

Introduction

Hundreds of books—memoirs, histories, fiction, poetry, chronicles of military units, and journalistic essays—have been written about the Soviet war in Afghanistan. If the topic has not yet been entirely exhausted, it certainly has been very well documented.

But what led up to the invasion? How was the decision to bring troops into Afghanistan made? What was the basis for the decision? Who opposed the intervention and who had the final word? And what kind of mystical country is this that lures, with an almost maniacal insistence, the most powerful world states into its snares? In the nineteenth and early twentieth century it was the British, in the 1980s it was the Soviet Union, and now America and its allies continue the legacy.

Impoverished and incredibly backward Afghanistan, strange as it may seem, is not just a normal country. Due to its strategically important location in the center of Asia, the mountainous country has long been in the sights of more than its immediate neighbors. But woe to anyone who arrives there with weapon in hand, hoping for an easy gain—the barefoot and illiterate Afghans consistently bury the hopes of the strange foreign soldiers who arrive along with battalions of tanks and strategic bombers.

To understand Afghanistan is to see into your own future.

To comprehend what happened there, what happens there continually, is to avoid great tragedy.

One of the critical moments in the modern history of Afghanistan is the period from April 27, 1978, when the “April Revolution” took place in Kabul and the leftist People’s Democratic Party seized control of the country, until December 27, 1979, when Soviet special forces, obeying their “international duty,” eliminated the ruling leader and installed

another leader of the same party in his place. This twenty-month period is the key to unlocking an understanding of many of the events and on-going developments in the Middle East.

The bloody coup d'état of April 1978, in the course of which revolutionaries killed President Mohammad Daoud, his family, and his allies, was the first link in a lengthy chain of plots, intrigues, and murders over the next years. It was the April Revolution's suppression of Islamic fundamentalist forces that both stymied the Islamists' reach for power and subsequently facilitated their consolidation of forces. It also fostered international support for their cause from both eastern and western states. The April Revolution was the world's last (and for the time being) social coup, the executors of which proclaimed noble aspirations but suffered a devastating defeat. The agents of the coup to a large extent dug their own graves.

Why were the masses unsupportive of, and often even tremendously resistant to, the revolutionaries' aspirations to lead Afghanistan out of the darkness of the medieval ages, to conduct economic reforms, and to transform the country by instilling democratic principles? How is it that the Kremlin, quite pleased with the prior bourgeois feudal regime of Mohammad Daoud, and at first quite nonchalant about the April Revolution, became the revolution's de facto hostage? Who were the agents responsible for the murder of Adolf Dubs, and what motivated the assassination? Was Hafizullah Amin an agent of the CIA? What were the various roles of the politicians, military personnel, special services, and diplomats behind those events?

To this day there are more questions than answers.

When the Kremlin's "international duty"/intervention began in 1979, only a "limited contingent of Soviet troops" was envisaged. The operation very quickly escalated into a prolonged regional engagement, which led to direct conflicts between the Soviet Union and a broad coalition of Western countries, the Islamic East, and China. By the time the conflict was concluded nearly ten years later, it had made an indelible impact on the world. It can be considered the final note of the great standoff that comprised the essence of global politics during the preceding decades.

The debate over whether Soviet troops should have crossed their southern borders in those years will not die down any time soon. Was the intervention an inevitable response to dangerous threats posed by external enemies or was it a fatal mistake? Were there other means to prevent the dangerous machinations of Islamic radicals and retain Afghanistan in the sphere of Soviet influence? Supporters on either side have weighty arguments to justify their positions. One thing, however, is obvious. The enemies of the Soviet Union capitalized on the strategic opportunity afforded by the intervention brilliantly, first by enmeshing Moscow in an exhaustive war of attrition and then by labeling the USSR an "evil empire," a designation that would stay with the nation for a long time.

The perspective that contends that the war in Afghanistan expedited the processes that eventually led to the destruction of the Soviet project and state is widely accepted and disseminated. It cannot be denied that the war had a terribly negative impact on the Soviet economy, corrupted the moral foundation of the state, and drastically reduced the number of the USSR's international allies.

However, if one examines the military activity of the Fortieth Army, as well as the measures implemented by thousands of Soviet advisors in Afghanistan, it should be acknowledged that by the time of the “limited contingent’s” departure from the DRA*, many of their goals had been accomplished. It can be said with confidence that were it not for the chaos that marked the minds and actions of the Russian leaders following the collapse of the USSR, and were it not for their abandonment of the Afghan president Najibullah, who was left to face his powerful enemies on his own, the history of the Middle East would have developed very differently. There would be no Talibs, drugs, terrorists, or subsequent invasion by NATO coalition forces. This, however, is conjecture.

It is obvious that the Soviet Union was not led into Afghanistan by the capricious desires of individual politicians within the USSR’s Communist Party, but rather by the confluence of a great deal of both objective and subjective circumstances, the logical result of geopolitical positioning over the preceding three decades of the Cold War.

For the authors of this book, Afghanistan and the tragic events that we describe do not belong to some fantastic and abstract story, but to our very lives. One of us, as a staff member of the Soviet embassy in Kabul, witnessed the first stage of the April Revolution first-hand and even directly participated in the events. The other author, as a journalist and historian, has visited the mystical country many times and has written countless articles, books, and a dissertation on the subject. In our work we naturally rely upon not only our own memories, but on open sources (books, articles, and monographs published in Russia and abroad), archival documents (many of which are quoted here for the first time), as well as invaluable eyewitness accounts and reports from those who participated in the events (a

* The official name of the state of Afghanistan from Apr. 30, 1978-Nov. 30, 1987

full listing of which is provided at the end of the book). We would like to express our enormous gratitude to all of our sources. Despite our backgrounds as historians, we intentionally decided against relating a dry point-by-point account of what transpired, and opted instead for the more ambitious approach of political investigation in the form of a *belles-lettres* narrative. We believe that such a format will attract a broad readership interested in the key moments of modern history. All of the situations described in the book are real. The conversations in which the authors did not directly participate have been reconstructed based on archival documents and the narratives of the actual participants. During our work on the book we verified every oral account.

There is not one fabricated character in the book. A few names of KGB operatives who were working undercover in Kabul have been changed at their request.

Chapter 1:

VIRUS: How the invasion of Afghanistan infected us. How we were infected by the invasion of Afghanistan

Springtime brings the roar of thunderstorms to the capital of Afghanistan. The clear and sunny morning skies darken perceptibly as the lengthening days draw towards noon and heavy black clouds creep over the mountain ranges, encompassing the city. The faint gleam of heat that shimmers on the ground is sensed by the whole human organism before the sight recognizes it as the signal of the day's transition from a radiant morning to a sweltering afternoon. As the storm approaches, the lack of oxygen creates the impression that the encroaching thunderclouds are wringing out any remaining fresh air. In these moments the earlier polyphonic harmony of the city loses cohesion and the noises of pedestrian activity begin to sound discordantly amplified and distorted by the incipient gloom. The wind picks up as nascent dust devils carry discarded papers, plastic bags, and other trash, all the while stinging skin and eyes with irritating sand. Suddenly a flash of light, a delayed report of thunder, and a few ripe, warm drops fall scattered in the dusty streets, announcing the imminent downpour. Soon lightning will flash almost incessantly. The heavy storm clouds, laden with electricity, rapidly approach the capital until bolts of lightning seem to strike from directly overhead. Thunder becomes a continuous rumble.

The storm will continue for an hour or two before the thunder relents and the black clouds begin to disperse. The fallen rainwater forms puddles that are sucked into the greedy soil right before your eyes. The clouds depart towards the same mountains over which they recently arrived and the sun once more begins to shine. The storms sap the

days' heat and make the evenings surprisingly pleasant. The air, sweltering only a few hours earlier, is fresh and cool and carries with it the scents of the herbs and wildflowers of the surrounding mountain slopes. The aromas of the blooming bushes and fruit trees coalesce into a single fragrance. Birds chirp. Soon the sun follows the clouds over the Paghman Mountains, coloring their snowy peaks with gold and burgundy. The night arrives, a myriad of pulsing stars appear in the black sky, and beyond the horizon, somewhere far past the mountains, the red bursts of other thunderstorms, either coming or going, flash silently.

On Wednesday, April 26, 1978, a powerful thunderstorm descended upon Kabul. The downpour lasted until evening. The first secretary of the Soviet embassy, Victor Bubnov, a tall, strapping young man, had just returned home from work and was walking out to his lawn to enjoy the fresh air and play with the massive furry dog that guarded his villa when the telephone rang inside. Uncharacteristically quickly for a man of his stature, Victor darted into the house and took the receiver. A familiar voice asked for Fayiz Jan to come to the phone in Dari.

“There is no such man in this house, you must have the wrong number,” Bubnov replied in a boring official tone before replacing the receiver. He rubbed his balding head with a palm and issued a heavy sigh. It was clear that he would not be able to enjoy the cool and quiet spring evening.

Victor was a Soviet foreign intelligence officer. The “mistaken” phone call with the predetermined phrase was a code inviting him to an emergency meeting with Agent “Mahmoud.”

Victor understood that this emergency rendezvous did not bode well—that he

should be prepared for a very important, perhaps tragic, event, either currently developing or having just occurred. Mahmoud was an Afghan officer, a member of the Central Committee of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA). He was well versed in the political intrigues of his country and had a discerning eye for important information pertinent to his many contacts. Mahmoud would not make an emergency call lightly.

In those days, Kabul was shaken by a series of destabilizing events. Nine days earlier, on April 17, unknown figures had assassinated Mir Akbar Khyber, one of the leaders of the PDPA. Khyber had been widely regarded as the "honor and conscience" of the party. No one took responsibility for the assassination. No one could with certainty name the assassins or those who had ordered the murder to be carried out. The PDPA immediately took advantage of the incendiary atmosphere in the wake of the tragedy to rally thousands of protestors in the streets. Khyber's funeral became an impressive anti-government demonstration. Among the participants were not only PDPA members and supporters, but also many residents of Kabul who had never before shown interest in politics, much less taken part in a protest.

The president of the country, Mohammad Daoud, was indignant and apprehensive. Never before in the history of Afghanistan had so many people taken to the streets to demonstrate their unhappiness with the governing regime. After long considerations and consultations with his closest advisors, President Daoud decided to take a gamble. He issued an arrest warrant for seven leaders of the PDPA. The list of names included the general secretary, Nur Muhammad Taraki, and his deputy, Babrak Karmal.

In the quiet April days following Khyber's burial, Bubnov and his colleagues sensed anger fermenting in the capital. At 8:30 p.m. Bubnov took his aged blue Toyota to the

arranged meeting point for the emergency rendezvous with Mahmoud. When he arrived he saw his agent wearing traditional Pashtun garb, stalking between the alleyways. Victor turned the headlights off and drove in the dark before stopping the car and unlocking the doors. The agent quickly jumped into the back seat of the car. After the traditional Afghan welcome and an apology for bothering his Soviet friend, he proceeded to explain the important reason for the clandestine meeting.

By the time Victor brought the agent back home, a hot meal was served and waiting for them in the guest room. A cold bottle of Stolichnaya stood sweating on the coffee table. Bubnov invited his guest to join him at the table. The agent sat down and put food on his plate, but refused to drink the alcohol.

“Thank you, Comrade Victor,” said Mahmoud, bowing with a hand on his heart, “But tonight I must return to the open session of the Central Committee and the officers of our faction, ‘Khalq.’ This is no ordinary session; the destiny of Afghanistan will be determined tonight. Whether or not there will be an armed uprising will be decided in this session.”

“Uprising?” Victor asked as calmly as possible, raised eyebrows revealing his concern.

“The goal of the uprising would be to oust the fascist regime of Mohammad Daoud and liberate our imprisoned comrades.”

“And, so, what do you expect the participants of the session will decide to do?”

“Most of them support an armed uprising, although a few are still uncertain,” answered Mahmoud. “They’ll probably end up with a majority. There’s been good work done among the officers—members of Khalq—in the last twenty-four hours. We are almost certain of receiving support from the Fourth Armored Brigade and the Bagram Airborne

Division. We also have solid positions in the Seventh Infantry Division. But I've come to you to do more than just alert you of these developments; my comrades have sent me to investigate how the Soviet leadership would respond to our decision to move forward with the uprising. Can you, tonight, find that out?"

The officer fell deep into thought, his hand automatically reaching for a glass of mineral water. "I'll try to do all I can," he mumbled. He took the notebook that was always placed on a coffee table in the guest room and wrote down both the information and the question for the Soviet leadership. Then he went into the kitchen where his wife was preparing tea. He gave her the note and told her to run quickly to the embassy, deliver the message to the KGB resident in Kabul, and request an immediate reply. He then picked up a tray loaded with tea, raisins, and nuts, and returned to the guest room.

Antonina, as a good intelligence officer's wife, did not ask unnecessary questions. She reached the embassy in the dark, using the empty and unlit streets. The resident was away from his office. He could be found neither at the embassy nor at his home. It was possible that he had left for a meeting in town. Antonina gave the note to the deputy resident of the Kabul KGB Residence, Orlov-Morozov, and relayed what her husband had told her. Afterwards, she asked some diplomats working late at the embassy to give her a ride home.

Victor knew that it would be impossible to receive a reply from Moscow before the morning. The resident and even the ambassador were not authorized to make decisions regarding such important matters. Once his wife returned, Victor told his guest that the information had been sent to Moscow. However, it was unlikely that they would receive a response in the next few hours. So as to avoid being chided for the slow pace, Victor

reproached Mahmoud for not alerting his Soviet comrades at least twenty-four hours in advance. The Afghan shrugged; it was possible that he himself had not known the previous day how things would turn out. Victor stopped him as he was preparing to leave.

“Wait, let’s agree that tomorrow, at five in the morning, I will come to Mikrorayon. You know the street, the one our specialists live on. It’s not far from your home. At that time, you should walk outside. If you are wearing your traditional Afghan clothing, I will take it as a sign that there will be no armed military uprising. If you are wearing a military uniform, I will take it to mean that there will be an armed uprising.”

Afterwards Victor took his guest to Mikrorayon, where the plotters were still in session.

At five in the morning, as light was just breaking, Bubnov parked his car near the house of the Soviet specialists. His appearance there so early wouldn’t attract undue attention. Kabul wakes up early; five in the morning is the time that traders go to the bazaar, bicyclists appear in the streets, and cars begin honking. Mahmoud appeared at almost the same moment that Victor turned off his car’s engine. The agent walked directly by the car, looking straight ahead and pretending not to notice the operative. He was wearing a military uniform.

Bubnov stopped at home to drink a quick cup of tea before dashing to the embassy. It was going to be a long day. There was still plenty of time until the beginning of the workday, but Bubnov found the KGB resident in his office. Colonel Osadchiy was excitedly scribbling something at his desk. Victor saw his own report from the previous night among the papers on Osadchiy’s desk.

“Come in, come in, you agitator,” the resident said with a smile. “Here is the cable

that Orlov-Morozov wrote to the Center as per your request. I had to come here at night to sign it. Read, is this all correct?"

Victor scanned the text attentively. "It's all correct, Vilior Gavrilovich, but something must be added to it. About an hour ago I saw Agent Mahmoud. He was wearing his military uniform. The uprising will begin today."

The color drained from the resident's face and a deep crease of concern appeared on his brow. "Your source, you're sure he isn't lying? Not playing out fantasies? Would he make something like this up?"

Osadchiy got up from his desk and began pacing across the small office as he reflected aloud. "Yes, damn, this feels like truth. *This* is what we've felt building up the last few days." With these words the resident's tone changed abruptly from light concern to authoritative action. "Here—the blank cable. Write it down here, right now, shortly and categorically, no 'possibly' or 'one should suppose' or 'one should expect.' Write: 'To Kryuchkov. Extraordinarily urgent.' What time is it in Moscow?" Osadchiy smiled to himself; it was six in the morning in Moscow, just the right time for such a cable. Within minutes the information confirming the forthcoming coup d'etat was sent to the Center.

Intelligence officers gathered in the embassy at nine in the morning. Osadchiy called a meeting to alert his staff of the volatile situation so that they could plan their day's work accordingly. There were no follow-up questions for the resident. It was understandable that most of the officers didn't take the news about the possible coup seriously. During the years of Mohammad Daoud's rule, not a month had passed in which the KGB chief wouldn't receive news of an urgent threat or a developing plot against the regime. There was a progressive democratic plot, a pro-Chinese extreme leftist group, "The Eternal Flame" plot,

Muslim fundamentalist plots, plots of organizations supporting the rights of a range of ethnic minorities. Each month unconfirmed threats passed by without disrupting the daily activities of the embassy.

When Victor entered the common room, he found his colleagues casually joking together. They would take turns in approaching the windows overlooking Darul Aman and asking, “See any tanks?” “No, what about fighter jets?” “No, no infantry either,” a third chuckled. “Such a strange coup...not a single soldier in the streets.”

At 9:40 a.m. the hum of an airplane was heard. It was an Aeroflot flight from Kabul to Moscow. The plane flew over the mountains to the north. Its windows sparkled in the morning sun before disappearing into the blue sky. And, at that moment, from the direction of the highway to Jalalabad came the sound of an artillery shot. The atmosphere of light sarcasm inside the embassy was replaced by grim solemnity. Everyone in the common room understood—it had begun.

