

Russian Supreme Soviet Investigation of the 1991 Coup

The Suppressed Transcripts: Part 4

Hearings on the Participation of the Leadership of the Soviet Armed Forces

Editor's Introduction

Five years have passed since the coup against Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, yet few institutional controls exist to keep the security services and armed forces accountable to elected civilian authority.

Of the five official probes of the 1991 coup, only one—the Russian parliamentary Commission to Investigate the Causes and Circumstances of the August Putsch—was public. Even so, the official transcripts of the hearings that took place in late 1991 and early 1992 have not been published in their native language. *Demokratizatsiya* obtained a copy of the stenographic record and published a translation of the hearings on the role of the state security organs in its Fall 1995 and Winter 1996 issues. A translated transcript of the hearing on the illegal financial activity of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) appeared in the Spring 1996 issue. In the following pages appears the first section of part four: the 18 February 1992 hearing titled “The Participation of the Leadership Personnel of the Armed Forces in the Coup d’Etat of 19-21 August 1991.” This section contains a short introduction by Lev Ponomarev, a deputy of the Russian Federation Supreme Soviet and chairman of the investigative commission; and the testimony of Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) Armed Forces Commander in Chief Yevgeny I. Shaposhnikov, and of Gen. Konstantin I. Kobets, who served as chairman of the Commission for Analyzing the Activity of the Leadership Personnel of the USSR Armed Forces During the Coup d’Etat.

Testimony of Russian state procuracy investigator A. V. Frolov and State Committee for Defense Matters Deputy Chairman Vladimir N. Lopatin will appear in the Winter 1997 issue, concluding the text of the entire series of hearings.

The text of the transcript, translated from photocopies of the original typed draft manuscripts by Russian Federation Supreme Soviet stenographers on worn-out manual typewriters, is often difficult to read. As an unedited transcript, the original text contains incomplete or rambling sentences, sudden changes of thought, and occasional improper syntax. To keep the translation as faithful as possible, the translators sought to preserve accuracy over style. The editors have deleted portions of text concerning procedural matters and other questions that offer no historical insights, and all editing is indicated in the text, either in brack-

ets or as footnotes. Material in parentheses is the work of the Supreme Soviet stenographers. A copy of the original stenographic record in Russian is deposited in the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C.

J. MICHAEL WALLER
Executive Editor
Demokratizatsiya

Transcript

Parliamentary Hearings of the Commission to Investigate the Causes and Circumstances of the August Putsch, on the Theme, "The Participation of the Leadership Personnel of the Armed Forces in the Coup d'Etat of 19-21 August 1991."

18 February 1992

Chairman: L.A. Ponomarev

L.A. Ponomarev

[. . .] Our Commission to Investigate the Causes and Circumstances of the August Putsch today is conducting the next hearings on the theme, "The participation of the leadership personnel of the armed forces in the coup d'etat of 19-21 August."

We all know from published material and we were witnesses to these events, that without the army's participation, this putsch could not have taken place. But, on the other hand, we know well that the passive participation itself of both the leadership and the army itself led to the fact that the putsch broke down. This contrasting situation, naturally, attracts both the public's attention as a whole to the situation in the army now, and, first of all, that of Parliament.

We know that a commission was set up to analyze the activity of the leadership personnel of the armed forces during the coup d'etat. But simultaneously, we know that the results of the activity of this commission are not known to the broad public and are not known to Parliament. That's exactly why we consider it proper today to conduct hearings on this theme. We have invited here the leadership of the armed forces and representatives of the procuracy who are participating in the investigation of the coup d'etat.

We will hear first the testimony of Yevgeny Ivanovich Shaposhnikov, the Commander in Chief of the CIS Armed Forces, and then Konstantin Ivanovich Kobets will speak. He is the state advisor for defense and the chairman of the state commission to analyze the coup.

I wish to remind you how our parliamentary commission operates. People's deputies of the Russian Federation may ask questions after each testimony. If the invited guests wish to ask a question, they should send a note to the person leading our meeting. Leading our meeting are Russian Federation People's Deputy S.N. Yushenkov and Russian Federation People's Deputy L.A. Ponomarev.

Ye.I. Shaposhnikov

Distinguished people's deputies! Your invitation to me today to the highest organ of state power in Russia to the meeting of this parliamentary commission has made it possible for me to report to you about the results of work conducted within the armed forces in analyzing the activity of the leadership personnel of the troops and forces during the period of the well-known events of last year, and also of the normative documents which regulate the activity of troops in emergency situations.

To conduct this analysis within the Ministry of Defense, a commission was established on 5 September [1991]. It was headed by Russian People's Deputy K.I. Kobets. Making up the rest of the commission were Deputy Chief of the General Staff Kleimanov, the Chief of the Directorate of Affairs Ivashov, Russian Federation People's Deputy Seleznev, and USSR People's Deputy Lopatin.

The presence among the commission's personnel of USSR and Russian people's deputies gave it the capability to carry out the task placed before us very thoroughly and objectively.

In connection with the fact that the USSR Supreme Soviet Resolution of 30 August, entitled "Concerning the Initial Measures for Overcoming Attempts to Carry Out the Coup d'Etat" recognized the illegal activity of all commissions except those created by the Supreme Soviet of the USSR and the republics for conducting investigation into the facts of the coup d'etat, and it agreed to the joint conduct by the USSR Procuracy and the Procuracy of Russia of investigation of those facts, the commission was given the task of at least analyzing the activity of the leadership staff in the armed forces during the period of the putsch and of the documents which governed the troops and military control organs during this period.

