shift efforts in armed combat to the 40th Army. Several senior Party and government leaders (Cdes. Nur, Takhzib, and Sarboland) have said this in private conversations. □We have studied the military and political situation and the processes connected with the progress of the Revolution and life in the country deeply and comprehensively. In the course of our work we have repeatedly voiced all these most important problems to the political, governmental, and military leadership of the country. Our ideas regarding these problems have been examined and discussed at various times with the Soviet Ambassador, representatives of groups of Party advisors, and leaders of other missions. □Six months of the second stage of the April Revolution have passed. Without question, certain social reforms have been carried out, events are developing on a positive level, and the authority of the new government is being strengthened. □But evaluating the state of affairs reasonably, it ought to be seen that all this has been done mainly by the political authority of the USSR and our economic power, but in the fight (the main task) against the counterrevolution inside the country the 40th Army remains the decisive force as before. □The Afghan political leadership is completely satisfied with such a state of affairs and it is trying to prolong it as much as possible, meanwhile solving its narrow factional problems of defeating political opponents, creating a Parchamist Party, but shifting the fight against the counterrevolution in the country completely onto the 40th Army, and not the DRA VS, SGI, and MVD.

□Assurances about allegiance to the USSR, the decisions of the CC PDPA plenum, and the laws concerning the VS DRA, on the whole reflecting a correct policy of furthering the Revolution are being ignored and not enforced, and evidently serve as political camouflage of the genuine intentions of the DRA leadership in the practical activity of

the Party, the country, and the VS DRA. In our view at this time it is necessary to evaluate the real state of affairs in the DRA, to mark out a political and military strategy, and the main thing - to demand the DRA leadership switch from assurances to decisive actions: concentrate all the efforts of the Party, VS DRA, and the country at defeating the counterrevolution in the near future, establishing government authority in the provinces, and solving other social and economic problems mainly by their own efforts, unquestionably with necessary economic aid from the USSR. The CC PDPA and Cde. B. Karmal personally should take the entire range of responsibility on themselves for the fate of the Revolution in the country and should switch from words to real deeds. Delay in this historically important matter cannot be permitted. We request you consider this. Signed [General of the Army M. May] [General-Lieutenant V. Samoylenko] [General-Lieutenant V. Cheremnykh] May 1981  
Signed [General-Colonel] Yu. Maksimov [General-Lieutenant] V. [Coordinated with them in Tashkent on 12 May when V. Cheremnykh was proceeding to Moscow with this document).