Five years earlier, on July 17, 1973, Sardar Mohammad Daoud, without exerting any particular effort, had usurped the throne of the Afghan Padishah and his relative, Mohammad Zahir Shah. He dissolved the monarchy and proclaimed himself the head of the state, the prime minister, and the minister of foreign affairs. The whole world discussed the military coup and the changes that were to follow the change of the regime. Several Soviet operatives who were experts in Afghan political affairs knew that the situation was quite different than the official version of events.

Someone very close to the royal family told operatives from KGB’s Kabul Residence in confidence that the king was most certainly behind staging the coup. The Afghan monarch, who was smart and farsighted, understood his inability to control the explosive

political situation developing in the country. On the one hand, Muslim fundamentalist groups were becoming more influential and preparing for an armed struggle. On the other hand, those dissatisfied with the medieval state of affairs in Afghanistan were exhibiting a growing determination to challenge the ruling regime. If those people had been simple peasants, workers, or bureaucrats, the situation would not be so dangerous. But these were young officers, the backbone of the Afghan army. In such a volatile political atmosphere, Zahir Shah could easily find himself in an unenviable position. He had had his fair share of distressing situations over the years and now, guided by experience, he considered it prudent to “retreat” and transfer his authority to someone more willing to grapple with the growing unrest and direct the country back to the traditional course of moderate nationalism. The man for the job was Mohammad Daoud, an out-of-favor prime minister and a close relative of the king. Before the “state coup d’etat” was carried out, the king, joined by his relatives and entourage, left the country for Italy to be spared the usual unpleasantnesses that follow transfers of power.

News of the “monarch’s blessing of Daoud to conduct the republican coup” was relayed to Moscow, but it went unnoticed among the enthusiasm surrounding Afghanistan’s transition to a “new stage of progressive development.” The enthusiasm was well merited. In his first speech on Kabul radio the morning after seizing power, the new Afghan leader assured his fellow citizens that from now on the country would develop along a path of social-economic democratization. He proclaimed the abolition of social and ethnic inequalities through the establishment of just land reforms that would allow Afghan peasants to own their own land. Daoud expressed his intention to put an end to bureaucratic corruption and to introduce state control over prices in the service and trade

sectors. There were proclamations of other good intentions as well. And to be fair, it should be noted that during his rule, Daoud earnestly attempted to realize the reforms promised in his inaugural address.

The new head of state, commenting on the foreign policy of the republican regime, emphasized his intention to strengthen the friendship with “the great northern neighbor,” as well as to resist “pro-imperialist ventures” within his borders. The foreign policy tilt towards Moscow was emphasized because Daoud’s recent ascent to power had been enforced by young officers who had received their military training in the Soviet Union. Many of them were members of the PDPA and had collaborated closely with Babrak Karmal. Once his presidency was established, Daoud was obliged to reward them with appointments to high-level government positions.

Daoud traveled to the Soviet Union on his first state visit. He was warmly received. The visit included many meetings that determined the course of comprehensive development for Soviet-Afghan relations.

Daoud, an experienced politician and an intelligent and pragmatic man, decided to assert his political authority over his enemies with immediate and decisive action. The suppression of Islamic fundamentalists was his first goal. Islamists had thrown acid in the faces of girls who walked uncloaked by their hijabs. They committed terrorist acts and had even attempted to organize pockets of armed resistance in several regions of the country. Daoud arrested and imprisoned Ghulam Mohammad Niazi, the dean of the theological department and a founder of the Islamic extremist group “Muslim Youth.” Some months later, in December 1973, another radical Islamic leader, Habibullah Rahman, was arrested and executed on the conviction of plotting to overthrow the regime. His friends, convicted

as accomplices, received long-term prison sentences. It was during Daoud's rule, not under the PDPA leadership as some assert, that the exodus of Muslim fundamentalists from Afghanistan began. Following another failed attempt to organize anti-government actions, a group of Muslim extremists including Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, Ahmed Shah Massoud, and others left the country. At that time, very few people knew those young men. Later, after the Soviet military intervention, those exiles became leaders of powerful private armies and influential politicians.

At the time, Soviet diplomats and official guests from Moscow who visited Afghanistan did not even attempt to conceal their pleasure regarding Daoud's campaign against the Islamic reactionaries. In Moscow, certainty grew that the "Red Prince" (the nickname given to Daoud by some journalists), supported by young, pro-Soviet, Afghan politicians, and propped up by Soviet assistance, would be inclined to build, if not socialism, at least a society in which the Soviet Union's Afghan friends would actually shape political decisions. In other words, the chimera of the Sovietization of Afghanistan was born.

In reality, Daoud's plans were different. He had no intention of changing the fundamental foundation of society that had evolved over the course of many centuries. As a true nationalist, he had a deep respect for tradition. His reforms were not to dismantle the political system, but to improve it. In his foreign policy, Daoud strove to balance between the superpowers and attempted to gain the maximum advantage for his country in the process. There was a popular joke in Kabul, "He uses Soviet matches to light American cigarettes." After Daoud managed to defeat radical Islamic groups and suppress the uprisings of ethnic minorities in the north of the country, he decided to get rid of his Soviet-leaning ministers, his former allies from the time of the coup.

As a result, many members of the PDPA lost their ministerial and other high government positions in 1974-1975. Some were sent abroad as ambassadors, while others merely became unemployed. The worst humiliation befell the active participants of Daoud's coup. The military pilot Abdul Qadir was removed from his position as the commander of the air force and later received the degrading appointment of head of the Afghan army slaughterhouse. Soon after being demoted, Qadir began discussing a new, anti-Daoud coup d'etat with his close friends—officers. An Afghani man can tolerate and forgive a great deal, but not an assault on his dignity.

The removal of the ministers—members of leftist organizations—bewildered Moscow. Bureaucrats in the Soviet Communist Party's Central Committee and the Foreign Ministry could only guess. It seemed that the International Department of the Central Committee had chosen the correct strategy towards the new Afghan regime. Soviet comrades persistently urged leaders of both Khalq and Parcham, "to reduce their revolutionary ambitions and to support the progressive regime established in Afghanistan with all means available to them." The Soviet leaders did not want to question their own strategic vision, nor did they want to be disappointed in Daoud. Thus they decided not to get disappointed. Many of the high-ranking bureaucrats dealing with Soviet-Afghan relations simply accepted Daoud's rationale for replacing the high-level leftist cadres and did not dwell too much on them. The explanation was that at that particular stage of the Republican Revolution the country needed highly qualified managers rather than army officers trained only to shoot and march.

At that time there were some young diplomats and intelligence operatives in Kabul who were well informed about what was going on in Afghanistan. They knew that during

World War II, Prince Daoud Khan, then a commander of the garrison of Kabul, supported collaboration with the Nazis, and that he was not as simple as the Kremlin wished to believe. They also realized that the honest and sometimes denunciatory reports they sent about Daoud's regime were not reaching the top leaders in Moscow, but were filtered out and stove piped. They feared that the key players in the Soviet Union were entertaining false notions about President Daoud and the Afghan republican regime, and that it would result in mutual misunderstanding between the leaders of the two countries. Soon those fears materialized.

In April 1977, during the Afghan president's official visit to Moscow, Brezhnev, under the impression that Daoud was a true "friend and brother" of the Soviet Union, expressed concerns about "research activities" conducted by the United States along the borders of the USSR under the aegis of the United Nations. Brezhnev had intelligence containing proof that CIA agents worked there under the cover of "UN staff." Naturally, the Soviet leader could not refer specifically to the intelligence information. Daoud's reaction to Brezhnev's words was unexpectedly agitated. He explained that the issue of granting or not granting expert access to different sites was exclusively within the realm of authority of the Afghan government, and he wouldn't want Soviet friends interfering in the domestic affairs of Afghanistan.

Brezhnev stoically accepted Daoud's rebuttal. However, it would not be the last one during those negotiations.

Sticking to the text prepared in advance, Brezhnev asked the Afghan leader about his intentions regarding cultivation of ties with the PDPA. The general secretary considered his question to be an innocent one, but Daoud became irritated again and offered a strained

response—“Friendly relations between our countries do not require intermediaries.”

Brezhnev, noting the harsh tone of his interlocutor’s response, did not press him further.

This episode left a strong impression upon some Soviet leaders. It raised concerns that the Afghan president intended to either limit the activities of the PDPA or even possibly dissolve it. Born of that concern was the decision to actively enforce the early stage of unification of the Khalq and Parcham factions so that the unified, powerful party would emerge as a legitimate political force balancing Daoud’s authority.

The misgivings that appeared during the April talks in Moscow somewhat cooled the “brotherly affection” of the Soviet leadership towards Daoud. However, the general strategy of supporting the republican regime in Afghanistan remained intact. When Afghanistan was discussed in the Soviet Foreign Ministry offices, the staff likened it to Finland as a similar neutral friendly state with predictable politics.

The Soviet Union did not need any cataclysms in its southern underbelly.

Lev Nikolayevich Gorelov was the head of the Soviet military advisory mission to the Afghan armed forces for almost three years. His service there was devoid of adventure or particular hardship. All weapons in the Afghan army, from handguns to missiles, were manufactured exclusively by the Soviet Union, and most of the Afghani officers had been trained in Soviet military academies and schools. Many spoke fluent Russian, liked to drink vodka, and happily reminisced over their years of study in the Soviet Union, remembering Soviet girls particularly fondly.

A story of one of Gorelov’s subordinates, who was a graduate of the Ryazan Training Center for paratroopers, stuck in the general’s mind.

“Can you imagine, Comrade General?” said the Afghan officer. “I was once in Moscow, it was about thirty degrees below centigrade, and I saw a woman selling ice cream. She was wearing huge felt boots, an overcoat with an almost white apron covering a mighty bust. I approached her and asked her to sell me some ice cream. She was surprised and asked, ‘what’s the matter with you, Mowgli? You wouldn’t be able to crack through the ice cream in such a frost.’ Then she pulled out a bottle of very cold vodka, two glasses, and a pickle from her lunchbox. I drank the vodka and, with difficulty, managed to bite off a piece of the frozen pickle. She drank with me but didn’t eat the pickle. She didn’t accept any money for the treat. So that’s how we met. Then she invited me to visit her at her home. You know, friend, I didn’t even know such women existed.”

Gorelov and his assistants traveled across the country without limitation. They visited military installations and never carried any weapons. Sometimes they would take along guns, made in Tula, if they were planning on hunting somewhere. Mostly they hunted ducks at a lake not far from Kabul. Sometimes the brother of the president, Naim, a passionate hunter, joined them. They would go to the north of the country, to the Soviet border, to hunt wild boar. However, porcupine hunting was the most exotic. Porcupine, cooked for dinner, was not so much a delicacy as a cause to bring together friends and to network with various important people.

Other than hunting, there was never any need for carrying weapons. Soviet generals and officers were always warmly welcomed wherever they went.

President Mohammad Daoud used to say to the members of his entourage that if one hair on the head of a Soviet citizen were harmed, the guilty party would pay with his life.

General Gorelov was not an ostentatious general. He was a veteran paratrooper who

had gained experience in harrying military situations, had served in remote garrisons, and knew danger. He had completed 511 successful parachute jumps and there were many ribbons decorating his military uniform. He led the paratrooper division during the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968—memories of which he attempted not to dredge up. Seven years after that, in 1975, Gorelov was serving as a deputy commander of the Fourteenth Army when he was unexpectedly summoned to a meeting of the General Staff of the Soviet armed forces. He was received by the head of the General Staff, Marshal Kulikov.

“You have been appointed as the chief military advisor in Afghanistan. In light of the expansion of the Soviet Union’s military presence and assistance in the region, you will be in charge of the training and preparation of the officer corps. And mind—no politics.” The marshal walked across his spacious office and looked at the two dozen different telephones on the desk. “The situation in Afghanistan may appear simple at first glance, but one can find some very interesting processes taking place under the surface. Local officers are being pulled in different directions. President Daoud wants them to side with him. Afghan communists have their own agenda regarding the army. You’ll figure it out once you’re on the ground.”

President Daoud received Gorelov immediately upon his arrival in Kabul. He introduced the general to the supreme military commanders of Afghanistan and wished him success. He was allocated a spacious apartment in Mikrorayon, a car, and an interpreter.

Lev Nikolayevich knew about the existence of the PDPA, but minding the order of Marshal Kulikov, tried to stay away from politics. He instructed his officers to do the same. There were more than three hundred military advisors in Afghanistan, most of whom had

no idea that some destructive political forces were evolving within Afghan society.

Gorelov and his people had their work cut out for them. While the Afghani military could march well at parades, their professional training and mastery of modern weaponry and tactics appeared weak. Soviet advisors had to start with the basics, making their advisees study textbooks and learn during various military exercises in the field. Besides training, the Soviet advisors had to address the routine living conditions of the troops. Soviet officers arriving in Afghanistan were shocked to discover that there were not even basic barracks in the Afghan army. Soldiers slept either on the floor or on the ground, cooked food by fire, and ate whatever they could get their hands on. Physical abuse was widespread, as officers had no qualms about beating up their subordinates. Junior officers themselves were prey to beatings by colonels and generals.

Two months earlier, Gorelov had been promoted to the rank of lieutenant general. He invited the most esteemed Afghan military leaders to celebrate his promotion. Out of respect to local Afghan customs, which prohibited consumption of alcohol, dinner was served in one room and in the next room there stood the table with alcoholic drinks. By that time, Gorelov knew that despite the prohibition, his Afghan colleagues wouldn't mind quietly downing a drink or two, just as long as there were no witnesses. They would go into the adjacent room one by one and come back to the table laden with food, looking very pleased.

The traditional "trade-union" meeting at the embassy was scheduled for April 19. This "trade-union" was a label used for meetings of Soviet Communist Party members working at the Soviet embassy in Afghanistan. Military advisers filled up two buses heading to the embassy from Mikrorayon. Gorelov and his deputies drove a Volga to Darul Aman

Road on the opposite end of the Afghan capital. Mid-way into their drive the column encountered a huge demonstration. Thousands of Afghans were walking towards the center of Kabul, waving flags and shouting slogans. The advisers reached the embassy with great difficulty.

The ambassador was one of the first to speak at the meeting. He explained that the main leftist ideologue from the Parcham faction, Mir Akbar Khyber, had been assassinated and that the demonstrators were blaming the Afghan government. Ambassador Puzanov continued, "However, we have information suggesting that Khyber was the victim of intrigues within the PDPA. It's possible that he was killed by Khalqis. For what purpose? We have to ponder this, comrades."

On the morning of April 27, General Gorelov left his headquarters in Mikrorayon and went to the Soviet embassy, where some of his staff was stationed. He had received some alarming warnings from several Soviet military advisers earlier. Apparently there was agitation in parts of the garrison of Kabul. There were rumors of strange activities. Suspicious people, appearing to be agitators, attempted to incite officers' participation in a rebellion. In the evening of April 26, Afghan contacts had sent information about the arrest of the key leaders of the PDPA. General Gorelov was anxious. He sensed that some dangerous events were coming. He felt he had to consult with the diplomats at the embassy.

En route to the embassy, Gorelov saw a column of tanks moving towards the center of the city. He was alarmed. "That's odd," he thought to himself, "where could they be going?" According to approved military plans, there were supposed to be military exercises in the field. The tanks did not belong in the center of the capital.

Upon reaching the embassy, Gorelov immediately summoned his chief of staff, Colonel Stupko, and asked, “What are these tanks doing in the capital? Who gave the order?”

“I have no idea,” replied the colonel, who had just recently arrived to Kabul and was not familiar with the situation on the ground.

“Well, go find out,” ordered the general. “It’s your responsibility. What do our comrades report from Afghan divisions?”

Stupko had no idea.

Later, when the events that transpired on that day were recalled and analyzed, the following emerged: the adviser to the commander of the Fourth Armored Brigade, Junior Colonel Yezhkov, had contacted Stupko early in the morning to report that the tank battalions under the command of certain officers—the Khalqis Watanjar and Mazdouryar—had advanced. “And,” Yezhkov’s voice trembled from anxiety, “the tanks are loaded with live ammunition.” Colonel Stupko reprimanded the advisor, telling him “not to say nonsense, and to mind his own business,” before hanging up.

Gorelov went to the phones himself. There was no new information from his headquarters in Mikrorayon. His staff could not give him any news. They were aware of the unsanctioned movement of troops and were trying to find out what was going on, but they lost contact with some Soviet officers. Then, using internal lines, Gorelov dialed the number of the ambassador. He wasn’t available. Earlier that day Alexander Mikhailovich Puzanov had gone to the airport to see off the delegation that had been in Kabul to conduct negotiations regarding the demarcation of several sections of the Soviet-Afghan border.

The ambassador arrived soon. He looked dismayed. Navigating the city was difficult

because of the presence of tanks and armored vehicles.

Puzanov recommended that General Gorelov take advantage of his military contacts to find out what was going on.

The general himself dialed the number of Junior Colonel Yezhkov, the adviser to the Fourth Armored Brigade. Yezhkov confirmed: "The tank battalion led by Senior Captain Watanjar has left the base without permission, entered Kabul, and blockaded the presidential palace and the Ministry of Defense. The airport's landing field has also been captured." Then Gorelov received a call from another adviser to the Fifteenth Armored Brigade, who reported that its tanks were also moving towards the city.