The commission worked from 5 September until 5 November. In the process of the commission's work, it was established that on 19 August, at 0600 hours, Marshal of the Soviet Union Yazov held a meeting with members of the Ministry of Defense Collegium and the chiefs of the main, central directorate, at which he informed those present about the establishment of the Emergency Committee and of the naming as acting president of Yanayev, the vice-president of the USSR, and he ordered that the armed forces be placed on increased combat readiness.

At this time, he demanded that attention be paid to increasing attentiveness to the protection of military objects and increased organization, stipulating that he did not want any blood spilled. On that same day the troops and forces were sent the corresponding directive, signed by Yazov. I would like to report to the members of Parliament that neither at the meeting nor in the directive were there instructions given about the use of arms against the civilian population and the civilian powers. In accordance with this directive, the guard was increased at arsenals, bases, supply dumps, and over arms, military equipment, military camps, and the most important state administrative buildings and joint patrolling was organized with the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Soviet army.

Called to greater activity than others were the troops of the Moscow and Baltic Military Districts, and also the airborne troops. Thus, to protect objects, patrolling, and with the intent of preventing a public uprising against the GKChP

[the State Committee for the State of Emergency, or the August junta], and also to strengthen the political actions by the armed forces there were attached to the Moscow garrison about 5,000 persons, more than 350 tanks, 270 armored vehicles, and other equipments. In the airborne troops, 380 airborne combat vehicles and more than 700 vehicles were attached. In other military districts and in the fleets, an insignificant amount of personnel and military equipment were set aside, and only in part was there carrying out of measures of increased combat readiness, and this was connected primarily with the protection of military camps.

The former Minister of Defense issued an instruction to establish a curfew in Moscow and Leningrad. In Leningrad, the commanding general of the entire Leningrad Military District, Colonel-General Samsonov coordinated all of his activities with the city's mayor Sobchak and refused to deploy equipment or troops in the city. Certainly to introduce a large mass of armed people and military equipment into a multi-million city such as Moscow, particularly under conditions of a tense political situation was insane. And only the self-restraint of people, civilians and military, avoided more painful consequences. The extra expenses of material resources in the Ministry of Defense for conducting the steps ordered in the 19-22 August period amounted to 2.5 million rubles in monetary terms. Furthermore, the motor schedules by aviation, armored, and vehicle equipment turned out to amount to about 13 million rubles. Essentially, this money, certainly, was cast to the wind.

In the process of the commission's work, the authoritative and normative acts regulating the method of troops' behavior at an increased level of combat readiness, issued in the Ministry of Defense were analyzed. The Parliamentary Commission of the Russian Supreme Soviet to Investigate the Causes and Circumstances of the August Putsch, headed by People's Deputy of Russia Ponomarev, participated in this work. The members of the commission were supplied with all the documents that they asked for. Subjected to analysis were such orders of the leadership personnel of the Ministry of Defense sent to their subordinate responsible personnel during the period of 19-21 August. Part of these documents were confiscated by the chairman of the Investigative Crew of the Russian Procuracy in connection with the criminal case or with the criminal cases leading at this time to the fact of the coup d'etat.

Furthermore, meetings were held with a great number of generals, admirals, and officers. I personally discussed the activities of the 19-21 August period with every deputy minister of defense, and commanding officers of the military districts and of the air defense, and then tried to objectively come to an evaluation of the actions of each military person, because the army has its obligations. First of all, there is the order, there is the message which must be complied with. It's another matter how to comply with it. For acts connected with the establishment of the emergency situation, there were removed from duty nine deputy ministers of defense, ten commanding officers of military districts or fleets, eight chiefs of main and central directorates, and three lower ranking commanders and chiefs. The reasons why we removed these people demand explanation.

The situation is that the demands of the directive about increasing alertness, protection of objects, and increasing the organization were complied with by practically everyone to whom it was addressed, and for this there was no reason to accuse anybody, but a number of military chiefs went further. They started to organize meetings in support of the GKChP, and to make appeals to their personnel, as did the military council of the troops of the air defense. And even more than that, they took administrative steps in the case of military personnel who did not support the GKChP. We approached these very commanders and chiefs in a principled way, considering it impossible to trust commanding officers of so many military personnel, ready to pull these personnel into political adventures.

As soon as I accepted the duty of Minister of Defense, I posed the question of “departization” of the armed forces and about banning activity in them of any political parties and at the present time this matter is actually resolved in the armed forces, because in fact the army had adopted departization even before the declaration of the GKChP, and this matter was posed directly at the Collegium, but it found no support because the Chief of the Political Directorate and some Collegium members spoke out strongly against it.

Per the results of analysis of the activity of the leadership personnel, an order of the Minister of Defense was issued by which the General Staff was tasked to prepare a proposal about developing a mechanism for bringing the armed forces to a higher level of combat readiness and increasing effectiveness. In the previous period we were in a situation that in a spoken way were accomplished very many various orders—one regiment from Point A to Point B, and so on. Now we have categorically stopped this, and I announced to the armed forces that if, let’s say, some situation demands some sort of movement, it must be sanctioned by the Supreme Soviet and the president, and second, that documents are supposed to bear two signatures—those of the Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces and the Chief of the General Staff, so that responsibility would exist and so it would be clear who is issuing this.

