

August 1988

Report from General Valentin Varennikov to Soviet Defense Minister Dmitri T. Yazov (Excerpt)

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Summary:

Varennikov reports on Afghan opposition leader Ahmad Shah Masoud, who is seen as the most significant threat to the Soviet-backed regime.

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(Secret)

to the USSR Minister of Defense

General of the Army Cde. D. T. Yazov

I report.

Concerning Ahmad Shah Masoud...At the present time A. Masoud is a figure who enjoys undisputed authority among the population and has powerful detachments with high combat [boytsovskiye] and propaganda qualities. The well thought-out social policy he follows and the agitprop work (construction of mosques, schools, hospitals, roads, providing the population with essential goods) enjoy the wide support of the people. A. Shah has categorically prohibited his formations from waging combat operations against Soviet troops, which they rigorously observe. At the same time he continues to speak out as an irreconcilable opponent of government authority, although he refrains from using force if government troops do not shoot (which is in accord with the policy of national reconciliation).

However, in our opinion, the existing roadblocks in the way of rapprochement between Najibullah and A. Shah can be overcome, although the President also thinks that Masoud will not now enter into any contact.

On 24 August of this year at a meeting of the Supreme High Command Soviet military representatives in the RA made the latest (in 1987-88) attempt to direct the attention of the Afghan leadership toward the need for an immediate resolution of this important problem. Fundamental measures are necessary regarding Ahmad Shah, primarily political ones. Najibullah, who agreed, said that it is Ahmad Shah Masoud, not the "Alliance-7," that is the real threat to the regime right now. At the same time he said: "Comrades E. A. Shevardnadze and V. A. Aleksandrov [the pseudonym of V. A. Kryuchkov] during their visit to Afghanistan at the beginning of this year were disposed toward the necessity of holding talks with Ahmad Shah, but if he refused them, then his groups need to be decisively smashed." In the presence of the ministers of the RA armed forces Najibullah let it be known in this regard that the main role in the solution of this problem (that is, smashing A. Shah) should be left to the 40th Army. He further noted that he (the President) had reliable information about A. Shah's ties with the CIA. Considering this, Najibullah continued, the strategic intention of A. Shah could be clearly imagined: to split off the 14 (although there actually are 12) northern provinces of Afghanistan, put the Americans in, and present this to the Soviet Union as a fait accompli. I replied to the President that nothing is excluded, but the problem [he] touched on needs to be studied (I have given information on these issues to Soviet Ambassador Cde. N. G. Yegorychev and the USSR KGB representative, Cde. V. A. Revin).

In our view, the adoption of the proposal of the President about involving the 40th Army in battles with A. Shah could place our troops in an extremely serious situation during the second stage of their withdrawal from Afghanistan. Doubtless there will be additional large losses; in general, their organized withdrawal at the set times could be disrupted. It is impossible in this matter to achieve the goal - namely the destruction of A. Shah - since it is necessary to know where he is and this has been ruled out - the agent network of Afghanistan has not been able to handle such a mission for eight years now. In addition, the operations of our troops would become a direct violation of the Geneva Accords. This step would inflict damage to the prestige of the Soviet Union from which it would be difficult to recover [trudnovospolnimyy] and would also provoke a negative reaction inside our country...any violations of them would negatively reflect on the authority of the USSR.

...The following conclusions can be drawn:

1. The main danger for the current regime in the present situation is the domestic opposition (the so-called "second echelon"), but among all of its leaders it is Ahmad Shah Masoud. This conclusion is not new and has been made for the last two years, but the political steps regarding this figure remain unchanged (and they even often slip into military measures).

At the concluding stage and after the withdrawal of Soviet troops one ought to expect that Ahmad Shah will step up operations to seize the northern provinces. He will primarily concentrate them on the Kabul-Hairaton highway.

2. The time when a rapprochement was possible with A. Shah, dictating conditions to him, has actually long since been lost and he has become practically invulnerable. However opportunities to establish contact with him have not been exhausted. Therefore the Afghan leadership needs to offer the maximum possible concessions to him and make any compromises. He should know that all his conditions will be satisfied, including granting autonomy to the northern provinces, etc.

3. In the future Ahmad Shah might grow into an important political figure with whom the Soviet Union, in all probability, will have to cooperate and it would be to our advantage to have him as an ally and not an enemy.

Considering this, Soviet operational services [operativnyye sluzhby -SIC] should establish direct contact with him as quickly as possible; especially since, as A. Shah himself acknowledges, because he has no special objections to this...

Varennikov

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