One didn't have to be a brain surgeon to realize that a genuine military coup d'etat was taking place in Kabul. Gorelov reported just this to the ambassador. Puzanov was confused and didn't care to hide it.

"What shall we do, Lev Nikolayevich?"

"We will watch the situation, Alexander Mikhailovich, what else can we do? We will watch and report, each to our own superiors. We will not interfere; just let them sort it all out."

The ambassador threw up his hands.

Sensing that the situation was escalating, Puzanov called the diplomatic adviser Novokreschenov and instructed him to alert the leaders of the various Soviet groups in Afghanistan to be ready to mobilize. Then Novokreschenov called a meeting with diplomats and staff members so as to open discussion about the mode of work under the exceptional circumstances. When the meeting convened, Novokreschenov pulled the plan devised for emergency situations out of his safe. The plan contained the protocol for operations in case

of war or a military attempt to capture a diplomatic mission. Diplomats began discussing their assigned responsibilities. As it turned out, one of the more experienced and respected diplomats was in charge of giving medical assistance to the wounded. That diplomat began screaming, "But I'm scared of blood! When I see blood I lose consciousness!"

"Look, look right here, whose signature is this? Is it yours?" Novokreschenov retorted, not even attempting to hide his indignation. "Well, whose is it? Yours?"

"Ok, yes, it's mine, but when I signed it I had no idea I would ever actually be responsible for handling the wounded."

"Here before you, comrades, is a classic example of a sloppy and irresponsible attitude towards emergency preparation," Novokreschenov commented dryly.

While this chaotic meeting was taking place, the ambassador summoned both the KGB and GRU chiefs to his office to inquire about their views regarding the unfolding situation.

"Last night we received information that an uprising against Daoud's regime was underway. We have informed the Center of this report." Osadchiy's tone was calm and Puzanov thought he could hear a note of condescension in it. Osadchiy continued, "Yesterday it was still unclear whether the opposition would carry out the uprising. Early this morning, however, we received a confirmation of their intent. The information has been sent to Moscow."

Osadchiy and the resident of GRU, Counter Admiral Pechenko, exchanged glances that went unnoticed by the ambassador. Early that morning Osadchiy had informed his colleague from GRU about Mahmoud's report. Pechenko had immediately notified his subordinates and asked them to collect pertinent information. Contrary to the popular

belief that KGB and GRU officers felt only animosity and jealousy towards one another, these two Soviet Residencies under the cover of the Soviet embassy in Kabul had coexisted professionally and courteously due to the friendly relations between the two chiefs.

At about 10:30 a.m. a Zhiguli came driving erratically up to the embassy gates. A Soviet military staff member ran from the car and began pounding on the gates of the entranceway. When the gates opened and the car drove onto the embassy grounds, onlookers were surprised to see that the car was missing both its front doors and a back right door. The driver, hyperventilating, ran into the embassy and said that a tank had shot at the Palace Ark, Daoud's residence, as he'd been driving by. The shot had deafened him and knocked three doors off his car. The deputy on duty at the embassy called the military attaché, Baranayev. The attaché came into the embassy lobby, took the incoherent major, and led him into his office for debriefing.

Gradually information began trickling into the embassy. Soviet specialists were calling in from different parts of the city with information about the situation on the ground in various parts of town. Diplomats from the embassies of socialist countries called to learn more about the uprising and to tell stories about what was happening in the streets surrounding their diplomatic missions. The information that came from Soviet military advisers was particularly valuable. They reported that the epicenter of the rebellion was in the Air Force and Air Defense Forces Headquarters near Kabul Airport. Colonel Abdul Qadir, appointed as the commander of the air force and air defense forces, was in charge of the military assault. The first direct tank assault on the president's palace appeared to have been rebuffed by Daoud's palace guard. It seemed unlikely, however, that the rebels would give up their attempt to overthrow the regime.

General Gorelov was particularly concerned by the news that the rebels had already delivered a blow to the Ministry of Defense. There were some twenty Soviet advisers and interpreters working there. What had happened to them? Were they killed? Wounded? It later became clear that none of the Soviet specialists were injured, despite the great risk they faced. Around noon, Soviet officers began to hear a peculiar thunderous rumbling from outside. At first they believed a column of heavy trucks was passing, but then as they came up to their windows they saw a line of moving tanks, about a hundred of them, directly in front of the Ministry of Defense, approximately a hundred meters away from Ark Palace. Some were passing by, roaring loudly, on their way to Pashtunistan Square, while others stopped right there. Somebody asked apprehensively, "This is the way they do military drills down here, isn't it?"

"What kind of drills are you talking about?" some of the more experienced officers responded. "Looks like it'll get hot here soon, boys."

At noon a tank swiveled its heavy machine gun and began to fire upon the presidential palace. Another tank turned its turret towards the Ministry of Defense and took a direct shot. The tank was targeting the office of the head of the general staff, but by mistake the shell hit the chemical services room. Panic arose, the wounded were moaning, and soot and smoke began to fill the corridors. Soviet advisers ran out to the yard. The chief of the General Staff, Abdullah Rokai, who was outside with the advisers, shouted only one word in Russian, "*Domoi!*" ("Go home!"). He grabbed a passing interpreter to explain in Dari that there was a bus outside waiting to take the Soviet officers to Mikrorayon.

The officers were evacuated safely, and by 2 p.m. the Defense Ministry had been captured by the rebels. Minister of Defense Ghulam Hayder Rasouli had left for the Eighth

Division, stationed in Paghman near Kabul.

At the height of the crisis at the Ministry of Defense, the Federal Republic of Germany embassy's military attaché arrived for a meeting scheduled with Minister Rasouli. The meeting was scheduled for 1 p.m. and the punctual German arrived precisely on time. While he was surprised to see the whole square filled with armored vehicles and that half of the building had been destroyed by shelling, he was nevertheless unfazed and approached the entrance of the ministry. Upon meeting passing-by officers, he explained the purpose of his visit, without verifying whether the officers were rebels or loyalists. He was listened to politely before being advised to come back later, as all the meetings scheduled for that day had been cancelled.

Between 1 and 2 p.m. a terrifying thunderstorm broke open above Kabul*. The darkness covering the city became even more ominous as the black smoke from fires across the capital billowed skywards. Sometimes it appeared that not only tanks, mortars, and light weaponry targeted the presidential palace, but that the very firmament attempted to strike the crumbling building with lightning bolts. It became impossible to distinguish between the roar of artillery and the roar of thunder as both coalesced into a single overwhelming reverberation. When the thunderstorm finally began to abate, fighter planes flashed in the clear skies behind the smoke and clouds.

From 3:20 p.m. onwards, the presidential palace was under continuous aerial and missile bombardment. SU7Bs, MIG-21s, and military helicopters participated in strafing runs. Fighter jets circled above the city. Heeding some unseen signal, they would split into groups and descend upon the Ark, firing missiles before gracefully interweaving for their

* The authors wish to emphasize the reality of the thunderstorm; it is not a literary trick used to enhance the tragedy of the situation but rather a verifiable meteorological event that occurred in Kabul on April 27, 1978.

ascent. One plane, flying low above the Rishkor district, was hit by a surface-to-air missile fired from an infantry division based there. The pilot parachuted.

Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the USSR to the Republic of Afghanistan, Alexander Mikhailovich Puzanov, was an experienced diplomat and bureaucrat. As a young man, Puzanov had been promoted by Stalin himself to assume the position of head of the Communist Party organization of the Kuibyshev region. He, along with Brezhnev, became a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party at the Nineteenth Congress of the CPSU. He remained a member of the Central Committee when serving as the Soviet ambassador in Kabul. In short, Puzanov had been a member of the Soviet political elite for three decades.

Puzanov enjoyed telling stories of the old days to his entourage: "Sometimes Leonid Ilyich Brezhnev would receive me. Well, I would report what I was supposed to report within my allotted time and then I would get up to leave. But Brezhnev wouldn't let me go. He would say, 'Where are you rushing off to? Stay some more, let's talk.'"

It appeared that the general secretary recognized a purebred bureaucrat of the Stalin school in Puzanov. He was a truly loyal and dedicated *apparatchik* who served his party in all positions entrusted to him. From time to time, with and without reason, he would send packages from Kabul to Brezhnev and other high-ranking Soviet leaders: sweet grapes, giant pomegranates from Kandahar, tender, thin-skinned mandarins, and all sorts of organic vegetables.

Alexander Mikhailovich had occupied many important positions in his life. He had even been the chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Russian Federation for some time. After that he had been appointed to lead the diplomatic missions to North Korea,

Yugoslavia, and Bulgaria. Alexander Mikhailovich enjoyed telling stories about his friendship with the general secretary of the Bulgarian Communist Party, Todor Zhivkov. Rumor had it, however, that it was Zhivkov who had asked Brezhnev in a private meeting to recall Puzanov from his position as the Soviet ambassador to Bulgaria.

Alexander Mikhailovich had two hobbies that were well known in the embassy. On Thursday nights (in Islamic countries Fridays are days off) the ambassador would go fishing at the reservoir Naglu, situated halfway between Kabul and Jalalabad. As a rule, he was always accompanied by the chef d'protocol Slava, the embassy's accountant, the ambassador's cook, the consul, and an intelligence officer (for some reason Puzanov was convinced that KGB agents' responsibilities included guarding him). Besides his own staff, he would sometimes invite the Bulgarian ambassador, Stoyanov. When Stoyanov would not or could not go fishing, he would send Kolya Popov, the attaché of the Bulgarian embassy and son of the famous General Popov, who arrested the Bulgarian Tsar Boris during World War II. Kolya hated fishing, and to demonstrate it he never brought any fishing equipment with him. He was not the only one who didn't want to go fishing of course, but you don't just say no to the Soviet ambassador. The most important ritual of the weekly fishing trips was a 4 a.m. breakfast prepared after the cortege of cars arrived at the observation platform on the other side of the hydroelectric power station Naglu. Petro, the ambassador's driver, as though he were a circus magician, would take out a tablecloth and lay it down on the ground and then place a stone on each corner. The cook and the accountant would then slice delicious ham, open cans of jellied pig's tongue and sturgeon in tomato sauce, and would lay out an array of dark bread and fresh vegetables: cucumbers, tomatoes, radishes, and scallions. All of it was delicious, except for the warm vodka. Petro

would retrieve vodka along with glasses from the trunk of the car. Everyone was poured a full glass of warm vodka. Alexander Mikhailovich would then toast to a successful fishing trip, and everyone present had to drink their glasses to the bottoms. Refusal was not permitted. The ambassador customarily was very attentive to the way people drank.

Alexander Mikhailovich Puzanov had another simple hobby. In the evenings he would lure senior diplomats into his residence to have them play Lotto with him and his wife, Tatyana Alexeyevna. Normally his partners would pretend that nothing in their lives could be more important and joyful than taking balls with numbers out from the cotton bag and then shouting out those numbers. Very few dared to refuse the ambassador when they were invited to this dubious form of entertainment. Some, however, dared to reject Puzanov's invitations. Among those were the KGB and GRU chiefs. Alexander Mikhailovich did not like them, and was possibly even a little apprehensive of them.

The Soviet ambassador in Kabul had a good life. His responsibilities were not too burdensome; his days were filled with receptions, meetings, and strolls through the fragrant ambassadorial garden. On Fridays he went fishing. That was how things were before the dark day, April 27, arrived.

Detailed reports about the events taking place beyond the boundary of the embassy compound had to be relayed to Moscow. What was there to report? How could one explain that the loyal and friendly regime that was fully supported by the USSR could topple at any moment? And that its executioners were not Islamic reactionaries or members of extremist Maoist groups, but friends who were also supported by the Soviet Union. What would Leonid Ilyich and other members of the Politburo think? Why had our trusted friends not informed us in advance about their preparations for the coup? Why didn't the plotters ask

for our advice? What will happen later? What happens if Daoud wins? Will we have to accuse the participants of the coup of being political adventurers? And what if the rebels win? Should we be the first to recognize the new regime? The ambassador was bewildered by these questions.

It was apparent that the questions “who will win?” and “what shall we do with the outcome?” posed difficulties not only to Puzanov. Since early morning, Moscow had been barraging the ambassador and both residents with inquiries about the developments in Kabul and the prospects of the rebels.

Once again the senior diplomats, both KGB and GRU chiefs, as well as the head of the Soviet military advisory mission, were summoned for a meeting at the ambassador’s. General Gorelov reported, “Capturing Ark will not be easy. It is a real fortress with two sets of walls that are impossible to penetrate using tank shells. The palace guard consists of two thousand troops. They have T-54 tanks. There are also anti-tank missiles and heavy machine guns deployed at the gates of the palace.”

“But you are neglecting one important detail,” the GRU chief observed gloomily. “These revolutionaries can engage the air force. Capturing the air force bases in Bagram and Shindand is certainly a part of their plan. And let me remind you that Commander of the Air Force Colonel Qadir, the one who deposed the king, is in charge.”

Gorelov agreed. “Then Daoud’s chances are slim.”

Somebody remembered that Daoud was scheduled to have a cabinet meeting that day. “The future of the PDPA and its imprisoned leaders was to be determined in that meeting,” Osadchiy added.

After the meeting, Puzanov walked out of his office and into the antechamber and

laid down on the couch. He felt pressure in his chest. He asked his secretary Lyuba, the driver's wife, to call the embassy clinic for a doctor. Alexander Mikhailovich, typical of the Stalin school of leadership, would very rarely succumb to illness and would never make his ailments apparent. Nobody could see the seventy-two-year-old ambassador's weaknesses, although sometimes, like any other mortal, he would not feel well. He awaited the doctor with grim and foreboding expectations.

Ten years later, in his Moscow apartment overlooking the Kremlin, Puzanov told the authors of this book that then, in the morning of April 27, 1978, he vaguely, subconsciously understood that the quiet, idyllic way of life he had been enjoying in Afghanistan was over—that from then on, everything would go wrong. Blood would be spilled, the “time of troubles” would arrive, and too many innocent lives would be broken up in the process.

The head of the embassy clinic arrived shortly. He was an experienced doctor and a very tactful man. He took Puzanov's blood pressure, prescribed pills, and ordered the ambassador not to worry. An odd character, he diagnosed the hypertension to be a result of the approaching thunderstorm. “What does it have to do with the weather?” Alexander Mikhailovich grumbled to himself after the doctor left.

At about 2 p.m. Osadchiy and Pechenko almost simultaneously received urgent cables from Moscow that were obviously coordinated by the leadership of the KGB and GRU. The cables reported the growing concern among Politburo members and other Soviet leaders about the volatile political situation in Afghanistan and urged them to send regular reports regarding the evolution of the situation in Kabul. Moscow stressed its acute interest in receiving minute-by-minute updates regarding military activity as well as analyses of the possible outcomes for both the loyalists and the rebels. Moscow suggested that the KGB

and GRU Residencies create teams of observers to be sent into the city with the task of conducting visual observations.

The headquarters of both intelligence services reminded their residents of the basics of intelligence operations: “During any street disorders, mass protests, state coups d’etat, etc., when relying on agents becomes difficult or impossible, the primary method of obtaining intelligence information is visual observation of the occurring events by the residency’s operatives.”

Both residents were very displeased with the cables that they received. Both Osadchiy and Pechenenko knew the basics of intelligence operations very well, but still did not want to dispatch their subordinates into the city. They were well aware of the intensity of fighting in the streets of Kabul and the degree of risk to their operatives. They could not, however, ignore the orders of their superiors in Moscow.

On the evening of the uprising, Colonel Abdul Qadir could not sleep. He, the commander of the air force and air defense forces, was ordered by the party to lead the military uprising against Daoud’s regime. Two weeks ago he had personally devised a plan for the blitz campaign that involved neutralizing commanders of several key military detachments located near Kabul and then capturing important government sites, including the presidential palace. According to Qadir’s plan, dozens of tanks and armored vehicles, fighter jets from air bases in Bagram and Shindand, and a detachment of commandos were assigned to take part in the revolution.

Colonel Qadir was not a romantic idealist. He understood all too well that a plan was one thing and reality was something else. It was impossible for a plan to consider every

possible contingency. Any unforeseen element could jeopardize the revolution, the failure of which would mean the immediate execution of everybody participating in the uprising, as well as their family members, friends, and colleagues. The authorities would be merciless; nobody would be spared. Daoud and his entourage only waited for a reason to slaughter their enemies.

It wasn't by chance that the colonel was asked to play a decisive role in the revolution. By then Abdul Qadir had become a professional behind military coups d'état. Just five years earlier he participated in Daoud's overthrow of the king. At that time he acquired priceless experience in coordinating the actions of different military divisions.

A shrewd political operative, Daoud knew about the secret ties between Qadir and the PDPA. He also could foresee many officers following Qadir, something he had to take into consideration.

Qadir was not an ideological warrior. He stood apart from the leaders of the PDPA, Taraki and Karmal, who had dedicated their lives to politics since youth. His path was different. He was selected to be trained as a pilot in the Soviet Union along with some other Afghan officers. Upon their return to Afghanistan, a group of like-minded military officers was formed. The group was named the Military Revolutionary Youth Organization. There were seven members in the group at its inception in 1963. All were equal; there was no leader.