Those points of normative documents where the command is directed to react to exacerbation of the public-political situation in regions right up to reports in the Central Committee of the Communist Party were canceled at the present time and removed from the management documents.

In this way, the August events of last year allowed us to learn a number of lessons for internal political life in the country. The organizers of the coup counted not only on unhappiness among the people, but also, first of all, on military personnel, hoping that the difficulties taking place in the life of the troops and fleet connected with economic difficulties and international differences and the low social support of the personnel of the armed forces would give them the capability to manipulate the attitudes of thousands of military personnel in their [the plotters’] own interests. Speculating on the situation which had come about in the country, the conspirators did not consider that which had taken place in society and the understanding of people, including people in uniform, of the changes.

After 1985, the army was not the same, it changed, and processes of democratization also showed up in it, as they had in all the other layers of the popula-

tion. The putsch organizers simply didn't have this in mind. The army would not operate against its own people, nor against them would be raised the arms in cold blood of the majority of generals and officer personnel of the army and fleet, their considered evaluation of the events taking place in the country did not allow that the August coup would have the predicted result.

Along with this, participation of troops in the events of 19-21 August forces us to think about the activity of the armed forces in a new way. Drafts of legislative acts of the Russian Federation were prepared and presented to the president of Russia, [acts] in which provision is made for forbidding use of the armed forces for solving internal political matters. These very ideas found expression in the drafts of new all-services regulations. The armed forces are supposed to be used for defense of the state from armed attack from without, and not against their own people.

[Text omitted—Ed.]

G.P. Yakunin (11th Nat-Terr. District, and member of Ponomarev Commission)

Information was published in yesterday's evening issue of *Izvestiya* and it disturbs, certainly, every defender of the White House. Now a band of rallying elements are taking place. Recently there was a rally. There is such an organization here as *Zhivoye Koltso* [The Living Ring]. Certainly this fact disturbs [the] Democratic Russia [political movement] that this is the fatal BMP [armored infantry vehicle] that was guilty in the death of three heroes of the Soviet Union (by the way, this all was kept quiet, and they were buried, as far as I know, and were not awarded these decorations), in the performance of their duties, and the crew of the BMP was not held guilty by the Moscow Procuracy.

Certainly *Izvestiya* properly asks the question, just who is supposed to be guilty? It is motivated by the fact that this case has not been properly accounted for. In fact, the putsch organizers bear, as they say, the moral and legal responsibility. But the armed forces has its own procuracy.

I am curious, first, about your personal view of this problem. Second, the problem is purely legal. What do you think about who will bear the responsibility? If this matter will not be raised, then we fear that the defenders of the White House will come here again, and we all, Muscovites, will be forced to support the demands of justice in the case of what took place.

Ye.I. Shaposhnikov

Distinguished comrades! No matter what we say about this fact, I or anyone else, this will be purely a subjective opinion. We have a Procuracy, and it and only it has the right to determine guilt or innocence in this or that person in this or that act.

What can I say? I am very sorry that it happened. Obviously, the leaders of the BMP and the crew of the BMP where it took place are also sorry. But I think there is someone to bring to court, to hold responsible. And let this be done in accordance with the laws, with the legislative acts which they are managed by in their practical work. That's how I would answer that question.

G.P. Yakunin

I have a second question, so that I won't have to come to the microphone again. Yevgeny Ivanovich, what is your personal attitude and that of the leadership of the army to the problem of creating a national guard, considering, that powerful rallies of the reddish-browns will be strengthened? Thanks to our large rally of democrats, we somehow managed to prevent the supporters of the GKChP from reaching here. This is a very severe problem. Apparently, in any case the national guard is one of those forces which is supposed to defend democracy. But the cart, as they say, is still there.*

What is your personal attitude and that of the army leadership to this problem?

Ye.I. Shaposhnikov

The case is that the fewer military organisms in any state, the better they are controlled. I don't have the state in mind here, but the military organism.

Therefore, considering the fact that here there was a division of the Ministry of Internal Affairs in the states of the as, I think, that this is strong enough to seriously strengthen the Ministry of Internal Affairs at this time, as appropriate.

And in the case of that contingency, you know, I would make this question a little broader. Since we have much disorder in the CIS, in one or another state, and even inside them, I, for example, would be ashamed to hear that the United Nations is getting ready to go into Karabakh and set things in order. I think that at the level of the president of the CIS things could be set in order there, and some sort of contingent could be set up to, so to speak, restore order, but, speaking gently or in another way, in such regions. I don't have only Karabakh in mind.

[Text omitted—Ed.]

B.V. Tarasov (49 NTO [National-Territorial District])

First of all, I want to say again that People's Deputy Yakunin is asking that we again set up and draw the army into violence with the people, although we now are participating in hearings, specifically intended to discuss this attempt in August of last year [. . .]

