

March 1988

General Valentin Varennikov's Proposals on How the Afghans Should Use Their Forces After the Soviet Withdrawal, March 1988 (Excerpt)

Citation:

"General Valentin Varennikov's Proposals on How the Afghans Should Use Their Forces After the Soviet Withdrawal, March 1988 (Excerpt)", March 1988, Wilson Center Digital Archive, A. A. Lyakhovskiy, Plamya Afgana (Flame of the Afghanistan Veteran) (Moscow: Iskon, 1999), pp. 407-09. Translated for CWIHP by Gary Goldberg
<https://wilson-center.drivingcreative.com/document/117275>

Summary:

Varennikov makes recommendations for the Afghanistan military after the withdrawal of the Soviet army. He recommends retreating from smaller garrisons and outposts, and concentrating on "holding the most important areas and facilities of the country."

Credits:

This document was made possible with support from Leon Levy Foundation

Original Language:

Russian

Contents:

Translation - English

□The armed forces today are in condition to independently counter opposition pressure only in instances where they constitute large units. Small subunits (posts, outposts) and small garrisons, to battalion level, are extremely unsteady.

□The leaders of the opposition, the US, and Pakistan are counting on the overthrow of the current regime and the seizure of power in the country under all alternatives of the development of events after the withdrawal of Soviet troops. Thus, if the Geneva Accords are signed, when Afghanistan receives certain guarantees of non-interference, rebel operations will to a considerable degree be fettered by the responsibilities of the Pakistanis and the Americans, and will not be of an open nature, let's say, by shipping weapons and ammunition across the border. Accordingly, the counterrevolutionaries will be forced to operate in an atmosphere which is more difficult for them.

□It is important to keep in mind that the counterrevolutionaries will obviously start to place their main reliance not on large-scale actions of armed groups but on infiltrating agents into the Party and government bureaucracy. Occupying responsible official positions, they can demoralize and recruit. At a certain time the counterrevolutionaries will try to occupy suitable positions in the government bureaucracy with these forces and support their operations with rebel detachments, which could sneak in with refugees (there are weapons in each population center)...

□The military doctrine of the Republic of Afghanistan, with the proclamation of a policy of national reconciliation, has been completely subordinated to the mission of stopping the war. It has a peace-loving nature, having as its main idea ensuring the security of the government and the relative stability of the situation in the main regions of the country.

□But in achieving the designated strategic goals and, in addition, tactical missions, the leadership of the Republic has still been relying not only on their own forces but on the international aid of the Soviet Union and the troops of the 40th Army.

□...The withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan will fundamentally change the military and political situation and considerably reduce the opportunity for the Afghan leadership to stabilize it. If measures are not taken in advance then many critically important regions and facilities can end up beyond the control of government forces in enemy hands.

□Considerable men and equipment are required to protect such regions and facilities. Considering the low combat reliability of Afghan units in comparison with Soviet troops, one can make the conclusion that only bold and decisive steps in the use of actually available forces can allow [them] to count on success in holding important facilities.

□In this regard it is advisable:

□1. To examine critically the current dispersal of the troops of the RA armed forces throughout the entire country (especially the army troops, including border troops). Try not to hold all the main regions, as was ensured by the presence of the 40th Army, but concentrate efforts only on the selected axes ensuring the daily activity of the government and stability for the situation in key regions.

□To create a concentrated grouping of armed forces. All garrisons which even now, when our troops are here, are difficult to provide for and support when they conduct combat operations are to be eliminated. Withdraw the subunits of these garrisons to troop basing areas. This chiefly affects garrisons in the areas of Barikot, Panjshir, and Badakhshan...

□Such activities preclude the possibility of the defeat and occupation of these small garrisons by the rebels, which would cause political damage to the government and negatively influence troop morale.

□The abandonment of small garrisons is to be carried out by holding a preliminary meeting with local authorities and concluding an agreement with them about handing over this area to local authorities for protection who, for their part, would be obligated not to take actions harmful to government bodies.

□2. To carry out similar operations regarding those "nuclei" [orgyadra] of government authority in a number of districts and rural districts (totaling 17) which were at one time established by force....These "nuclei" are to be removed and agreements signed with local authorities that they will hold elections for administrative bodies themselves without displaying hostility to government bodies.

□3. At the present time and also after the withdrawal of Soviet troops the Afghan armed forces (in addition, the 40th Army) are not to organize large-scale combat operations and not to exacerbate the military and especially the political situation. When necessary, launch small, but effective, strikes only on targets which pose a direct threat (outside population centers).

□4. Concentrating the main efforts at holding the most important areas and facilities of the country, the main cities and highways of the country, the armed forces are to be used to carry out the following fundamental missions:

□The Army. The main forces are to be in constant readiness to maneuver in order to inflict defeat on counterrevolutionary formations presenting a special danger to the existing regime - in the regions of Kabul, Herat, Kandahar, and Jalalabad. Part of the forces are to be used to cover the main lines of communications, pipelines...

□MGB. The main mission is the timely identification of the counterrevolutionary underground, both in the capital and in provincial centers and also, and especially, in the armed forces.

□Sarandoy. Its main forces are to be sent to protect and defend security zones, the most important cities, economic facilities, sectors of lines of communications, and also to support public order in Kabul and its suburbs...

□5. Considering that the fate of the present regime mainly depends on holding the capital and the Kabul-Termez highway, bring up additional troops to Kabul, its suburbs, and also to the main airbase, Bagram...

□6. Make a fundamentally new decision about border troops. The border troops of Afghanistan do not actually perform routine protection of the state border but wage combat operations the same as army troops to hold specified regions or population centers and also to cover sectors of routes from Pakistan into Afghanistan via which weapons and ammunition are delivered to the rebels.

□At the present time the border troops, having a considerable man power level (more than 60%) and complete (up to regulation) supply of combat equipment and weapons (from 80 to 100%) have been making a combat contribution for a year now. However they cannot provide guaranteed protection of the state border from penetration by enemy caravans even if they are reinforced manifold. It is impossible to do this without the complete involvement of the free tribes in the problem of protecting the border. The latter are even interested in the passage of the caravans since they get considerable reward from this.

□A situation is developing in which there is no sense in having the border troops located right at the border. But considering that their maintenance and support is already a large problem even now, the need arises to transfer the majority of border subunits to the main lines of communication of the country, putting them at the main population centers.

□...All the issues described have been tentatively discussed with Najibullah with the exception of the border troops, and has found his full support. As regards suggestions regarding the use of border troops he has for now only a general idea. The Supreme Commander-in-Chief needs some more time to recognize the need for such a step...

Varennikov

□Kabul, March 1988