The group had no program, no code of conduct, no membership. They held long conversations concerning the future of their country. They discussed methods of reform and modernization and puzzled about how to overcome backwardness in Afghanistan. Several years after the inception of the group, they learned of the Khalq and Parcham

factions, but couldn't grasp what kept the two groups apart. PDPA's noble, progressive, and democratic goals appeared compatible with the Military Revolutionary Youth members' goals, but Khalqis and Parchamis harbored such animosity and uncompromising aggression towards one another. Qadir's comrades sent him to find out about the essence of the conflict between the two factions. Members of Parcham arranged a generous reception for him: shish kebabs, vegetables, and vodka were served. They immediately began to invite the officers to join the ranks of the party.

"But why are you fighting each other?" asked Qadir.

"This is a technical question. With time things will settle down," Babrak Karmal responded.

"In that case, we will wait until you unite with each other."

Qadir, while not particularly well educated, was a naturally shrewd, intelligent, and cautious political operator. With patience, he usually achieved his goals. Later, when the Military Revolutionary Youth Organization had grown to include more than a hundred officers, one of Daoud's trusted representatives came to him. He informed Qadir that Daoud himself requested a meeting with him. The idea of an anti-monarchical coup was ripe in Afghanistan, but the support of the army was crucial and still lacking.

The consideration of this military aspect was what brought Qadir and his organization into the fold. Initially the pilot was very cautious about supporting Daoud. But when Daoud promised that the overthrow of the monarchy would clear the way for socialism, Qadir quickly became optimistic, and convinced his comrades of the merit of Daoud's plan. Daoud promised that the socialism would be Islamic in essence, a socialism founded upon the natural Afghan identity.

In July 1973, Major Qadir and his group supported the plotters. As has been previously mentioned, there were no serious difficulties in overthrowing the monarch. Only six people died in the coup, the most noticeable of whom was the head of the king's guard. Mohammad Zahir Shah, who had sensed that something was wrong, or having been alerted by some of his loyal allies, had no problems leaving for Italy with other members of the royal family on the eve of the coup.

In a statement delivered shortly after the coup, Daoud proclaimed the transfer of vast fertile tracts of land in the southern Charikar region to poor peasants. Qadir was present at this historical event. After the proclamation, Daoud gave him a meaningful look, as if to say, "see, I've kept my word. I promised socialism and I'm delivering."

The major was rewarded generously for his participation in overthrowing the king. He was promoted to the rank of colonel and was appointed as the commander of the air force. By that time he was established as the leader of his underground military organization.

Daoud's promise of "socialism" did not progress further than the transfer of the Charikar lands, but to be fair, his reforms were unconditionally progressive. Daoud, as well as Qadir, likely wanted to see his country advanced and flourishing. However, he remembered all too well the fates of former Afghan rulers who had been ahead of their times. Amanullah Khan had allowed women to take off their chadors and men to wear European-style clothing at the beginning of the twentieth century. How long did he remain on the throne after that? Even the military support of Soviet Russia failed to save him then.

And now Daoud had to take into consideration that on the left he was under pressure from PDPA members and on the right all of his actions were closely monitored by

religious fanatics—fundamentalists. He also had to consider that there were elements in Afghan society, apart from the allies of the great northern neighbor, who wanted friendship with the West.

Daoud was engaged in a balancing act. Having become the head of the state, he asked the minister of defense, “Why is our army equipped exclusively with Soviet weaponry? Go to India, to Saudi Arabia, see what they have.” He then invited the commander of the air force, “Why are all our airplanes and helicopters manufactured in the Soviet Union? I task you to explore the procurement of similar technology in Western Europe.”

Abdul Qadir conscientiously fulfilled that task and reported back to the president, “Switzerland is prepared to provide us with transport aircraft which would be superior to our current Antonov models. There are also French helicopters available that are much better than MI-8.” Daoud listened to the report approvingly and ordered the minister to continue negotiations. However, soon after that, Qadir was read a lecture by the PDPA leaders: “You should try to sabotage these deals. In cases like this we must always orient ourselves to the USSR—our most trusted friend and strategic partner.”

The problem resolved itself. India, Saudi Arabia, and the European countries demanded payment in full for their weaponry, aircraft, and technology. The Soviet Union, meanwhile, was helping Afghanistan for practically no compensation. There were some credits arranged, some symbolic payments made, and a lot was provided by barter for natural gas supplied from Afghan deposits.

It was not only the underground activist Qadir who was rewarded by Daoud for his help in overthrowing the monarchy. Several members of the PDPA, primarily members of

the Parcham faction, also became ministers. These PDPA members had conducted a successful operation against the Islamic fundamentalists and their sympathizers, and at the same time rooted out both overt and secret enemies. The movement of religious fanatics had been gaining momentum in those years. Their many organizations were actively operating almost in plain sight, both at the Kabul Polytechnic Institute and Kabul University. The future heroes of jihad—Rabbani, Gulbuddin, and Massoud—were sharpening their blades against a regime that they perceived as too secular. Any opposition movement always has patrons in the top echelons of power. Those patrons should also be considered plotters. So Qadir, with his comrades, made a list of fifty people who were allegedly planning to overthrow the president. Daoud was informed of those “plotters” through different channels. Their names included the commander of the air force and air defense forces, the former prime minister, a well-known tribal authority, a prominent banker, and a major entrepreneur. Gulbuddin and Massoud, who were indeed organizing military detachments, were included on the list as well.

Water erodes stone. At some moment the president believed in the alleged plot and had almost all of the fifty plotters arrested. Many were immediately shot, while others received long prison sentences. However, the only “real” enemies—Gulbuddin, Massoud, Rabbani—escaped miraculously. They were tipped off about Daoud’s intentions and fled to the mountains or hid in neighboring Pakistan. Why did that happen? Only Allah knows. It was a purely Afghan variant.

Abdul Qadir was appointed to the recently vacated post of commander of air force and air defense. Six months later a second plot was uncovered, and once again, surprisingly, it happened with the help of a member of an underground left-wing

organization. Lieutenant General Mir Ahmadshah gathered around himself generals and officers who were displeased with Daoud's reforms. Ahmadshah made the serious mistake of inviting Senior Lieutenant Watanjar of the Fourth Armored Brigade to one of these secret meetings. Unfortunately, Watanjar turned out to be a clandestine member of the PDPA. He informed Daoud's people about the plans of the plotters, and all were immediately arrested and executed.

But balancing between contending forces and creating his smart system of checks and balances, Daoud did not hesitate to occasionally strike at the left-wingers. Once, when he sensed that he had almost become a hostage of communists, he removed everybody from the government whom he believed to be PDPA members and their sympathizers. Colonel Qadir was swept up by that wave and was removed from his position. He stayed at home for a long time, waiting for another appointment, and finally ended up as the head of a slaughterhouse.

It was only a year earlier that Qadir had been permitted to return to the armed forces. In his next incarnation he was appointed as air force and air defense chief of staff. There were rumors circulating that an enormous bribe had been paid for that position. Other rumors said the appointment was the result of interference by Soviet comrades, who somehow convinced Daoud to remember the hero of the "anti-monarchical revolution." Whatever the reason, it turned out that the president was digging his own grave.

By strange coincidence, Qadir was officially accepted into the PDPA at the same time. One evening somebody knocked on the door of his modest home. He opened it, and there by the entrance was the general secretary of the Central Committee of the PDPA, Taraki, along with his favorite comrade, Amin, and Lieutenant Gulabzoi, a technician from

the military transport division of the air force. The colonel invited his guests to enter, lit a kerosene oil lamp, and asked for tea to be served. Taraki addressed Qadir with a short and solemn speech: "According to our rules, it is necessary to pass a testing period before joining our party. But, as we trust you, we will make an exception for you. You can become a member right away. Congratulations."

The host was surprised. "Thank you for your trust, but I would like to say right away that I will not tolerate any intrigues, tricks, or dirt-slinging. I will not participate in your squabbles."

Amin came to his mentor's assistance. "You don't trust us?"

"Can one trust politicians?" the colonel responded.

"It is a wrong attitude. We came to you first. And we also want to inform you that the party has united and there are no longer any disagreements in our ranks."

This was how the PDPA acquired Abdul Qadir and several hundred of his allies from the air force and air defense.

At the very beginning of spring, Amin sent an invitation for the colonel to come to the house of another pilot, Assadullah Sarwari. His house was located in the western part of Kabul. In addition to Amin and Sarwari, the commander of the armored battalion, Watanjar, was present. Amin, having personally checked to be sure there were no eavesdroppers in adjacent rooms, declared: "Comrades, I would like to introduce a very important decision. The Politburo believes that if Daoud learns about us, he will strike a blow against the leadership of the party. This information was received from a source close to the president. If members of the Politburo are arrested, then the party's military branch will have to act. You must," he looked severely at the officers, "undertake certain steps, including initiating

an armed uprising against the regime. I invited you here in order to develop the plan for such an uprising.”

Qadir spent the following days developing the plan: How many tanks would be needed to storm the presidential palace, the Ministry of Defense, the airports, and other important sites, as well as to block the main roads? Who of Daoud’s allies should be arrested prior to the uprising, and who should be executed right away? He considered how to organize communications between the rebellious military detachments. Watanjar had promised to allocate at least twenty tanks and twenty armored vehicles in the first hours of the revolution. The colonel thought that it would be a sufficient number to guarantee success. He knew that their force would increase as other military and artillery detachments were captured. Qadir was not concerned about aviation. That was under his control.

One issue that did greatly concern this professional plotter was the integrity of the Khalq-Parcham alliance. He had not seen a single Parchami at the military meetings planning the coup, and all the secret orders to the army had been given exclusively to Khalq faction members. Qadir guessed that Amin either didn’t trust the Parchamis or wanted to reap the benefits of the situation for himself.

Events were developing rapidly. The party’s favorite, Khyber, was murdered. His funeral procession was transformed into mass demonstrations. Daoud used the demonstrations as an excuse to arrest the key leaders of the PDPA. For some reason Amin was the last to be imprisoned. Before his arrest, he managed to send an oral message to Qadir to begin the military uprising the next day at 8 a.m.

When Qadir, groggy and irritated after a sleepless night, entered the headquarters

on the morning of April 27, the officer on duty saluted him and happily reported that according to an order given by the minister of defense, that day had been declared a holiday for all military personnel.

Qadir asked what was the occasion for the holiday. He also wanted to hit the officer on duty on the face as a warning against lying. The colonel was very good at delivering such warnings to his subordinates.

“Because the traitors of our motherland have been arrested and imprisoned,” the guard replied.

“Oh, yes,” said Qadir. “This is a great day for Afghanistan.”

The lieutenant shouted after him, “There will be a meeting at ten in the morning!”

Qadir went to his office on the second floor to wait for the news. He knew that by evening, were he to live that long, he would become either a hero or a criminal. Around ten in the morning a very agitated deputy commander entered the office.

“Tanks have left the Fourth Armored Brigade and are moving towards the center of Kabul.”

Qadir, feigning surprise, went to the office of the commander. General Musa Khan was not in his office; he had gone to the men’s room. He had recently had prostate surgery and had been suffering from severe pain and incontinence. A phone, the direct line to the president, rang, and Qadir picked up the receiver. Daoud was agitated.

“Have all the fighter jets take off immediately and destroy the traitors.”

“Yes, Mr. President,” Qadir replied, thanking Allah for his great fortune.

The wheels begin to turn, Qadir thought to himself. From now on he would be unstoppable. Only a minute ago he had been a member of the presidential team, just as

loyal to his military oath and Daoud as everybody else in the building, but now everything had changed. Now he was on the other side of the barricade.

But, if all went according to Qadir's plan, the tanks currently driving towards the city would soon arrive and begin firing at headquarters, precisely at the offices of the senior staff. Just at that moment Musa Khan called Qadir to his office. Qadir became nervous. He reported the president's order to the general, and told him that he had already ordered the pilots from Bagram to take off. He then urged the general to go down to the first floor for safety. The elderly commander didn't entirely understand Qadir's intentions, but he complied. Just as they hurried downstairs, an armored vehicle began firing upon the compound, blasting large-caliber machine gun rounds—first through the second floor windows, then the first floor windows. A piece of shattered glass cut Qadir's forehead.

"You are under arrest, Mr. General," Qadir informed the frightened commander. "Sit quietly; someone will be here shortly to escort you into custody."

Qadir himself went back upstairs to his office and began calling the Bagram Air Base.

When he recalled those hours later, Qadir could not understand one thing: why did all of his attempts to contact the military detachments fail? He had been using the secret passwords given to him by Amin, but there was no response. Where had the plan gone wrong?

"I only started to understand the problem later," Qadir told us. "It turns out Amin gave the password 'Helmand' and the response 'River' to one party, and the password 'Flood' and response 'Hurricane' to another party. The first group turned out to be the Khalqi officers who were the closest to him. The second party was also composed of the Khalqi, but they were not as close to him. The Parchamis in the party didn't even know

there were passwords. I think Amin wanted the revolution to be carried out by his loyal associates, though he had a backup plan in case he needed additional forces.”

Sarwari managed to contact Qadir soon after noon.

“Why are you dragging your feet? You need to bomb Daoud’s residence, or we shall fail.”

But the orders issued to the pilots did not go through. The passwords were not recognized. Then Watanjar called, cursing.

“Are you asleep there or what? Everything is hanging by a thread. If the planes don’t take off right now, we’re as good as dead.”

“What’s the password? Give me the correct password.”

“Bomb immediately. That’s my password,” Watanjar shouted before abruptly hanging up.

Qadir understood that he needed to act independently. His men had already arrested almost all of the air force commanders, and had some of them shot. The colonel dashed to a helicopter waiting at the airfield. As he approached, he began to wave his cap to the crew, signaling for them to start the engine. He was being pursued by Kasem, the head of air force counterintelligence. Kasem took a pistol from his holster and shouted, “Stop or I’ll shoot!” At that moment an armored vehicle appeared on the tarmac and gunned down Kasem. Qadir watched as his pursuer’s head was blown apart.

Within a minute the Mi-8 helicopter painted in camouflage colors was in the air. It flew north. They were only sixty kilometers, or fifteen minutes, away from Bagram.

A twenty-five-year-old air force lieutenant, Sayed Muhammad Gulabzoi, sat in an

armored infantry vehicle on the morning of April 27. He, along with the crew of the vehicle, was moving towards the position assigned to them by the rebel headquarters. Suddenly, his close friend, the pilot Assadullah Sarwari, got in touch with him over the radio. Assadullah was a giant whose face strikingly resembled the famous Soviet film director Eldar Ryazanov. Sarwari informed him that the commander of the helicopter squadron in Kabul, having learned about the military action against Daoud, lured all of the pilots into a hangar and locked them there. This was very bad news because a victory would be impossible without air support.

Assadullah Sarwari suggested that he and Gulabzoi go to the airfield together to free the pilots and do whatever was necessary. However, military actions seldom go according to plan. A pair of Su-7B fighter jets suddenly appeared in the sky from the direction of Bagram and launched missiles at Gulabzoi's armored vehicle. It remains unclear why the pilots from Bagram, who were all their friends, decided to fire at Gulabzoi's group. Four members of Gulabzoi's crew were instantly killed in the attack, while he incurred serious wounds to the abdomen. Sarwari rushed his friend to a military hospital, stormed into the operating room with his Kalashnikov rifle, and barked at the doctors, "If he dies, I'll shoot all of you."

Once Sarwari was assured of Gulabzoi's survival, he continued on his mission to rescue the trapped pilots. When he arrived at the air force base, the commander of the squadron took one look at him, stood up, left his office, and walked towards the runway. He understood exactly what was ahead of him. He was doomed. Sarwari followed him. From a distance it might have seemed that the two pilots were just going for a walk. However, the stroll was cut short for one of them. Having walked away from the buildings, the

commander suddenly stopped and turned towards Sarwari. Sarwari raised his sub-machine gun and shot the major point blank.

In the next few minutes all of the pilots were released. When they saw their commander's corpse, they understood what could happen to those who did not support the uprising.

At the same time, the helicopter carrying the air force and air defense chief of staff, Colonel Abdul Qadir, touched down at the Bagram Air Base, just north of Kabul. Qadir gathered all of the pilots and technicians at the airfield and delivered a passionate speech. The essence of it was that the revolution to bring down "Daoud's anti-people regime," had almost won. All that was left was the capture of the presidential palace, "the stronghold of dark reactionary forces and obscurantism." The pilots of the Bagram garrison were honored to finish off the tyrant.

When the order to take off was given, none of the pilots hesitated. Now nothing prevented the air strike against the hated regime.

Colonel Abdul Qadir got back in his helicopter and flew to Kabul. When he was in the air, the Bagram pilots contacted him by radio.

"Name the precise targets for bombing."

"The target is the Ark Palace complex, the residence of President Daoud."

Let's rewind to eleven in the morning, when a tank column led by Watanjar entered the center of Kabul without facing any resistance from an artillery battery deployed squarely in the route from the Fourth Armored Brigade to the city. The commander of the artillery battery knew nothing about the armed uprising against the ruling regime. When

he saw the tanks driving towards the city, he immediately called the Ministry of Defense. There, by chance, the call was taken by one of the participants of the uprising. He explained to the battery commander that the tanks were en route to Kabul in order to protect Daoud's palace.