But the question that bothers me is this. I still can't understand it. Marshal Yazov, a veteran of World War II, an experienced person in the military sense, we say directly, passed through all the stages and so on. Why do all these actions from the point of view of having the army participate in the actions of the GKChP look like a farce, like simply some sort of, you understand, comic situation, because I personally found about the beginning of this putsch while driving in my vehicle to work. And when I saw these tanks standing one by one under the street lights, and then after a known time they were surrounded by crowds who knew absolutely nothing and so, then these orders, completely unwarranted in the form of a curfew and so on. This bothers me, actually, that

**Translator's note: This is the last line of a folk poem by Lermontov about a crab, a pike, and a lobster all hooked up to a pull cart. They each pulled in different directions, and the cart remained in place.*

this attempt was not of a different character because a true experienced military leader, having decided, let's say, to effect or support it, but having decided on combat action against the people, the constitutional order and so on would not act like that. Can you shed any light on this, since you were a member of the Collegium and so on?

Ye.I. Shaposhnikov

I was in contact with Marshal Yazov on the 20th, the 19th, and the 21st and so on. I want to say, it so happens, that Marshal Yazov, I want to say directly to you, that here, certainly, is not the court, but he was not decided about using the army against the people. What motivated him? You have to ask him this, but I can confirm to you with full clarity, honesty, and exactness. Yazov made no such decision. Perhaps from fright he decided to work or in agreement with the other members of the GKChP, but when it was announced on the radio at the rally in Leningrad that the Air Force supports Yeltsin, and he invited me to see him, and my colleagues said that I shouldn't go there, I want to say to you that we had a very objective conversation one to one.

I told him that the army is doing something wrong, that this should not be done, and so on and so on. If he had gone all the way with the GKChP members, I would never have made it out of there.

V.A. Yugin (13th West)

Yevgeny Ivanovich, it is known that in the army a great number of various newspapers are published at the division and military district and so on level. It is also known that for quite some time there was one ideology in these newspapers, an ideology which contradicts your personal ideology. How is this matter being handled now and is any analysis being done on the responsibility of the army's mass media for preparing the ground for that GKChP-type mood, even among a small part of the officer personnel?

Ye.I. Shaposhnikov

You know that the press in the army to a large extent is subject to the influence of higher structures and this to a greater extent than in civilian structures expresses the point of view and the policies conducted strictly by specific people. Comrades, we made such an analysis, and I want to tell you that there even was such a paradox on the 22nd, when it became clear to everyone that there almost was no GKChP, but the *Flotskaya Gazeta* of the Black Sea Fleet nevertheless published a call appealing to the people in the name of the GKChP. Therefore such an analysis was done. Concerning the change in these structures now, we are still working on it, because this is a very difficult question. Earlier, most of our structures were subordinate to the Main Political Directorate, and now we think that they should be attached to the General Staff or to the Committee for Working with Personnel, but we have not come to a final conclusion about what I am talking about here, and in the active army, the press is still conservative for the time being.

A.B. Koltunov (274th NTO)

[. . .] I have this question. I have information that some twenty days before the putsch began, a secret or semi-secret meeting took place on Novaya Zemlya [Island] between Mr. [Oleg] Baklanov and the former Chief of the General Staff, Comrade Moiseev. Can you tell us, Yevgeny Ivanovich, what they talked about and why on the eve of the putsch they would have a meeting at a nuclear test range?

Ye.I. Shaposhnikov

In June or July, I don't know exactly, but around the end of June or the beginning of July, there was a Defense Council meeting chaired by Gorbachev, but I was not present at it. One of the matters [discussed] there concerned nuclear testing. Baklanov was present there, as were Yazov, Moiseev, and everyone who would be appropriate at such a meeting, and there a decision was made who would need to do what, under Gorbachev, at Novaya Zemlya to figure out all these matters. And when they flew there, I was absolutely convinced, that they were carrying out the order of Gorbachev and the Defense Council to investigate matters connected with nuclear testing. I do have some other information, although it is fragmentary and not about this matter, that some very highly placed persons' ideas of our former state appeared in these or those regions and now it as if this whole matter falls under the fact that they were taking the pulse there of the mood of the military personnel. That's how I would answer that question.

G. M. Benov

[. . .] How do you explain the behavior of the former USSR Minister of Defense, Marshal Yazov, after this putsch took place? If I, you understand, start out against someone, then on what basis would I [turn] to him two days after I started to cook this porridge in the country, and go visit him in Foros [where Gorbachev had been during the putsch]?

Ye.I. Shaposhnikov

Maybe, and this is without deep analysis, he, so to speak, saw [the light].

When we talked with Yazov on 20 August, [we said that] this is an unpromising thing and outside of harming the authority of the armed forces, it would bring about nothing else and so on. The morning of 21 August, a Collegium meeting was announced. At the Collegium meeting, I according to the right of the junior person, spoke out and reported this same thing that I had said. Other Collegium members—some of them—started to say that it would be necessary for Yazov to repent before Gorbachev. And it was necessary to somehow find a way to fly to him, to free him or something like that. Yazov agreed in principle with my proposals and those of the other Collegium members, that we had to annul this emergency situation and withdraw the troops, but at that time he said that he had to report directly to the committee about this. And after that, we were released. And then, as I found out later, they [the GKChP] met. Apparently, when Marshal Yazov reported to the GKChP that the Collegium had made this decision, I know, that all the members of the GKChP went to him in his office. And they were already

convinced that this undertaking was at an end and they began to think about alternatives, how they were to get out of this mess and save face and all the rest. And probably the ideas came up and they called upon Yazov and the others to go to Foros.

[Text omitted—Ed.]

