

Excerpt from Alexander Lyakhovsky and Vyacheslav Nekrasov, *Grazhdanin, Politik, Voin: Pamyati Shakha Masuda* (Citizen, Politician, Fighter: In Memory of Shah Masoud), (Moscow, 2007), pp. 202-205

Masoud and Najibullah Confrontation.

There was a hope among the Soviet military command that in the end, in spite Masoud's refusal to cooperate, they wouldn't have to fight the Islamic Society of Afghanistan Party's forces. The Afghan leadership, however, had different ideas and held a very firm line on the matter. Najibullah was pulling whatever strings he could to reach his goal – to carry out a military operation against Ahead Shah Masoud's troops. Alexander Lyakhovsky said, *“On December 15, 1988, the army General V.I. Varennikov turned 65 years old. He had traditionally tried to go somewhere over the days of his birthday. This time around he left a week prior, to Kandahar. I usually accompanied him on these trips, but this time I stayed to ‘man the fort’ in Kabul, I took all phone calls and received the congratulations from all the Afghans who came to see us. There was a call from those serving around Najibullah, who wanted to personally come and pass their congratulations to the General. I told them that Varennikov is in Kandahar overseeing the security posts of the outer security ring around the city.*

Once the General got in from Kandahar, I brought him up-to-speed on all the phone calls and visitors, as well as told him about Najibullah's wishes. He ordered us to do everything necessary for the arrival of the Afghan President to our residence on 16 December. Najibullah arrived that evening and, together with Varennikov, joined in the celebration for the army general. Usually Varennikov abstains from alcoholic drinks. For all the time we've served and through 20 years of knowing one another, I can count the number of times I have seen this, but on this night the celebration followed the Russian custom. Najibullah brought up various matters during our conversation. I, of course, brought us back to the problem of Ahead Shah. He even said to Varennikov, “I know you have two sons. So, please consider me your third.” The General answered that he would be honored to have him as a son. In regards to the military operation against Ahead Shah, he firmly stated again that it was not something he was hurrying to get back to. The army general always put the interests of the State before his own.”

During Shevardnadze's January 1989 visit to Kabul, Najibullah persistently repeated his request to solve the problem of Ahead Shah Masoud before the troops leave Afghanistan. This came from excerpts of the conversation between E.A. Shevardnadze and Najibullah.

Najibullah: *“Moving on to more important and pressing matters, I would like to stress the following: At the present time, no one has any doubts that the realization of peaceful political measures, in the name of achieving normalization, must be a priority matter. With this it becomes obvious that, due to conditions created by the continued interference in Afghanistan by Pakistan, the U.S.A., and other countries, the refusal of a cease-fire by the opposition cannot be forgotten- in the same way that the means by which the military operations are carried out cannot be forgotten. It is appearing that it is just as important now as it was before to use the power of our rockets, artillery, and bombing attacks to hit their bases, their depots, and wherever their fighters have amassed, if we wish to hold off their politicians from a large-scale attack after the Soviet forces' withdrawal.*

In this context, the question of what will happen in the struggle with the group under Ahead Shah Masoud, which belongs to the Islamic society of Afghanistan, has a special meaning.

Considering that after a withdrawal his forces would be able to create a forward front from Khairatom to Kabul, across the southern Salanga region, and form a blockade around Kabul, which would create potentially catastrophic situation for the capital, Ahead Shah should be considered as the primary foe of the government for the time being.

Ahmad Shah has long been a problem but, in spite of whatever prior decisions were reached, now he is a particular problem. In our opinion, there's no reason why this problem should have been dragged on for so long.

... In the course of the last four years, not mentioning a few small, separate strikes, there have been almost no large-scale operations against him. He, as a result, has been able to create a strike-force of around 11 thousand men, including another 2,500 in Panjsher. We've got to acknowledge that Ahead Shah has taken advantage of the superiority which has arisen from our passiveness.

A joint operation of Soviet and Afghan forces has just been planned in a move against Ahead Shah, but it is going to take on a local character and be limited, in essence, to a purge of those areas that are close to the road – a replacement of the Soviet-manned posts with Afghans. We suppose that an operation of this sort won't be able to do any serious damage to the enemy or to change the basic situation..."

E.A.Shavardnadze: "I agree that this operation against Ahead Shah has been dragged on for too long now. The reasons for this are not exactly clear, not to mention that M.S. Gorbachev already dismissed this question when the Afghan Minister of the Armed Forces visited Moscow three months ago. It is clear that we will have to take a look at the lead-up and preparations of this last operation. I see that none of the local or organizational measures regarding the problem of Ahead Shah will be solved..." (13.1.1989, Kabul)

Of course, it was difficult for the Soviet Union's Minister of Foreign Affairs to understand what was the mood or the expectations of the generals, officers and soldiers, who never wanted to fight, as they left Afghanistan. No one wanted to be the next to either kill or be killed. However, the Soviet party functionaries clung to a different opinion. They nonetheless were aiming to fulfill their assignments to Afghanistan. It didn't matter to them that innocent people were losing their lives.

On January 15, E.A. Shevardnadze was at a conference at the Soviet Embassy and spoke about the continuing military action against Ahead Shah Masoud's forces as if it was a done deal: " .. The carrying out of the operation against Ahmad Shah's forces is to inflict the sort of damage, across all the areas in which he is based, that would prohibit him from organizing and coming out in any approach, or on the main road between the Chariton – Kabul. At present our Air Force is bombing across all regions, with the exception of Panjsher and South Salang. According to the information we've received from our soldiers, Soviet forces from January 1, and Afghan forces from January 5, have been ready for attack. Still, on Najibullah's request, and something I

myself am convinced of, the beginning of military action has been delayed in order to carry into Kabul the minimal amounts of flour and other supplies necessary..”

This position was indefensible on the higher level. As soon as E.A. Shevardnadze and V.A. Kryuchkov left to Moscow, LCSF received its order from army general D.T. Yazov, the defense minister of the Soviet Union, to immediately prepare to commence with military operations against the forces of Ahead Shah Masoud. The command of the 40th army was not hearing any objections, arguments or cases against the matter of such actions. There was only a stupid, yet difficult-to-explain desire to please the Party functionaries – even to the fault of inflicting damage on their own national interests, and to their own army by the bombing-raids and artillery shelling on Panjsher. The operation to destroy the forces of Ahead Shah Masoud was given the name, ‘Typhoon’.

[Translated by Jayson Stoinski for the National Security Archive]