Once the tank column entered the capital, it split into three groups. One group drove towards the Kabul Airport, which housed both a large military garrison and the Air Force Command Headquarters. Several other tanks moved toward the ancient fortress of Bala Hissar, where a regiment of commandos was deployed. The rebels had no problems capturing the fortress. They did not have to fire a single shot. The third column had the most important tasks: to storm the presidential palace and to assume control of the Ministry of Defense.

The tank of Battalion Commander Watanjar fired at the Ministry of Defense at precisely noon. That shot was the signal for the beginning of the attack. Then the other tanks under the command of officers Mazdouryar, Omar, and Raffi began shelling the presidential palace. About sixty tanks were involved in supporting the revolt. The Presidential Guard, charged with defending the palace, immediately retaliated by firing at the rebels with large-caliber machine guns and grenade throwers.

Minister of Defense G. H. Rasouli arrived at the Eighth Division, where he gathered his officers and tasked them to go to Kabul, defeat the rebels, and save the government. He did not wait for the division to take off, instead moving to alert other military detachments. After the Eighth Division departed from its base, the commander in the lead tank suddenly came to a stop, turned around to face the other tanks, and fired a warning shot at his servicemen. The division then responded by eagerly swearing allegiance to the single crew

in the lead tank, which was comprised exclusively of Khalq members.

In the evening the minister of defense arrived at the Seventh Division, which was deployed in the suburbs of Kabul. He managed to convince its commanders to act in support of the president. However, as soon as the military vehicles began moving forward, a squall of fire was unleashed on them from the sky by the fighter jets dispatched from Bagram. The commander of the Seventh Division was killed and the rest of the soldiers deserted. Later that night Minister Rasouli was captured and executed without trial.

This revolution, like most revolutions, was not carried out in white gloves.

Major Hashim, the commander of the special forces detachment stationed in the ancient fortress Bala Hissar, immediately understood that resisting the rebels would be futile. He voluntarily transferred his authority to the commander of the First Company, Senior Lieutenant Shahnavaaz Tanai, who naturally was a party member. Tanai called Captain Imamuddin, the commander of the communications platoon.

“You’re a communications specialist,” declared Tanai. “Here is the party order for you. Go to the Palace Ark and give President Daoud a message from the Military Revolutionary Council.”

Imamuddin initially assumed that he would be entrusted with some papers or a sealed envelope with a message from the new commander. Nothing of the sort happened. Tanai made him memorize the text. The essence of the message was that the authority in Afghanistan was being transferred to the Military Revolutionary Council. Daoud and his allies should turn themselves in.

“Don’t take any weapons with you,” Tanai warned the communications officer.

Residents of the KGB and GRU began to form operative teams immediately after they received orders from Moscow to organize the surveillance of military activities in Kabul. They decided that each Residency would form two groups, each consisting of two men. The KGB and GRU groups would enter the theater of military action simultaneously. Each group would have a cover story explaining what it was doing in the city. The pairs of operatives received a route for them to traverse across Kabul that would be approximately an hour and a half long. The operatives entering the city were not allowed to carry cameras, recording devices, or any other communication equipment. They were not even allowed to take notepads. These measures were taken to diminish the risk to the operatives in case of their arrest.

Valery Starostin, a thirty-three-year-old KGB officer, worked undercover as the third secretary of the Soviet embassy, dealing with cultural issues, intelligentsia, religious officials, and sports organizations. He was appointed by Osadchiy to go into the city in the second team. He was paired with an older colleague, an experienced and distinguished intelligence officer. Osadchiy chose Valery because he was calm under pressure, spoke Dari fluently and without any accent, and knew the city thoroughly. Valery, a passionate Orientalist, had explored every inch of Kabul on foot while he was still a student working as an interpreter.

Once they received their assignment and instructions from the resident, Starostin and his partner went to the common room to prepare for their departure. Meanwhile, Victor Bubnov and Yuri Kitaev, who comprised the first group, walked towards their car parked outside the embassy.

Peering through the window, Valery watched the GRU operatives, followed by his

KGB colleagues, exiting the embassy compound. In order not to waste any time, he turned to the massive, detailed map of Kabul hanging on the wall of the common room. As he traced the route outlined for him and his partner, he tried to imagine which landmarks along the route would be of most interest to the reconnaissance operation.

Thinking that his partner would be the one driving, Valery suggested that they look over the route together while they had the map before them. His partner brushed Valery aside, saying, “to hell with the route.” It’s possible that he and the other colleagues standing by the window watching the events unfold in Kabul were more interested in how the air force attack on the presidential palace was proceeding. Valery turned away from the map and joined his comrades by the window.

The hour-and-a-half wait before their departure seemed an eternity. To kill time, Valery went downstairs to the first floor, stopped by the embassy’s protocol department, and then continued towards the entrance hall. On his way there, Valery checked his mailbox. He had received a postcard from his former boss in the Center, in Moscow. The postcard contained May Day congratulations. Valery read the kind words of his severe, but fair, former boss and, without thinking, slid the postcard into the pocket of his sports jacket.

Valery then stopped by the protocol department to chat with his “clean” diplomat friends. Their discussion about the events in the city was very general. Perhaps as a demonstration of their diplomatic tact, or perhaps because the situation appeared self-evident, not one of them asked him any specific questions. Perhaps they well understood, without Valery’s explanation, who was shooting whom in the city at the moment.

One of the diplomats, Mikhail, offered to put up Valery and his family in his small

two-room apartment, located in the embassy compound, for the night. “It isn’t spacious, but it is secure,” Mikhail explained. He knew that Valery lived in a two-story mansion in the district of Karte Seh. Not only was the Parliament of Afghanistan located near Valery’s home, but the houses of Minister of Defense Ghulam Hayder Rasouli and Vice-Premier and Minister of Finance Abdul Illah also were located nearby. Mikhail understood the potential danger for his friend of living proximate to those in Daoud’s closest circle.

“Thank you, Misha,” replied Starostin. “I will discuss it with my wife.” He shook the hand of his diplomat friend sincerely.

While Valery was talking with his friends, the car with his GRU colleagues screeched to a halt in front of the embassy. The gates opened immediately and the car peeled into the compound. The officers jumped out and dashed into the building where Pechenenko, beside himself with anxiety, awaited them. The arriving officers briskly followed the military attaché and the resident upstairs to their offices without saying a word to anyone.

The clock was ticking, but Victor and Yuri had still not returned from the city. Starostin headed back to the common area. An atmosphere of gloom pervaded the room and hung on everybody’s spirits.

Suddenly a wedding procession of honking cars festooned with flowers appeared on Darul Aman Road, passed the military convoy, and drove off towards the center of the city. Soldiers sitting in grim passivity on the edges of the tanks and armored vehicles were enlivened for a few brief moments and waved to the newly-weds with a sort of childish enthusiasm.

An encryption officer, who came to the common room in case the resident needed his services, commented, “Just look at them. They could not find a better time to get

married?”

“I wonder whose side those soldiers are on. I counted about thirty armored vehicles in just one column,” one of the operatives muttered.

“Who cares whose side? Undoubtedly they will spill a lot of blood on both sides,” came a nervous response.

Valery very quietly, as if speaking to himself, said, “But where are Victor and Yuri?” Everybody heard him though.

Valery’s partner, the experienced officer who was supposed to go into the city with him, jumped up and quickly ran out into the corridor, eyes leading his feet, silently. Valery noticed that his face was mortally pale and his eyes dull, motionless.

Soon the resident summoned Valery into his office.

“How are you?” Osadchiy asked him in an insinuating tone. The resident considered Valery to be his friend. He was closer to him than to other officers from the Kabul Residence.

“I’m fine,” Valery replied cautiously.

“Well, it appears your partner has suddenly fallen ill. Must be his blood pressure. He went to the clinic. I’m not sure who to team you up with now. Maybe you shouldn’t go there at all.”

Valery remained silent out of deference to his superior.

“Okay, go on, we’ll figure something out,” concluded Osadchiy.

Valery returned to the common room, considering the sudden illness of his colleague and the conversation that he had just had with the resident. He was overwhelmed by conflicting feelings. On the one hand he feared being killed, or worse,

maimed. On the other hand, he was very curious to see what was happening in the city with his own eyes, and he also felt the need to test himself in a truly dangerous situation.

When Victor and Yuri returned to the embassy, the mood in the common room improved immediately. As soon as they stepped out of the car, they headed immediately to the resident's office. Colleagues greeted them as returning heroes in the corridor in front of Osadchiy's office.

"What's going on there?" "Who's winning?" "Are there many casualties?"

Yuri didn't respond. Victor used one choice word to characterize the situation in the city. Both entered Osadchiy's office. Yuri came out a couple minutes later holding a notepad with blank sheets for encrypted cables. He headed to the office of the resident's deputy, Orlov-Morozov, to write an urgent cable to the Center. The resident then called Starostin into his office.

"Victor will go with you," he said.

"Understood," Valery responded, energized by the news. It would be a dream to work with Bubnov. Victor was his close friend. Everybody knew him as a reliable and courageous person.

"Don't say anything to Tamara yet," warned the resident, "otherwise she won't be able to work. Right now she is our most important source of information."

"Certainly," replied the operative.

Tamara, Valery's wife, worked as a Residency interpreter. While Valery was meeting with the resident, she was sitting in a separate room with a special radio receiver monitoring the communications between different headquarters and military detachments, as well as the communications between the many different units within the military

detachments. The analyst of the Residency, Vladimir Khotyaev, would gather her reports and prepare an hourly update about the progression of the coup for Moscow.

Victor and Valery silently exited Osadchiy's office, walked out of the embassy, and got into Victor's blue Toyota. They drove along Darul Aman Road to the center of the city, where the sounds of explosions and shooting were becoming increasingly loud and the smoke billowing above the roofs of the houses thickened. As they drove by the Soviet Cultural Center they saw a battery of anti-tank guns facing towards the city's perimeter. A little further down the road, near the headquarters of the Transport Police, two armored vehicles were parked. They passed the vehicles, drove by the Shah-e du Shamshira Mosque, and entered Spinzar Square. From there they had to make their way very cautiously towards Hotel Kabul and Pashtunistan Square. The car zigzagged between tanks and armored vehicles in various states: moving, shooting, parked, or burning. Fully armed platoons and separate officers and soldiers in helmets equipped with bulletproof vests, grenade launchers, and Kalashnikovs darted between the tanks and armored vehicles. Some carried wounded soldiers on their backs or on stretchers. It seemed to Valery that the fighters were so preoccupied that they didn't notice the blue Toyota with its foreign passengers or other out-of-place civilian cars that occasionally appeared on the street. He shared his impression with his partner.

Victor agreed. "They have other things on their mind."

Realizing that he shouldn't rely on his memory alone, Starostin pulled out his pen and the postcard from his former boss in Moscow and began jotting down his observations on both sides of the postcard. The notes would become a draft of his future cable to Moscow.

An intense firefight was underway from the Ark down to 26 Saratan Street* near Pashtunistan Square, the site of the Afghan Ministry of Defense. Tanks and armored vehicles, maneuvering between burning vehicles, were shooting continuously at the presidential palace. No fire, however, was being returned from the Ark walls. This led the operatives to an important conclusion—the center of Daoud’s resistance had moved inside the palace compound. There were no less than a hundred killed or seriously wounded soldiers in the square in front of the Ark. Nobody was helping them. Some were trying to crawl, some moaned in anguish, some were silent. Others tried to apply bandages to their wounds. Spent shells, boots, helmets, and tatters of uniforms and human extremities lay in puddles of blood before the palace.

Victor calmly and masterfully avoided moving tanks and vehicles, as well as other hazards, while maneuvering the car through this dangerous segment of the route. Concerns about the possibility of live munitions led him to grant a wide berth to burning tanks and armored vehicles. He made a similar effort to drive around the killed and wounded. Valery was busy quickly counting the number of active and destroyed tanks and other vehicles that had participated in the storming of the palace. He noted the various attack positions that the rebels had taken up in their assault. The postcard in his hand quickly darkened with pen markings detailing the battle scene.

After they finished surveillance of the front of the presidential compound, Victor and Valery headed towards the Kabul International Airport. They had noticed many tanks and armored vehicles moving in that direction as well. The Afghan Radio building, located en route to the airport, was surrounded by tanks. They turned around on the circular plaza in

* This was one of the nicest streets in Kabul. It was named in honor of Daoud's anti-monarchical coup, which, according to the Afghan calendar, occurred on the 26th of Saratan 1352 (July 17, 1973).

front of the airport and drove back towards Mikrorayon, which was quiet and deserted. Residents of that district remained in the safety of their apartments, quietly praying. The Soviet operatives didn't see anything of note there and turned back towards the center of the city.

They soon found themselves back on 26 Saratan Street, where many tanks continued to dodge shells and return fire. An armored vehicle was in flames near Daoud's residence. Valery and Victor did not see anybody killed or wounded there. Suddenly a tank appeared, heading directly toward their car. Victor managed to maneuver the Toyota out of the path of the speeding tank's treads just as the tank fired a shell towards the Ark. The shockwave knocked the front passenger door of the Toyota open and deafened Valery, who had to overcome his instinct to jump into a ditch to avoid the projectiles. He clutched the seat firmly with his left hand, reached for the passenger door, and slammed it closed.

"How many times do I need to tell you not to slam the door?" Victor grumbled. "It'll be the end of this poor car."

Valery said nothing. He was silently smiling. In a moment like this, when the proximity of death should evoke thoughts of eternity and repentance, his friend's outburst was comical and, more importantly, revealed that Victor's steely nerves were about to burst.

Once they reached the Hadji Yaqub Mosque, Victor began making a series of consecutive left turns. They drove by the residence of the American ambassador, the Indian embassy, and the Afghan Ministry of Internal Affairs. The area around the American ambassador's residence and the Indian embassy was quiet. Afghan policemen sat in their booths as if nothing had happened. Now, however, they did not seem bored. It was obvious

that the guards were prepared to act if it became necessary.

“Shilka” anti-aircraft guns were positioned in front of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. They noticed a familiar face near one of them. “Lateef!” both operatives exclaimed at the same time.

Five years ago, Major Lateef (then a senior lieutenant) had taken part in Daoud’s anti-monarchical coup. At the time he was neither a member of the PDPA nor an ally of Daoud. Lateef was not particularly interested in politics. He participated in the anti-monarchical coup perhaps because he couldn’t help but join his Soviet-sympathizer friends at that time. Not joining them would seem like a betrayal of the bonds of military brotherhood and a display of cowardice that would cast disgrace on an Afghan man.

But now, from his post on the armored Shilka, the major appeared very different from the way the intelligence officers were accustomed to seeing him. He was disheveled and unshaven, and wore a loose-fitting black jumpsuit and tank helmet instead of his customary tailored military uniform. His face was blackened from a combination of hypertension, stubble, and soot.

The major didn’t notice the Russians. With an automatic gun on his knees, he was looking towards the expansive green lawn in front of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. There the ministerial staff sat cross-legged on the lawn in their jackets and undergarments. Soldiers armed with Kalashnikovs walked among the rows of pantless officials. Victor giggled. “Great idea. They won’t be able to run very far looking like this!”

Then they drove on to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The white walls of the ministry had been scarred and the windows shattered by artillery fire. There was not one unbroken window in sight. Valery remembered how one Afghan merchant had recently

complained to him, “Your trade representative is forcing us to buy useless and expensive goods like window glass on top of things that we really need, like matches, galoshes.”

“Too bad,” thought Valery ironically. “If you had agreed to buy those windows, you could have made a fortune overnight.”

A crater caused by an aviation bomb in the street in front of the ministry had begun to fill with water. The impossibility of driving around it forced the officers to find an alternate route towards the Kabul Polytechnic Institute. On the way, they passed a battery of howitzers loyal to Daoud aimed towards the city. Armored vehicles blocked the highway to Karga and Paghman. The blue Toyota continued driving along the highway to Gazni and Kandahar before it came to a roadblock set up by Daoud’s allies. Victor and Valery decided to drive back home past Kabul University.

Valery and Victor said little during their assignment. They didn’t compare their impressions or conclusions. Upon returning to the embassy, however, they found that their reports on the situation for Moscow were consistent.

One can only imagine how nervous Osadchiy must have been awaiting his coworkers’ return from the battle-torn city. He was very relieved to see them enter the office. Victor was given a fresh stack of blank forms for encrypted cables and told to go to Orlov-Morozov’s office to write a cable to the Center immediately. He asked Victor to give a detailed description of what he’d seen in the city and analyze each side’s prospects for victory. Possibly that was a wise move by a very experienced resident. After Valery completed his cable, Osadchiy would have the opportunity to compare its contents with Victor’s story.

Twenty minutes later Valery had finished writing his four-page report. The most

important segment was his categorical conclusion that the rebels had much more firepower and much higher morale. In conjunction with this observation, based on surveillance within the combat zone, they could reasonably expect that the armed resistance of Daoud's allies would collapse by the morning of April 28, and leaders of the PDPA, headed by Nur Mohammad Taraki, would triumph.

By the time Valery returned to the resident's office, Victor had already left. An encryption officer was sitting next to Osadchiy. The resident quickly scanned Valery's cable and signed it, clearly pleased by the report. The encryption officer took the file and hurried off to transmit it to the Center.

"Go take a break," the resident ordered Starostin. "I just ordered a substitute for Tamara for the night. She hasn't taken her headphones off all day."