S. N. Yushenkov

Yevgeny Ivanovich, tell us, please, what you think, since Marshal Yazov himself was free in his activity, was not being observed, that he effects in principle a different will, in particular, since you know the role of the CPSU Central Committee in using the army in the GKChP.

My second question concerns the fact that many of the GKChP participants remain at high posts in the army, particularly General Kalinin, the former commander of the Moscow Military District, and who now is the Chief of the Armor Academy. How do you look at such personnel policies?

Ye. I. Shaposhnikov

Concerning the first question, one can say that Yazov and Kryuchkov and other GKChP members were, certainly, unwilling in some processes which took place in the country, in the army, and so on. They, certainly, thought that it was necessary to take some steps, but they had not come to the final steps. Willy-nilly, by decree or by their own will, I can't say. It is better to ask them, as I already said. On the second question, the majority of the military leaders can fall under any reprisal after the GKChP for the fact of what they carried out, that they displayed initiative, and for that to which they said, "Yes, sir." It is necessary to understand that the army is the army, and here it is necessary to understand this along with me. Second, I received from the Russian Prosecutor such documents, about Comrades Kalinin and Gromov, in particular, which in general free them from criminal responsibility, but I considered that it is the same about moral responsibility. Maybe Kalinin shouldn't command a military district's troops, but can command an academy.

I discussed this matter with the new members of the Collegium of the Ministry of Defense or the armed forces, and I think that we often have operated with the idea that overkill is better than underkill. It is better to punish the innocent and make everyone afraid. I think that this [newer] solution [described above] of the matter is sufficient so that the [level of] order that we want in the army would be provided.

[Text omitted—Ed.]

Zinovev (119th District)

Today the role of the leadership of the military-industrial complex in the preparation [for the coup] is not completely clear. Could you shed any light on this matter? [. . .]

Ye.I. Shaposhnikov

I have no data concerning the role of the military-industrial complex. [. . .]

(Unidentified Questioner)

Yevgeny Ivanovich, former People's Deputy Sergei Belozertsev asks the following question. "Are you acquainted with the contents of a coded message from your deputies during the putsch and (transcriber notes two words missing) do you not consider them to be people ready to serve expediency and not the law, and are not those like Marshal Yazov and [the personnel of] the garrison guard service [who see themselves as] higher than the Constitution dangers to society? Moreover, [should this attitude be tolerated in] responsible deputies to the commander in chief of the armed forces?"

Ye.I. Shaposhnikov

Thanks to Belozertsev for this question, because I had been waiting it for some time, since there are the telegrams from Varenchikov, Maslov, and Pyankov. Concerning Pyankov's telegram, I just became acquainted with it recently and I met with him. He agreed to accept any responsibility which is appropriate in this situation. I think that we will take steps after today's hearings.

Konstantin Ivanovich Kobets [State Advisor for Defense, Chairman of the Commission for Analyzing the Activity of the Leadership Personnel of the USSR Armed Forces During the Coup d'Etat. Army general.]

Distinguished people's deputies, first of all I would like to apologize for my hoarse voice. First of all, the commission which I was tasked to head was formed by decision of a Minister of Defense Order in agreement with the Russian State Committee for Defense. The intent of the commission's work was to provide assistance, I say specifically, so that then the questions would be correct, to the Minister of Defence in analysis of the role of the command of the armed forces in preparing for and conducting those events which happened in the period we all know about.

I agree with all the positions and conclusions which Yevgeny Ivanovich Shaposhnikov stated here. I don't want to waste time on recounting those positions which were stated.

The commission analyzed the actions of all the leadership of the armed forces during the period of preparation for and conduct of the putsch. We know about the categories. We looked not only at the problems connected with the activities of specific responsible people, but also at the management documents which were set forth on the basis of complying with those actions connected with bringing the troops to combat readiness. I will say that in these documents there was a great deal, and I give you my word of honor as a general that if they were not complied with, then the leadership personnel should have been court martialled because these documents were adopted by resolution of the CPSU Central Committee and the government and were disseminated as directive orders which were delivered to the commanders and commanding [generals] in the outlying areas. And they, having received the appropriate signals and opened these packages, were obliged to act and were obliged to report to the leadership not only to the Ministry of Defense and to its command, but to the

leadership of the Central Committee of the party and to the government. That's what those documents ordered. And one could not defy them. And this was delivered in the first days from the beginning of the commission's work, although it was hidden from us with the intent of preventing this and not allowing it to repeat itself in the future, beginning from the time the commission started working.

I want to report to you, distinguished comrades, that from those conclusions and meetings with personnel of various ranks, one single pain became clear. The pain was not for themselves, but the pain was for society and the pain was for our army, for our state.

To speak about the actions of the leadership in the first hours, nobody knew what was the intent of this increase in combat readiness. Not a single person knew, and since they didn't know where, for what, or why, naturally the tanks and the armored personnel carriers, naturally all combat resources and arms had ammunition. If they had deployed without ammunition, this would have been non-compliance with their tasks.

Moreover, these facts about coming to combat readiness were distributed not only to the garrisons in which the government or organs of power were located, but also to the nuclear missile submarines located in the Arctic Ocean, which were loaded with munitions directly for action in regions of combat designation. The appropriate armaments were also hung on the aircraft. This was supposed to be done according to plan. And there was no way not to do this.