Valery was walking towards the door when Osadchiy asked him, "by the way, where are you going to spend the night?"

"I will leave my son at the embassy with friends, and Tamara and I will return home to Karte Seh. What if some of my Afghan friends or my contacts among foreign diplomats call with something interesting?"

"I can't imagine how any foreigner would be better informed than us about what's going on in Kabul, but you might be right. If there's a possibility to clarify some details and further our analysis, we should take advantage of it. Try calling some of your official friends yourself," suggested Osadchiy. Suddenly the chief turned pale, placed his hand on his heart, leaned against the back of his char, and grimaced in pain. "Those trips of yours into the city..." Osadchiy trailed off, looking through the window into the darkness that was descending upon Kabul.

“What’s wrong? Should I call a doctor?” asked Valery.

“No, it’s okay. Go rest. If I need the doctor I’ll call him myself. I’ll spend the whole night in the office if I have to.”

On the night of April 25, the doorbell of Babrak Karmal’s residence rang. He hadn’t been expecting any guests. His intuition told the professional revolutionary that someone was coming to arrest him. He trusted his intuition—it was never wrong. His experience as a revolutionary was vast. He had been pursued, threatened, arrested, and experienced all of the natural elements of the life of a rebel. His intuition proved right this time as well. When Babrak opened the door, two police officers dressed in brand new uniforms entered the house. Other policemen remained outside. The officers introduced themselves politely, displayed their badges, and asked for the name of the owner of the residence.

“You don’t know who I am?” replied Babrak sarcastically.

“We do know,” a handsome young officer with thoughtful, light-colored eyes responded. “We do know, but that’s the order. You’re a lawyer; we shouldn’t have to explain to you how arrests are conducted.”

“I am Babrak, son of Mohammad Hussein,” responded the second-ranking member of the PDPA, his left arm held behind his back and his chin raised proudly.

The officers showed Babrak a warrant issued by the attorney general authorizing his arrest and informed him that the basis for his arrest was the organization of an unlawful mass demonstration and a meeting.

Such polite behavior on the part of the officers of the Afghan police could be explained by the fact that one day prior to the arrests, the interior minister, Abdul Qadir

Nuristani, personally instructed the participants of the forthcoming operation to demonstrate lawful and ethical behavior. He ordered all of the conversations during the arrests to be tape-recorded so that the minister could monitor the actions of his subordinates. Later, all of the recordings were obtained by the leaders of the new Afghan regime.

Babrak did not protest or express any concern in regards to his arrest. The political struggle he had led for almost thirty years had developed in him a readiness to persevere through the most severe trials and challenges. His revolutionary experience had transformed him into a particular sort of person with standards drastically different than other, ordinary people. Babrak was a professional warrior, a man dedicated to an idea for which he would sacrifice everything: material wealth, physical well being, even life itself. He had experienced imprisonment. In the 1950s, as a student at Kabul University, he had spent four years in prison for participating in anti-government demonstrations. While there he changed his name to “Karmal,” which meant “a worker” in Pashto. He was not afraid of prison. He was not afraid of being shot or executed. There was only one thing that he was afraid of: being broken by modern, refined torture devices or psychotropic drugs.

Sitting on the concrete floor of a solitary confinement cell in the investigation unit of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Babrak considered the possible allegations that the government could level against him and the sorts of questions that might arise for which he should prepare himself. The Hazara guard, with a silly and almost guilty smile on his face, brought him tea, then lunch and dinner. The guard did not respond to Babrak’s attempts to speak with him. Time passed, but Babrak was not summoned to any questioning. He thought, “They arrested me and now they don’t know what to do with me. They are

awaiting further instructions. My arrest must have caused some commotion in the politically active circles of Afghan society.”

He began to smoke. He listened to the sounds that came from beyond the prison walls. Cars honked their horns and traders hawked their wares. Life went on as usual in Kabul. Karmal sat against the wall, smoking and thinking.

Babrak Karmal was the second most senior member of the party after Nur Mohammad Taraki. Being number two had somewhat diminished his self-esteem, but he understood that the unification of the party meant that there could not be two equally prominent leaders. Thus it was important to forego personal ambitions for the sake of the consolidation of the country’s national and revolutionary forces. He had always been number two in the party, since its inception.

Babrak remembered the First Founding Congress of the PDPA that took place on January 1, 1965 in the house of Nur Mohammad Taraki. Twenty-seven young men who decided to dedicate themselves to “the struggle for the better future of Afghanistan” had gathered there. Metal chairs were unfolded in rows in the living room. A wood stove crackled and warmed the air.

Adam Khan Jaji, a former military pilot and the oldest of the delegates, was elected by an open vote as temporary chairman of the congress. He, his deputy, and his secretary, who was tasked to record the minutes of the meeting, sat around a coffee table with a bone inlay. Taraki and Karmal, smiling and exchanging banter with one another, sat in the front row on the left side. The participants of the congress were trying to speak and applaud quietly. It was, after all, an underground meeting. The participants all were well aware of the conspiratorial nature of their gathering, and knew that not far from the house a

*chowkidar** was stationed at the intersection of two lanes. They were also wary of neighbors who might call the police and report on the owner of the house, who was already in trouble with the authorities.

The guards of the congress—several strong young men who arrived with Karmal—stood on the snow-covered lawn of the house. From time to time, the “guards” would leave the courtyard and walk along the surrounding lanes, either to patrol the area or just to warm up. The head of the security detail was a Lycee “Habibiya” student named Najibullah, whose nickname was “the Bull.” Najibullah could not have then imagined that he would someday become the secretary general of the PDPA, and later the president of Afghanistan.

Jaji introduced Taraki to the delegates. He showed them Taraki’s book, *New Life*, and told them about his revolutionary activities. The owner of the house then took the floor. Before speaking, he took a piece of red fabric and carefully covered the coffee table with it. The solemn action left an impression on everyone present. The conspirators applauded quietly.

Taraki was speaking about the peculiarities of Afghanistan’s historical development. He spoke about the conditions of feudal despotism and the anti-colonial wars that Afghans had waged against British colonizers. He spoke about the growing pernicious influence of imperialism on his country at the current moment, and about the country’s current social-economic backwardness, progressive revolutionary movements of the past, and the need to create a new party based on a scientific theory. Then Taraki read the main points of the program and the rules of the party that he had prepared in advance.

The chairman of the meeting then introduced Karmal, who presented a thoughtful,

* A watchman assigned to monitor an area and report any suspicious activity to the police.

well-prepared speech that touched upon the principles of the future party's activity.

“The present condition of Afghan society leaves no illusions regarding the possibility of conducting any immediate radical-progressive reforms,” he said, addressing the group passionately. “However, we would be bad revolutionaries if, knowing this, we did nothing. We need daily, hourly actions to prepare the population for active participation in the country's political life. We must do everything possible to enable participation by broad groups of the Afghan population in ruling the country democratically.”

Having heard the speeches of the leaders, the participants of the congress moved on to discuss the main items of the party program and rules.

During the break, the participants broke off into groups and drank tea with cookies, nuts, and raisins. Adam Haj Jaji prayed on a prayer rug in a far corner of the house. One of the delegates asked Taraki, “who authorized you to rally us? Who is supporting you?” Taraki replied with a timid smile, “my own will, and the people of Afghanistan.”

After the break they discussed what to name the party. As they were adopting the draft of the party program and the law, they formulated their general goal in the following way: “creation of a society free of exploitation.” Marxism-Leninism was identified as the ideological-theoretical basis for the movement. The party itself was named “the avant-garde and the representative of the proletariat and all of the working classes of Afghanistan.”

Babrak protested such a definition, asking, “What kind of proletariat can possibly exist in feudal Afghanistan?” His question elicited no response and generated no discussion. Taraki leaned over and quietly whispered to him, “Our Soviet comrades will like it. I sought their advice.” Nobody could argue with that.

Before the vote for the candidates to the Central Committee commenced, it was decided that each delegate should briefly introduce himself. Shah Wali, when speaking, asked the assembly to take note that he represented the bourgeoisie class and was therefore liable to make mistakes. Nur Ahmad Nur admitted that his father was a prominent feudal lord with a personal army, thirty thousand men strong. While the congress “delegates” were internalizing that information, Nur Ahmad Nur promised that the men, loyal to his father, would from now on serve the party.

Babrak, despite his pseudonym “Karmal,” looked no more proletarian than anyone else in the assembly. Everyone knew that his father was the governor-general of the Paktia province. But they also knew more important things. Karmal had been leading revolutionary youth from an early age. He organized many anti-government demonstrations for which he had been expelled from the university and spent time in prison. And what could one say about Taraki? He was born into a family of Pashtun peasants who had come from a nomadic tribe. His parents died when he was a child and he was adopted by an English couple that lived in British India. Taraki, like the majority of the participants of the congress, had never worked in the field or with any sort of machinery and could under no circumstances be considered part of the working class. He was a writer, journalist, a bureaucrat in the Ministry of Information and Culture, a press attaché for the Afghan embassy in Washington, an interpreter for the American embassy in Kabul, but neither a peasant nor a worker.

Deep in his heart, Babrak Karmal was very eager to become the new party leader, but he knew well that his revolutionary experience would not impress the delegates like that of Taraki, who had joined the progressive movement *Vish Zalmiyan* (“Awakened

Youth”) in the 1940s. Babrak also guessed that he was not the only one at the congress who had been “confidentially” told by Taraki about his “special contacts with Soviet comrades.” It should be mentioned that Taraki, and later his closest allies, would successfully exaggerate or fabricate their “special contacts with Soviet comrades” in order to boost their authority in the future. In that environment such contacts were of great value.

The election began, completely free and open. Seven delegates were elected as members of the Central Committee and four became candidates to the Central Committee. The newly elected members of the Central Committee then elected Nur Mohammad Taraki to be the first secretary of the Central Committee of the People’s Democratic Party and Babrak Karmal to be his deputy.

The Congress was adjourned at 2 a.m. and the delegates went to their homes on foot or by bicycle.

As he pondered the fate of the party in his prison cell, Babrak repeatedly recalled that the first cracks in “monolithic party unity” had already begun to appear at that first founding congress. Jaji, the chairman of the congress, left the party the next day after he failed to be elected to the Central Committee. Some suspected that three delegates (Taraki, Karmal, and Badakhshi) had engaged in double voting, for themselves as well as others.

The cracks multiplied and deepened very quickly and resulted in an insurmountable fissure that eventually broke the party into two factions. Karmal remembered that from the very beginning there had been disagreements regarding strategy and tactics. Taraki and his allies openly labeled themselves “Communists.” They targeted the immediate and violent removal of the existing regime as opposed to a sustained and systematic program of work with the Afghan people. Karmal preferred a moderate approach that employed legal

methods of leverage instead of leftist slogans. He aimed not for a violent overthrow of the regime, but a gradual progression towards national democratic goals.

From March 14, 1968, when Babrak Karmal and his allies began publishing the newspaper *Parcham* (*Banner*) without involving Taraki, the schism in the party became final. The schism was not only structural; the factions deliberately split off from one another and began operating independently. Babrak's allies became *Parchamis*, and Taraki's supporters became *Khalqis*, named for the newspaper *Khalq* (*People*) that was published in 1965.

Karmal stood up, crossed the small cell, stretched, and lit another cigarette.

"It's too bad they didn't elect me as the first secretary then," thought Babrak. "The events in the country would have developed differently...some of the Central Committee members and many other party cadres* might not have left. There would have been no ten-year schism, and under no circumstances would I have allowed Hafizullah Amin to join the party. All of the major problems started right after he returned to Afghanistan following his study in the United States, became Taraki's friend, and was appointed as a Central Committee member," ruminated Babrak sadly.

Any other politician would have reached the banal conclusion that there are no "if's" in history. Any other politician would have done that, but Babrak thought instead of the words written by the Iranian revolutionary Kazemi on the night before his execution: "Our spring has passed. Our past is gone, and I am walking forward, towards my destiny."

"Well," thought Babrak, "Daoud chose a good time to destroy our party. He didn't

* The People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan had the following hierarchy at the time: first secretary of the Central Committee, secretaries of the Central Committee, members of the Politburo, members of the Central Committee, party "cadres," members of the party, allies of the party.

really need to act a year ago, because then the party, divided into two hostile factions, was busy devouring itself. A year later he wouldn't be strong enough to act. Then, just about nine months ago, both factions decided to reconcile, and the unification process began gaining momentum."

He shook his head in dismay, remembering the details of the break-up of the party and the hostility between the Khalqis and Parchamis. Even now, thinking about the angry exchanges between the members of the two factions left a sour taste in his mouth. Taraki's supporters called the Parchamis "whoring servants to the aristocracy." Karmal and his supporters in turn labeled the Khalqis as "semi-literate peddlers" and "Pashtun chauvinists."

The personal accusations of the PDPA leaders were the most dishonest aspects of the intra-party clashes. Karmal knew from Taraki's people that Taraki had attempted to discredit him in the eyes of his Soviet comrades. In messages to the International Department of the CPSU Central Committee, Taraki had tried to convince his friends in Moscow that Karmal had ties with Afghan counterintelligence and the intelligence services of the Federal Republic of Germany.

Babrak himself, though not a practicing Muslim, reciprocated in kind according to the Islamic principle of *Qisas* ("equal retaliation")—an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. When an opportunity arose during a meeting with a Soviet comrade in Kabul, in spite of his better instincts, he began to accuse the Khalq leader of having suspicious ties with Americans and the British, and insinuated that he had been involved in the embezzlement of funds sent by the CPSU Central Committee to support the PDPA. His Soviet comrade, KGB operative Alexey Petrov, listened to the "horrible" accusations regarding Taraki quietly and

with a degree of skepticism. The agent then appealed to Karmal to put aside his personal animosity towards his political opponent for the sake of party unity. Karmal understood from Petrov's tone that it was not his personal suggestion, but rather the opinion of Moscow.

Taraki received a similar lecture. The intelligence officer relayed to him, verbatim, a directive from the CPSU Central Committee: "Your internal struggle has, unfortunately, lasted too long and has sown discord among the progressive forces, which has led to the weakening of both sides. Such a situation benefits only the internal and external enemies of the Republic of Afghanistan, those who organize anti-government plots, engage in sabotage, and carry out other acts hostile to the new political order in an attempt to restore the old regime. In such a complicated situation, all progressive forces should cast aside their disagreements and unite their efforts to create a popular social support base for the republican regime and galvanize resistance to foreign and domestic threats."

Moscow not only supported the unification of the party unequivocally, it also opposed any action that would threaten Daoud's regime. Daoud visited the Soviet capital for the first time as head of state in 1974. During a conversation with Brezhnev, he expressed concern that according to the security services, leftists were plotting a coup against his regime, which would be undertaken if he did not agree to expedite a socio-economic program to steer the country towards non-capitalist and then socialist development. Leonid Ilyich listened attentively to Daoud's concerns, raised his famous eyebrows, and gave a reproachful look to the secretary of the Central Committee in charge of international affairs, Boris Ponomarev, before looking back at Daoud. "We will correct that," Brezhnev promised.

After Daoud's visit to Moscow, the Kabul KGB resident received a cable containing a directive to meet with K. Babrak (the Soviet leaders' way to name Babrak Karmal at the time) and M. Taraki and to draw their attention to the necessity of uniting Parcham and Khalq, "with the purpose of defending the interests of workers, peasants, and all working groups of Afghan society, *based on cooperation with the republican regime and the government of the republic led by M. Daoud.*"*

Time passed. Gradually, Moscow's recommendations regarding the unification of the party became more insistent. During meetings with Taraki and Karmal, Soviet friends much more frequently demanded answers to questions such as, "What is necessary to achieve the unification of the party?" and "How long should one wait for the unification to occur?"

In such cases Taraki would usually say that he was not against unification as long as the Parchamis—"prodigal sons"—would repent their "narrow-minded sectarianism and revisionism, and return into the fold of the PDPA." Such a position was clearly unacceptable to Babrak, as the fault for the ten-year-long party schism would then fall squarely on his shoulders. He insisted on the principle of parity during unification. The Central Committee of the CPSU supported his position.

After Daoud's visit to Moscow in April 1977, when the Afghan president remarked, in regards to the PDPA, that "friendship between our two countries requires no intermediaries," Taraki found himself under heavy pressure. Soviet handlers from the Central Committee demanded that the two sides stop fighting or else Moscow would cease all political and financial support. From May to June 1977, meetings were held between the leaders of the PDPA and staff members of the CPSU Central Committee's International

* Translator's note: emphasis in the original

Department, who specially traveled to Afghanistan from Moscow. Taraki himself traveled to the Soviet Union under the guise of seeking “medical treatment,” while in reality he was there to consult with the Central Committee. The negotiations between Taraki and Babrak, akin to bargaining at a bazaar, went on endlessly. As a result of the impasse, the stage was set for a unifying party conference. The conference took place on July 3, 1977. Two days later the plenary session of the Central Committee of the PDPA occurred. Taraki was elected as the general secretary of the party, and Babrak Karmal, Nur Ahmad Nur, and Shah Wali, were selected to be secretaries of the Central Committee.