Thus, I asked myself as the commission chairman, "What is the nature of the responsibility and the place and the role here of the higher command staff?" From one side, it complied with the order, and the order was, as you yourselves know, about the makeup of the Emergency Committee and there was no legislation to say the least, passed saying that in peacetime the president is the supreme commander-in-chief. And I ask the deputies of the Supreme Soviet and the distinguished commission to consider some things for the Russian armed forces. All these documents have to be properly signed. I am not trying to make excuses for anyone. You understand me. I want only to say that we must operate on the basis of the law, on the basis of normative documents and to evaluate the activity of each commander in accordance with that which he did.

This is where the questions start, and how one or another general was fired and now to understand this and so on. Thirty-one persons were dismissed from their jobs. This is from the high command staff. And 300 generals and officers were discharged. More exactly, 316. But remember, we did not set as our target to grab each one and give him up to God's judgement. Two or three times each day, I as the commission chairman met with Defense Minister Ye.I. Shaposhnikov, and we discussed each personnel matter. And there were even such things, Yevgeny Ivanovich is sitting here and will not allow me to deceive you, these matters were discussed about discharges and recommendations about jobs in the morning and at six o'clock in the evening. Twice a day. That's the type of pressure there was.

Comrades, we managed, as I already reported, to make the appropriate cor-

rections in the documents so that there would be no more such things in the given directives about combat readiness, and directive orders about the place and role of the armed forces in the introduction of emergency situations in peace time and in war time, and at this time there were many contributions from Dogushiev and his team. A series of regulations which the armed forces were to comply with were shoved under Gorbachev's nose. This is connected with guarding bridges, with localization of television centers and radio centers and all the rest under the view of all manners of emergency situations. And here is hidden the answer about the place and role in January. All this is about one and the same scheme, to provide management documents with such theses, that the armed forces would turn out to be guilty in any situation.

In November of last year, B.N. Yeltsin signed a corresponding note about the work done by the commission and about those measures which should be done in the near future. Such agreement was given over, and such work basically was done, with a couple of exceptions, and Yevgeny Ivanovich spoke of them, those which demand supplementary solution at the Supreme Soviet, that is, the legislative acts [. . .]

I would like to emphasize, distinguished comrades, that immediately after the active phase of the putsch had ended, there immediately was a powerful flow, let's say a sea of letters, complaints, announcement about the actions of commanders of all ranks. It got absurd, even the commander of an independent battalion was accused of something. You remember. And there was a sea of such letters. There were even such zealous people who even continued to carry out such an active phase, to practically begin a "witch hunt." Do we really have to repeat 1937? Do we really want to behead the army down to regimental commander inclusively at this moment which it is needed to support all of society and primarily the Supreme Soviet and our legislative organisms? Certainly not. And, naturally, I as the chairman of the commission, reported these matters to the president, and I talked constantly with Yevgeny Ivanovich, and we discussed all matters and that in no case should this [beheading] be allowed.

Therefore, we evaluated the activity of the commanders, from one side, to comply, and from the other side, did it have a political tint? Our tasks actually were that we had to clarify if there was a political tint on that situation which has now become manifest. And we proceeded from such positions.

Distinguished comrades, the army is practically in the role of a state. And it has to consist, as you understand clearly, of leaders and subordinates, while the actions of this or that person should be done strictly according to the laws.

Where is our law? On what laws are the activity of the armed forces even inside Russia to be governed? I have spoken about this several times with the mass media, and have sent several documents to the Supreme Soviet and the president. But, excuse me, comrades, but a week passes, two, three, five, a couple of months. I don't know where these documents are. I don't know what the reaction to them is. I don't understand anything of what is being done by our leadership and specifically in our commissions or in Parliament, and why these documents are not discussed. The regulation about the military doctrine was not

discussed. The law about defense was not discussed. The law about the armed forces was not discussed. The draft law about social protection for military personnel was not discussed. As a result, it turns out that the leadership speaks toasts, good words, but nothing in writing has come out. In the outlying areas the organs of local power and the representatives of the president's administration can not begin to deal with the social problems because there are practically no documents.

I think that there are questions which you posed to Yevgeny Ivanovich, and that I think will be given to me about the conclusions which we reported. We—Yevgeny Ivanovich and I—have had some contacts with some people, complete contact and complete understanding. We have agreed on an approach so that things would not be repeated. I think that as a whole the activity of the leadership cadres of the armed forces during the time of the coup is clear to you and if someone grins, and I see them sitting here, then that is simple, they grin only because they want to show their independence, but you don't know the whole story. We know everything and you know everything. This situation only confirms all those questions which were given here, and only specifically that which you already know well, and I would like the distinguished Supreme Soviet to understand that we have probably gathered here not to reprimand anyone for anything and draw new blood, but to settle on an approach and to assign specific tasks if necessary to the appropriate responsible people, if necessary, even to place the matter before the president so that the armed forces would really be dealt with. Thank you.

L.A. Ponomarev

[. . .] Please, Sergei Nikolaevich [probably Sergei N. Yushenkov].

(Sergei Nikolaevich)

Konstantin Ivanovich, you headed the Committee for Defense and Security. In general, your role in the defense of the White House is well known, but there are questions connected with it which you stated. The Supreme Soviet is not adopting any laws. This a completely reasoned conclusion and just what documents did the Committee for Defense and Security provide in the capacity of legislative initiatives which could be discussed in the Supreme Soviet? Were there such documents?

K.I. Kobets

Prior to 19 August, as you know well, the Committee was not tasked concerning defense or about the army. What sort of documents could it present if there was no decision made about what the army was supposed to be in general? But there was a written decision of Yeltsin with Supreme Soviet approval to create a committee on defense, but which did not propose the creation of its [Russia's] own armed forces, but proposed participation within the framework of unified armed forces. So how were we supposed to talk about laws? I am talking about those laws which should have appeared after the putsch took place,

after Russia accurately was determined to be a state, and after the disintegration of the armed forces actively began.

(Sergei Nikolaevich)

And yet, Konstantin Ivanovich, you said here that the CPSU Central Committee actually managed the armed forces, issuing this or that corresponding legislative acts in essence, so how do you view the present officers' meeting as not pretending to its unique way as the political leader of the armed forces?

K.I. Kobets

I personally don't think that the officers' meeting is pretending toward that role, and I certainly don't think that it is a public organization. At least, I have not formed that impression. And concerning the answer to the first question, you know better than I that in all the regulations it is written that the fundamental basis of the activity of the armed forces is the leadership from the side of the Communist Party [. . .] Yes, this law was adopted.

Tarasov

Konstantin Ivanovich, I have two questions [. . .] Isn't it time, perhaps, to look more closely at these processes and on our attitude toward the leadership personnel? Because in my observations—naturally, I am not talking about myself—many capable generals have left the army before they had served out their careers and so on, and they could still be used to Russia's benefit.

And the second question so that I can immediately make your task easier [. . .] Isn't it time, in your opinion, as a people's deputy, to bring these activities to a wider group of people's deputies so that the legislative activity for reforming the army and the creation of the Russian military concept and all the other defense matters would be done more productively and effectively?

K.I. Kobets

I will try to answer briefly. To the first question. In the sense of leveling and all that during the time of the putsch. I don't know on what moral basis to place the activity of the Communist generals and the activity of the democrats and clergy. I was here [in the White House] during the putsch and I didn't see a single Communist general here, and I saw clerical democrats among the democrats. I saw them not only in the hall, I saw them on the roofs, I saw them at the barricades, I saw them everywhere. Therefore there can be no talk here of morality. It is another matter if from this point of view these deputies were to look at their own positions and their attitude toward the democrats, but I can only suggest this. That's to the first question.

Concerning the second question, I agree with you completely, that it is necessary to involve professional deputies and those who are not deputies in solving those problems that we talked about. We are doing this.

[Anatoly] Shabad

[...] Beginning from which level does the military commander become a political figure bearing civil responsibility for his actions? And is it possible in the military regulations or in some legislative resolution to order that nevertheless from some level the military person is obligated to comply with all orders, except those clearly criminal, as was at one time in our army?

K.I. Kobets

I understood your question. You are asking one to which there now is no answer if you look at the surface, then there is an answer. Yes, from what level is a commander a political figure? And I would ask myself another question. Is a commander in general a political figure? This is from one side. From the other side, what makes an order criminal or not criminal? If each soldier were allowed to judge that some order is criminal, then there would never be any strong point or gun point stormed.

Therefore, we have to separate things. And we now are attentively dealing with this matter. What is criminal in the democratic righteous state in the army? What is criminal in time of peace? What is criminal in time of war? Who has the right to issue such orders? What are we to write into the regulations about this matter?

It would seem that this could be resolved. The order which carried a criminal character would not be complied with. Who can evaluate this order? Let's say the order is to make a sortie on the night of 20-21 August, if such an order had been given, to make a sortie with the intent of unblocking the forces concentrated at the Hotel Mir. Yes, and during this, 300-400 persons would be killed. Is this a criminal order? You could evaluate it however you wish later.

And if this order were given to someone who would defend the White House, and it were not given, and the White House were taken, then this crime would have been done by that commander who did not give this order? That is, I want to say that in specific situations there can be an order.

Therefore you say correctly that it is necessary to determine the level of political evaluation of the order of a commander. The leadership of the armed forces are political entities, and a division commander . . . well, it's hard to say. Therefore I won't give you a definitive answer, I tell you honestly.

Ye.I. Shaposhnikov

Concerning a criminal order. After 21 August, the Ministry of Defense was attacked by these matters constantly. Konstantin Ivanovich correctly states that it is impossible to write such things into the regulations, that if an order is illegal, one need not comply with it. Any one of us would interpret that any way he wants. Then there would be no army; I don't know what it would be.

Therefore, we supplemented the regulations. It is written there that the order of a superior must be complied with unswervingly, accurately, and in time. The commander bears responsibility for carrying out this order. We are leaving this all alone with the exception of the last sentence. We are writing, he bears respon-

sibility for complying with the order, and he bears responsibility for the legality of this order.

A.B. Koltunov (274th N-T District)

Konstantin Ivanovich, I have two questions.

The first question. What is your honest evaluation of the role of Russian People's Deputy General Chalov in the activities of the GKChP?

The second question. When will the Ministry of Defense of Russia be established?

K.I. Kobets

Concerning General Chalov's role and my honest evaluation, I can not give an evaluation because I, located here, knew absolutely nothing about his place and role. And only later from the mass media and from meetings from representatives of the Procuracy and investigative organs did I begin to find out something. Therefore, I can't evaluate his role.