At demonstrations protesting the murder of Khyber, Taraki and Karmal led the column holding each other’s hands. To outsiders it appeared as though the two old fighters had totally reconciled, but Karmal knew that the reconciliation was superficial. Everything still lay ahead of them: new arguments, mutual rejection, and, eventually, war. “All of it is still ahead of us, and none of it can be changed,” Karmal thought bitterly.

“So, what can they charge me with?” Babrak repeatedly asked himself. “Can the Prosecutor’s Office accuse me of violating the law of public meetings? Yes, they can, but that would be a baseless charge. We didn’t have to ask permission to have a funeral for our comrade. A funeral is a ritual, not a public meeting. Yes, the funeral turned into a mass political demonstration, but is there any law limiting the number of people allowed to attend a funeral procession? Besides, none of those people were specially invited or called to participate. They came of their own volition to pay their respects to a popular politician who had been assassinated. It’s true that during the funeral, accusations were leveled against the ruling regime and oaths were sworn to continue Khyber’s struggle. So what? Who can determine the themes of the speeches given during a funeral? So, any accusations

that could be leveled against me or other party comrades would not be very solid. They can be easily contested. However, Daoud is not so simple. If he decided to put an end to our party, he would need to have more persuasive arguments, evidence of attempting a coup d'etat, for example.”

That thought greatly concerned Babrak. He finally understood the feelings of alarm and dread that had been stirred in him since the moment he learned of Khyber's death. He paced across his tiny cell in agitation. “Yes, it's probably a rigged game, but who is pulling the strings? Who plotted all of this? Daoud? If it wasn't his people who murdered our comrade—then who? Why did the assassins pick Khyber—not me, not Taraki—but Khyber, to be the victim? Killing Taraki or me would have been just as easy as killing Khyber.”

Central Committee member Mir Akbar Khyber was found assassinated on April 17 at 7:55 p.m. in the middle of a street leading from the center of the city towards old Mikrorayon, about two hundred meters from the River Kabul. His body was noticed by policemen who were driving by. Most likely Khyber had been killed elsewhere before his body was dumped in the street. The next day Afghan radio only briefly mentioned the assassination of the prominent opposition politician. The authorities promised to thoroughly investigate this crime. It was clear, however, that the assassins would never be found.

Khyber was an ideologue and one of the founders of the PDPA, though he didn't participate in the founding congress. At the time he was a police officer and had no formal right to participate in political activities. He became a member of the Central Committee of the Parcham faction two years later, after retiring from the police force. Khyber's authority in the party was very high. Even during the worst years of divisions and mutual hostilities

within the party, none of the Khalqis dared to reproach Khyber for anything undignified. He was a fervent supporter of party reconciliation. He was a pure-hearted revolutionary, devoted to the noble cause.

“So why was he the one who was assassinated?” Karmal pondered. “Could it be because our enemies needed to provoke me, Taraki, members of the Central Committee, the entire party, to openly rebel against the regime? Did they need to provoke us to commit the actions that would be qualified as attempts to organize mass riots and incite the rebellion? Perhaps they needed Taraki and me to appear as figureheads at a show trial?”

The murder of Mir Akbar Khyber shook the entire party, and not only PDPA members. Even those who supported the Western-inspired scenario for Afghanistan’s development perceived the assassination as a “plot of dark forces” that signified the lack of readiness on the part of Daoud’s regime to enter a civilized dialogue with the opposition. Anger also boiled up within society because such an ignoble crime directly challenged the principles of Afghanistan’s ancient code of honor: Pashtunwali. That was why the city was so emotionally charged when news spread about Khyber’s assassination.

Party leaders understood that turning Khyber’s funeral into a mass action would provide them with a unique opportunity to demonstrate the power and unity of their organization. They wanted to demonstrate to Daoud’s regime and the population of Kabul that the PDPA was not only the most numerous but the best organized political force in Afghanistan. Tasks were distributed and responsibilities were assigned on the eve of the funeral. Some involved the ordering of a hearse and wreaths. Others provided for preparation of banners, slogans, and portraits of Khyber. A large group of girls was sent to the countryside in several trucks. They went to Kuhdaman to pick red tulips that were

blooming in the fields, to be handed out to the mourners in the procession. Photographers and filmmakers were invited. Strong young men formed a group of guards for the Central Committee members. The funeral procession's route was thoroughly planned. It would begin at the location where the assassins had dumped Khyber's body and proceed to the cemetery at the base of the Bala Hissar Fortress.

Around fifty thousand people gathered on the day of the funeral to participate in the mourning procession. Following their leaders' suggestions, many party members invited their colleagues, relatives, and neighbors to join. There were many students among those marching. Girls and young women, who mourned and openly vented their sorrow and anger, comprised more than half of the participants. Their emotions filled the streets of Kabul with a particularly dramatic flair on that day. Almost all of the participants of the funeral procession carried red tulips in their hands. Countless red flags and banners fluttered overhead. Khyber's portraits and slogans were ubiquitous. Following the memorial service, a line of mourners paid their respects to the revolutionary by tossing their tulips onto his fresh grave. Before long, a huge mound of red and green had risen on top of the spot where Khyber's body was buried. His funeral became the most attended political demonstration in the preceding history of Afghanistan.

"It's strange that the authorities did not try to provoke the participants of the procession; they didn't push people towards chaos," Babrak continued thinking in his prison cell. "It would have been so easy to do. There was plenty of fuel to start the fire...One could have sent fewer than ten provocateurs into the column of demonstrators and clashes with police would have broken out instantly, followed by riots, clashes with the police, shootings...Taraki and the rest of us could then be easily apprehended and charged with

inciting uprising. Strange. So why were there no provocations? Perhaps that was not Daoud's game after all. Perhaps there is another, more powerful, more insidious, unseen force that is interested in the collapse of the PDPA and the cooling of Afghan-Soviet relations? Of course, Daoud seems to be quite an independent and self-sustaining figure to many, but who knows what's really going on behind the curtain? Something is not right. Something is obviously not right."

Time passed, one hour after another. Morning followed night and day followed morning. Karmal sensed that something very important was taking place beyond the prison walls. Some events were unfolding which he was powerless to influence. He heard the rumble of passing tanks, followed by the sounds of shooting. What began as single shots escalated into a continuous cannonade. The customary city noise changed dramatically. Peddlers stopped shouting, taxis stopped honking, the noises of pedestrian activity ceased. "What is happening? 'Mirab*' has become the prisoner of the flow," Karmal remembered a poem he had heard from someone or read somewhere.

Suddenly he heard the quick shuffle of army boots, gruff military commands, and the jingle of keys in the prison corridor behind his door. It was about 5 p.m. when the cell door swung open and a major wearing a black jumpsuit, a tank helmet, and equipped with a Kalashnikov entered his cell and happily proclaimed that Comrade Babrak was free.

"What's happening?" Karmal asked the officer.

"Revolution!" he responded heatedly.

"And Taraki? What happened with Taraki?"

"He and Comrade Amin, like you, were just freed from prison."

* Mirab: a person responsible for distributing water for irrigation.

“And what about Daoud?”

“I don’t know. There’s still a battle going on at the Ark. That’s why, Comrade Karmal, I’m escorting you to a secure location.”

Babrak, surrounded by excited officers and soldiers, walked out of the building of the Ministry of the Interior. He breathed the fresh air with great pleasure. The sky was shrouded by dark clouds. A thunderstorm had gathered somewhere beyond the mountains but the rain had stopped on the outskirts of the city. It smelled of spring.

Karmal swung himself onto an armored vehicle. Somebody’s arms appeared from the hatch and pulled him inside. “Mirab has become the prisoner of the flow,” he repeated to himself silently.

The beginning of that day did not promise anything inauspicious for the president of Afghanistan. A meeting of the Cabinet of Ministers was scheduled to take place in the morning. Daoud planned to continue the discussion of what to do with the arrested instigators and their political organization at the meeting. They had begun discussing the topic a day earlier, but as no consensus had been reached the discussion was postponed until April 27. To some ministers it seemed that nothing out of the ordinary had taken place and no special measures were called for. Others demanded that all instigators of the anti-government demonstration be subjected to severe punishment and called for the introduction of a state of emergency and martial law. Minister of Internal Affairs Nuristani was particularly uncompromising. “They should be executed immediately and without trial, otherwise our country will face endless troubles.” Daoud hesitated. As usual, he wanted to hear the views of all his ministers before making a final decision. “Should they be

executed?” he thought to himself. “How would the world community perceive us then? What if they become martyrs? Such a development can introduce new shocks in society.”

In the evening, Daoud’s extended family members were supposed to come to his house for their traditional Thursday night dinner. Nothing had ever interrupted this tradition.

Just as the ministers began their meeting, however, the president was informed of tanks advancing toward the center of the city. Daoud immediately contacted the minister of defense and the army chief of staff. “What’s going on?” He received no definitive answers. Then he called the Air Force and Air Defense Headquarters as well as the commander of the Central Army Corps. He gave the necessary orders and returned to the ministers to continue the discussion. At precisely noon, shells fired from tank cannons struck the palace.

Daoud addressed the members of the meeting: “Those who wish to do so may leave the presidential residence.” A few ministers did exactly that, citing the need to oversee their ministries. Others stayed, but opted to move to an underground location that housed the winter garden. The president, along with his wife, children, grandchildren, Minister of the Interior Nuristani (who personally volunteered to guard Daoud), Vice-Premier and Minister of Finance A. Illah, as well as a few others, moved to the new, underground location.

The presidential palace would be difficult to capture. The Ark was a well-fortified fortress, surrounded by high walls and equipped with a thoroughly developed system of defense. There was, however, one problem that deeply concerned the president. Daoud knew that there were numerous PDPA supporters among his 1,600 palace guards. His security detail had alerted him to the problem more than once. Recently the president had

sent the commander of the Presidential Guard, Zia Majid, who made no attempt to hide his allegiance to the party, to an honorable exile as a military attaché in India. Alas, he didn't have the opportunity to remove other party sympathizers. Now he would pay the price.

At the very outset of the coup, the head of guard communications, Captain Gol Agha, a man with a hoarse voice and a face scarred by pockmarks, severed all the telephone lines connecting the palace to the outside world. This act of sabotage was the reason for Daoud's inability to summon loyal military detachments to come to his aid. Another officer fired upon the presidential car when Daoud attempted to leave the Ark with the intention of personally assuming leadership of the resistance to the rebels. Daoud's son was seriously wounded in that attack and the president gave up the idea of leaving the Ark.

About thirty officers were members of that "fifth column" of the Presidential Guard. Almost all of them were later generously rewarded, promoted to the rank of generals and appointed to various high-level positions.

Even the head of the Presidential Guard, Sahib Jan, was a good friend of many officers close to the top leadership of the PDPA. But on that day, loyal to the ancient code of honor, Pashtunwali, he fulfilled his duty to the end. He fought defending the president and the government. As a result, Sahib Jan was captured and later executed.

Much was written and said about Daoud. People who personally knew the president described his extraordinary willpower, mind, and skills in conducting sophisticated political maneuvers. Many of them emphasized the austere, rigid, and even cruel character of the Sardar, his insidiousness and vindictiveness. Daoud, according to some, did not even try to conceal his arrogance and vanity. Not only was he proud to belong to the ruling clan of Afghanistan, he was also very proud of his Pashtun origin. The president was absolutely

convinced that Afghans, more than other Iranian peoples, had genetically inherited the noble features of their ancient Aryan* ancestors. It's possible that this belief was the impetus for the attempt early in his presidency to rename Afghanistan "Aryana." Daoud's behavior and his attitude towards important issues was informed by the principles of Pashtunwali, an example of which could be seen in his illustrious progenitors, who knew how to bravely face mortal danger. Understanding that his cause was lost, the president acted as a true Afghani should in such a situation. Even his enemies would later honor his courage and noble spirit.

Immediately after the beginning of the siege, Daoud ordered his family to be brought to the palace: his brother, wife, children, and grandchildren. It was suggested that he find shelter in the French embassy located near the Ark. The French were alerted to the possibility and agreed to it. The president decisively rejected the offer—"No, I'm staying here." All the other members of his family made the same decision.

After their liberation, almost all of the PDPA leaders gathered at the offices of Radio Afghanistan, which had become the de facto headquarters of the uprising. April 27 was almost over. Messages reporting the capture of various government and security sites arrived continuously. By evening the only important site that remained outside of rebel control was the presidential palace. The revolutionaries were intoxicated by the sense of imminent victory. Kabul, the key to power in Afghanistan, was in their hands. Only one step remained—to storm the palace and finish the uprising.

In a corridor filled with armed officers and soldiers, Babrak Karmal bumped into

* Arii ("noble"), or Aryans, were the ancestors of peoples who spoke Iranian languages (Persians, Tajiks, Pashtuns, Kurds, Ossetians, and others), as well as some peoples who inhabited India.

another Central Committee member, the Parchami Suleyman Layeq. Layeq was a Pashtun known as a fine lyrical poet and an intellectual. Like Karmal, Layeq had also recently been released from prison. He had turned himself in after having learned that his comrades had been arrested. Babrak and Layeq exchanged a long traditional greeting before turning away to face the window.

“So, it’s a revolution?” asked Babrak, nodding towards the street.

“More of a military coup, but Allah knows, we had nothing to do with it. It was realized without taking the will of the Central Committee into consideration. The Khalqis decided to act. History is written by the victors, isn’t it?”

“It’s true,” Babrak confirmed gloomily. “The most important thing now is to not allow these political adventurers to commit some stupid acts. History will never forgive us if there is major bloodshed.”

“Blood has already been shed and, mark my words, there will be more. Very little depends on us now. The military mounted their horses. They will gallop as fast as possible, rattling their sabers. Heads will roll, guilty and innocent alike.”

Karmal told Layeq that during their short trip from the prison to the offices of Radio Afghanistan, Hafizullah Amin had clambered on top of the armored vehicle at a crowded cross section, put handcuffs on himself, waved his shackled arms to passers-by, and shouted, “It’s time to break the chains that the hated regime has long used to shackle the Afghan people. Long live freedom!”

“He will turn out to be the main hero of this ‘revolution,’” Karmal predicted.

“That rings true,” agreed Layeq. Lowering his voice, he added, “Do you know what many comrades are discussing amongst themselves? They say that Daoud’s people had

nothing to do with the murder of Khyber. They say that criminals did it.” He paused with significance, then whispered under his breath, “it was Amin’s order. Typical, classical provocation meant to rock the boat.”

“If that is the case, then everything is unfolding in accordance with his vision.”

Just then, as if to confirm their words, they were invited to the room in which a session of the Military Revolutionary Council was about to begin. Hafizullah Amin, as a skillful military leader, was issuing orders to pilots, officers of the special forces, and members of tank crews. The general secretary of the party, Taraki, looked upon his student with adoration. He whispered to Karmal, “You and I should take charge of the uprising’s political leadership. Leave all of the dirty work to the military and Comrade Amin.”

Radio Afghanistan stopped its broadcasting at approximately 11 a.m., when the building in which it was located was surrounded by tanks. The officers who captured the radio facility ordered all technicians and staff to stay at their work places, but forbade any further transmissions. Broadcasting was only resumed after the thunderstorm that had raged in the afternoon abated, though not a single word describing the day’s events was uttered. The radio broadcast only the steady ticking of a metronome, military marches, and cheerful, patriotic songs sung in Pashto.

At 7 p.m. one of those military marches was abruptly interrupted. The sounds of physical movement near the microphone, the rustle of papers, and indistinct whispers filled the air. Hafizullah Amin was the first to speak, and announced the transfer of power to the Military Council. He then gave the floor to Watanjar and Abdul Qadir.

“This is me, Colonel Abdul Qadir, chairman of the Military Revolutionary Council, speaking.” Later in his short speech, Qadir proclaimed that the national and progressive

forces in the country, which had been subjected to unfounded persecution and repression at the hands of the rotten, despotic regime of Daoud, had overthrown the hated regime with the help of patriotic soldiers and officers of the Afghan army. According to Qadir, Daoud, along with some of his close allies, was given the opportunity to surrender and face a civil trial, but the former president of Afghanistan and his stooges had put up armed resistance to the representatives of the Revolutionary Command and were killed as the result of cross fire. Colonel Qadir appealed to the servicemen of the Armed Forces and other power structures who continued to defend the non-existent regime to accept the orders of the Headquarters of the Revolutionary Command to put down their weapons in order to avoid unnecessary bloodshed. He proclaimed that the Afghan army assumed full responsibility for maintaining order in the country. Then he announced the introduction of a curfew for Kabul and other cities, effective immediately.

Following the colonel's speech, the anchor read a list of instructions to the residents of the capital intended to help them avoid danger.

The radio station broadcasted the speeches of the leaders of the Military Council every half hour during that evening.

The truth was that the legitimate president of Afghanistan was alive and well, and he never relented in his determination to tip the balance of the battle in his favor.

The plotters' goal was to sow confusion among Daoud's supporters so that they would turn themselves in sooner. At that time, a rumor circulated with the help of the fifth column saying that if the resistance continued, the air force would drop a powerful five hundred kilogram bomb on the palace. Those in the uprising headquarters understood that they needed a swift and decisive victory. They knew that every moment lost would work

against them. If Daoud could establish contact with loyal military detachments, or reach troops in Kandahar and Jalalabad, the situation would immediately change, and not in their favor.