Second, about the Ministry of Defense. I think that it will be established. The question is when, on what basis, with what tasks, with what leadership of the armed forces, in the sphere of resolving what military-political tasks, and managed by what doctrine. This is the most difficult question.

G.P. Yakunin

My elective district, the 11th National-Territorial, includes Monino and Chkalovskoye. Back at the beginning of our commission's work, I, as a deputy, received many complaints signed by officers. These were not anonymous persons, but complaints from active officers that an active role in support of the GKChP was played by the chief of the Chkalovskoye garrison, General Kovalenok and [the chief] of the Monino Academy *imeni Zhukovsky*, General Korolkov.

Do you have [material] on this matter as a commission chairman and did these names figure in your commission's [activities] and what do you think? Did they, in fact, actively participate in support of the GKChP or not, Konstantin Ivanovich?

K.I. Kobets

I want to say only what I know and what I think. First, excuse me, Father Gleb, what chief of an academy? Korolkov was at that time the chief of the academy in Kalinin, the PVO Academy.

(From the hall)

Monino, Monino.

K.I. Kobets

And later he was named the chief of the Monino Academy.

(From the hall)

He was there.

G.P. Yakunin

And he remains at that post.

K.I. Kobets

Then we are not talking about this Korolkov. I am talking about the chief of the academy of the Kalininskoye Military School, and he was fired and retired. I do not know if [this other person] was fired or not. Maybe Yevgeny Ivanovich can help us with this. I don't know if he was fired or not, but he was to be retired as the chief of the Kalinin Academy.

L.A. Ponomarev

No, but what about the Monino [Academy]?

K.I. Kobets

[The chief of] Monino [Academy] was not fired because there was no data other than those examples which the group wrote in this vein, that he had done something. But there is no data.

L.A. Ponomarev

But this must be objectively investigated. Certainly. Your commission did not conduct such an investigation.

K.I. Kobets

Concerning Kovalenok. Kovalenok, as we will say, about his job, and what was written about him. I read everything about Kovalenok when we investigated, and this simply does not pertain to him. Therefore, we did not put the question, and I did not take this matter to Yevgeny Ivanovich. This is because we did not see any cadre there. But we did investigate all this data.

(Unidentified speaker)

Here in the hall is Major Milchakov, about whom General Tretyak wrote in the press. The Prosecutor General protested his [Milchakov's] firing. And there was no reaction from the Ministry of Defense at that time. He requests to ask the question. When will he receive justice? But this, probably, is a question for Yevgeny Ivanovich.

K.I. Kobets

I think it should not go to Yevgeny Ivanovich. I think that this question should not be asked, and that this should be handled in due course. I, for example, don't know anything about it.

L.A. Ponomarev

[Reading a written question] "How do you evaluate, distinguished Konstantin Ivanovich, the actions of military personnel who took active part in the defense of the White House? They acted contrary to the laws. What must be done to avoid

[Ponomarev notes a couple of words are illegible here] punishment of those who are still troops so that they would no longer be persecuted in the troops? [Signed] Lieutenant Colonel Solovyev.”

K.I. Kobets

What can I say? I know one thing, that not a single commander in chief [transcriber notes that he doesn't name any commanders] nor the Minister of Defense—now the commander in chief—Marshal Shaposhnikov, [that if] I, as chief of the General Staff, were to place before them questions about connections with purely such directions, that nobody at all would refuse to establish justice for anyone. That is a fact and I am prepared to confirm that fact. But there are other facts, when under the flag of politization, or all sorts of other matters so much is written, and which we begin to figure it out, there, certainly, it could be real, if something doesn't please someone, then these matters could be resolved. At least, I know that even here in the committee people worked and along with the committee, in the period of the August events as well, who reported that they were oppressed, and they resolved all these matters, extended their trips and took other measures in general. But I do not exclude such cases, at least. But let's figure it out.

[Text omitted—Ed.]

L.A. Ponomarev

I have received questions that in the course of the commission's investigations there was uncovered participation of a number of commanders and chiefs in active conduct of the policies of the GKChP, specifically, the Military Engineering Academy *imeni* Kuibyshev, the Kurgan School, the Kolomenskoe School, the Kamchatka Flotilla, and a number of [other] units. What conclusions were made concerning these chiefs?

K.I. Kobets

I want to say, and I know, who asked this question. This question comes from . . .

L.A. Ponomarev

I think you are mistaken.

K.I. Kobets

. . . let him answer it himself. Allow me, I want to say once again that I had all sorts of things, and I will even say more, that the chief of the Kolomenskoe School was fired based on that material which they reported to us. When we started to look at it in more detail, a group of some sort of excuse me please, semi-rogues gathered those very letters, which have nothing more of the spirit. We confirmed, sent people there to check, and apparently such stuff was done there and on the basis of their report, we set matters right. When we started to investigate farther, the chief of the school actually took the opposite policy [than what was

reported]. Therefore, I say that they are many such letters and many such signatures but nothing concrete and concerning non-specific questions and signatures, we do not do anything and we pass the case along to the investigative organs if necessary.

[Editor's note: The transcript of the remainder of the 18 February 1992 hearing on "The Participation of the Leadership Personnel of the Armed Forces in the Coup d'etat of 19-21 August 1991" will appear in our winter 1997 issue.]