Fighter jets and military helicopters intensified their strikes against the president's shelter. Loyalists from Daoud's entourage sent a message that the morale of the Guard was weakening by the hour and that they would raise the white flag and surrender at any moment. But what should one do with Daoud then? Would he be liquidated during the attack as a despot and an enemy of the people, or would he be captured alive and brought to face a revolutionary tribunal? Opinions differed. Taraki, Amin, and other Khalqis wanted to physically eliminate the entire presidential family. Karmal and other more moderate party members preferred to see the head of state live. The disagreement revealed the old cracks in the party. They argued so intensely that at one point, one Khalqi claimed that Babrak was Daoud's agent and suggested killing him along with the despot. Taraki interrupted and voiced his final verdict, "If Daoud and his people stop their armed resistance and put their weapons down, they should be taken to a safe place and treated according to the current law and traditions of Afghan society. If they choose to continue their resistance, then our comrades have the right to defend their freedom, personal security, and revolutionary order."

However, at the very same time as these deliberations were unfolding, Hafizullah Amin gave a very different order to his people: "Sardar Mohammad Daoud and his supporters should be destroyed."

The shooting continued even after darkness descended upon the city. After midnight, military activity flared up anew. The city was lit up by fires, tracer bullets, and

explosions in the night sky. Only after an hour or two did the intensity of the shooting begin to subside.

A new day, April 28, 1978 arrived. With the first rays of the sun, when the muezzins invited Muslims to morning prayer from the minarets, the president gathered his supporters and the officers of his personal guard around him. He informed the commander of the Guard: "I have made my choice and I do not plan to compromise. You are young, and should think about how to save your lives." He spoke in a tone that precluded the possibility of objection. He then ordered Sahib Jan to relay his order to the rest of the guards. "Put down your arms to avoid unnecessary bloodshed."

Shortly after the president's guards left, a group of soldiers, headed by a short officer who seemed devoid of confidence, entered the room where Daoud remained along with his wife, children, grandchildren, and a few others.

The officer straightened himself in front of Daoud, saluted, and introduced himself as "Captain Imamuddin."

Daoud silently looked at the officer from his armchair on a large burgundy carpet. His wife sat beside him, also in an armchair. She lovingly attended to her grandchildren, who were sitting on the carpet and looking at picture books. Near the entrance, closer to the winter garden, the Vice-Premier and the Minister of Finance Abdul Illah sat on a chair. He was obviously nervous. To Daoud's right, by the entrance, near a stone wall that separated the flower beds filled with blooming roses, was Minister of Internal Affairs Qadir Nuristani. He kept reaching under his jacket, feeling the reassuring handle of his Walther sidearm in an open holster.

“Mr. President, the political authority in the country has been transferred to the People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan. According to the decision of the Military Revolutionary Council, you are to surrender and turn yourself in immediately,” continued Imamuddin without much conviction.

Daoud, not understanding, or pretending not to understand, arrogantly raised his head and asked in a quiet but firm voice, “Who sent you?”

“I am fulfilling an order of the Military Council of the Revolutionary Uprising.”

Silence filled the room. Daoud was looking directly at Captain Imamuddin. Three soldiers stood behind the captain with automatic guns targeting the president. Captain Imamuddin, having uttered the words that he was ordered to, appeared more lost than before. Daoud seemed to be deep in thought. His eyes were not looking out, not to the people who arrived to arrest him, not to his grandchildren, his wife, or his ministers, but inwards, into his soul. The pause was growing long. Daoud’s wife called the grandchildren to come up to her. They left their books and, pressing themselves against her knees, looked at Imamuddin with surprise. Never before in their lives had they encountered a person who dared to give orders to their grandfather.

Suddenly, in a flash, Daoud reached for his small Browning pistol and shot Imamuddin. The bullet hit the captain in the shoulder. The officer reeled back with pain as the soldiers standing behind him opened fire with their automatic rifles*. In less than thirty seconds everything was over. The president, along with his relatives and allies, lay bleeding on the burgundy carpet.

* Soon after the coup, Captain Imamuddin eagerly told stories of how he had personally shot the “hated despot.” He became a general in the Armed Forces of Afghanistan. However, when power was later usurped by the Mujahadeen and the political situation changed, Imamuddin categorically denied any role in the killing of the Afghan president. Now he lives in Western Europe and makes his living as a schoolteacher.

When the bodies were removed from the winter garden, the telephone rang. One of the servicemen took the phone. Having heard the voice on the end of the line, he apologized and called the doctor.

“This is Malalai, the wife of Abdul Illah. May I speak to my husband?”

“I’m sorry madam, but that’s impossible.”

“Where is he? What’s wrong? Is he wounded? Is he killed?”

“He has been killed, madam.”

“Where is the president? May I speak with him?”

“Everyone—he, his wife, children, and grandchildren—have all been killed.”

“Goodbye,” whispered the woman through the receiver as she hung up the phone. Malalai had known earlier that something terrible was going to happen. She knew earlier that year, when twenty-nine-year-old Abdul Illah was appointed vice-premier and Daoud’s successor for the Afghan presidency. Their second son was born then. “How lucky are we? It can’t go on like this,” thought Malalai with superstitious dread.

This young and very beautiful woman knelt on her prayer rug. She prayed for peace for the soul of her murdered husband. She didn’t pray long. When she rose from her knees, she knew exactly what she had to do. She first went to the bedroom and opened the drawer where a pistol was hidden. She took it and proceeded to the nursery. First she approached the bed of her four-year-old son. He was asleep. Feeling his mother’s presence, the son opened his eyes and smiled at her. “You are so beautiful, my boy,” Malalai thought before shooting him through the forehead. The baby heard the sound of the shot, woke up, and began crying. Malalai rushed to his bed and shot him as well. At that moment the door of the nursery burst open, and the soldier who never left his post guarding their house in one

of the streets of Karte Seh, ran in. Malalai saw the soldier, put the gun to her temple, and fired the third shot.

Members of the presidential entourage were executed throughout that day and the next day. About one hundred people associated with Daoud were killed. All told, about fifteen hundred members of the military and the Presidential Guard lost their lives.

Revolutionaries hunted the dispersed groups of soldiers and officers still loyal to the president like wolves. The hunters knew their prey from years of studying, training, and participating in military exercises together. Officers loyal to Daoud's regime fought to the last bullet, knowing all too well that they would receive no mercy.

Gradually the fighting moved away from central Kabul to outlying districts. Early in the pre-dawn morning, next to the office building of the Soviet Trade Representative and the garage of the Soviet embassy, intense battles broke out between infantry detachments in a confined space lined by saplings. The battle lasted for an hour before it died down. When the sun rose over Kabul, soldiers were seen loading the remnants of the day's battle, bodies and weapons, into army buses.

While the early morning melee raged, a staff member of the Soviet Trade Representative office, a World War II veteran, died of heart failure. What was happening in Kabul was a lethal reminder of the horrors that Mr. Ivanov had lived through fighting at the front during World War II thirty years earlier.

Ivanov was the first Soviet citizen to die because of "the great commotion" that gripped Afghanistan on that spring morning in 1978.

Chapter 2:

“We Knocked Out Their Teeth and Became Free.”

The morning of April 28 was clear and sunny. Not a cloud was to be seen above the mountains surrounding Kabul. The snowy peaks rose against a background of endless blue. “It surely will not rain today,” Starostin told his wife Tamara as they got into the embassy car.

Generally, Friday was a day off, but due to today’s special circumstances, they went to work early. Tamara, who—like many women—was normally quite interested in the weather forecast, paid no attention to her husband’s words. She was too anxious about the couple’s five-year-old son, who had been left with their friends in the embassy compound the night before. She was concerned that the boy would be traumatized by the sounds of the military assault. She prayed silently for all to be well.

While driving along Darul Aman Road, the Starostins witnessed a horrific scene. A lieutenant and two sergeants were dragging a young man in officer’s uniform at gunpoint. The young officer was missing a service cap, tie, belt, and holster. He seemed withdrawn and indifferent. A young, heavy woman with long, loose, black hair, dressed in her domestic garb, followed the grim procession, wailing in tears. Suddenly, she dashed forward and caught up with the officers. She grabbed the lieutenant by the sleeve and, looking directly into his eyes, began speaking very quickly, waving her hand in his face. The officer tried to respond. The sergeants, who were dragging the prisoner, stopped to watch their commander.

To avoid taking a risk, Valery decided not to drive the car past the group, but instead to park it near one of the entrances to the residential buildings. Meanwhile, the lieutenant pushed

the woman away and approached the prisoner, reaching for his firearm. The prisoner understood his captor's intention, approached the ditch, and got on his knees with his hands on the back of his head. The officer shot through the head. The body shook and collapsed face down into the ditch, still wet from yesterday's rain. The woman, hysterically sobbing and wailing, threw herself to the corpse, pulling it back onto the road while the lieutenant and his men quickly disappeared into one of the side streets.

When Valery entered Osadchiy's office, he noticed that his chief was in a hurry. Vilior Gavrilovich was stuffing papers into a folder with extreme irritation. He looked bad. His face was swollen, with bags under his bloodshot eyes. A cup of unfinished tea sat on his desk. Lumps of sugar and an open pack of cookies lay on a stack of cables from the Center. A roll-away bed with a flattened pillow and wrinkled blanket occupied a place near the bookshelf filled with reference materials.

"Anything urgent?" asked the resident. The question could be interpreted as "Leave me alone. I have more important things to deal with."

Starostin could report a few things to his chief, but understood that the information would be better communicated in a calmer setting, and in writing. He responded, "No, nothing urgent."

"I am running to a meeting at the ambassador's. Don't leave the embassy and tell the group to stay put. We'll have a meeting once I return," said Osadchiy.

Then Valery went to see the deputy resident, Orlov-Morozov, who, elegant and calm, sat at the desk holding a silver handmade Parker fountain pen. He was reading a cable. As was his custom, a smoking pipe hung from his mouth, exuding a sweet aroma.

Vladimir Khotyaev, analyst at the Residency, sat at a smaller desk to the right, staring at the text that Alexander Victorovich was studying. Disheveled Khotyaev was smoking a cigarette. The

deputy resident gave Valery an indifferent look over his reading glasses before gesturing for him to take a seat across from Vladimir. Having finished editing the text of a cable, he handed the sheets to Valery and asked him to go over it.

Valery Starostin had a special status at the Kabul KGB Residency. Before becoming an intelligence officer, he graduated from the Oriental Department of Leningrad State University and interned in Afghanistan, where, working as an interpreter, he had made some significant connections among the Afghan intellectuals. When he joined the KGB, he had to become a member of the Communist Party. However, for a long time his admission application was rejected—either he couldn't remember some decisions made during the last Central Committee plenary session or at the meeting of the local Communist Party plenary session, or recommendations given to him by "senior comrades" were not correctly stamped. The KGB officers who were not members of the Communist Party could not work abroad. That was why Starostin spent almost four years at the Center. His way to fight the imperialist enemy was to use the sharpest weapon available to a KGB officer—an awl. He was tasked with compiling and sewing up dossiers. There was a Makarov handgun and many dossiers in his safe. There were dossiers for all of the active Soviet agents in Afghanistan and materials related to those who were targeted for recruitment by KGB officers. They were thick information files. There were personnel files for every operative of the Kabul KGB Residency, along with other supporting materials. The young officer had to study that archive in great detail, and had to prepare the Center's recommendations related to Soviet intelligence activities in Afghanistan. Having reported the recommendations to his superiors, Valery used an awl, a huge needle, and a thick thread to attach the documents to relevant dossiers. Starostin enjoyed digging through the old files. The archived reports of residents from the twenties and thirties, written in pencil on rice paper, inspired awe in him.

Valery's chief at the time was a very intelligent and severe man. His name was Vladimir Alexandrovich Sobolev. He had been a fighter jet pilot in World War II and had been seriously wounded during the war. Having become a member of the political intelligence unit of the KGB, he became famous for several glorious exploits, namely the uncovering of double agents in Tehran and the crucial recruitment of new agents among the archenemies: America and Britain. British intelligence operatives in Cairo once beat Sobolev cruelly, which was against the unwritten rules of intelligence ethics.

Vladimir Alexandrovich was fluent in English, liked to write poetry in French, and solved crossword puzzles in Persian. He was an intellectual of the highest caliber. He collected stamps and rare silver coins.

From the very first day, Valery felt deep respect towards his chief. Sobolev was strict. He demanded that his underling constantly improve himself by studying his assigned tasks. He wanted Valery to respond immediately and precisely to all of his inquiries, such as where, in which dossier, index number, and page could he find information pertaining to a specific person or issue. Gradually, due to his natural talents and Vladimir Alexandrovich's supervision, Valery memorized documents from all the dossiers placed in the Afghan safe, learned the history of Soviet intelligence in Afghanistan, and became an expert in Soviet-Afghan relations.

When Starostin arrived in Afghanistan in 1975, then-Resident Ivan Ershov insisted that Valery not only fulfill his duties as a KGB operative, but also take care of the financial affairs and financial reporting to the Center in the KGB Kabul Residency. Valery loathed this sort of work, the abstract multiplication, addition, and subtraction of numbers. His work as an accountant revealed all of the attempts to embezzle funds that operatives would often engage in.

Valery knew Orlov-Morozov from the first years of his work in the Center. He liked and

trusted the deputy resident, who was about ten years his senior.

Orlov-Morozov always spoke very quietly, almost without any inflection. He liked to make long pauses, not only between phrases, but also in the middle of sentences, making it very difficult to communicate with him. One would feel constant tension and discomfort looking into his pale blue eyes while waiting for him to utter the next word. Afghans called such a manner of speaking *guz-ye murda*, or a dead man's sigh. However, Alexander Victorovich was a superb writer. He wrote logically and precisely, without drafts or the need to introduce corrections. He was erudite, and had many hobbies. He was interested in geology. He spent a lot of money to order trekking poles and hiking boots from Germany to hike in the Afghan mountains. He was interested in chemistry, particularly the secrets of producing alcoholic drinks—Italian *grappa* in particular—although he did not drink alcohol. He was also very interested in rare fish that lived in the Red Sea, and problems of cosmic time and space. His main responsibility at the Residency was to supervise informational and analytical activities, among other things.

Valery attentively read the cable passed on to him by Orlov-Morozov. The cable was about to be sent off to the Center. It contained information about the victims on both sides after yesterday's clashes, including the elimination of the presidential guards, three-quarters of whom had been killed or wounded. There were a number of servicemen killed in various military detachments of the Afghan army; soldiers and officers died on the day of the coup not only because of the armed clashes with the rebels, but also because of their internal conflicts.

Valery also read that some high-ranking officials of the Afghan army and government ministers were stripped of their clothes and locked inside cages of the Kabul Zoo during the night of the coup d'état. With sadness, he learned from the cable that his acquaintance, a brother-in-law of the king and a former military attaché in Moscow, Brigadier General Suleyman Rokai, had been

killed the previous night. Suleyman Rokai's son, a surgeon at a military hospital who had graduated from the Military Medical Academy in Leningrad, was also killed. A great number of military officials and bureaucrats were also missing in action.

The last words of the telegram read: "We understand (no matter how hard we try to deny our involvement in Kabul's events) that in the minds of the majority of Afghans, and also in the propaganda of Western mass media, the military coup in Afghanistan will inevitably be linked with the geopolitical ambitions and anti-imperialist politics of the Soviet Union in this part of the world. We don't doubt that the errors of the new authorities will ultimately be blamed on us. This is why we recommend exerting as much influence as possible on our Afghan friends who have just captured power, in terms of curtailing repressions against supporters of Daoud's regime and engaging Daoud's cadres in conducting reforms. We doubt that our arguments will be heard by Taraki and his allies until more senior figures than our operatives enter into direct negotiations with them. This is why we suggest that tomorrow, April 29, or in the next few days, an undercover meeting of the Soviet ambassador be arranged with Taraki in the office of the news agency TASS, near the Soviet embassy. By that time the ambassador will have the necessary authority to engage in such talks. Then it may also be possible to discuss the procedure of recognition of the new regime in Afghanistan."

After he read the cable, Valery gave a colorful account of the execution of the young officer that he and his wife had witnessed less than an hour earlier while driving to the embassy. Volodya Khotyayev got agitated hearing Valery's story, and he demanded that it should be included in the cable, or be relayed to the Center in a separate cable. Volodya was convinced that specific stories, episodes, and photographs had much more influence on the aging Soviet leaders than political analysis and statistical data.

Alexander Victorovich puffed his pipe a couple of times and said: “They don’t understand us there, in Moscow, at any rate. We should think about the people to whom we’re addressing our analyses more often. Whether they will or won’t understand us. Let’s not put pressure on their psyche. And you, Valera,” he said, puffing on his pipe, “save these stories of yours until the time when you’ll be writing your memoirs—if you survive...”

Having finished his soliloquy, he smiled. The phone rang. Vilior Gavrilovich was calling.

Orlov-Morozov, Volodya, and Valery immediately proceeded to a meeting with Osadchiy.

Having entered the chief’s office, Khotyaev gave the new cable to the resident to sign. Vilior Gavrilovich focused on the text while his colleagues settled in the chairs around the table. Then he nodded with approval and signed off, authorizing the cable to be sent to the Center.

Osadchiy looked at the operatives across the table from him. He didn’t detect that any of his colleagues were hung over, despite the fact that the last twenty-four hours were among the most stressful of their entire lives.

“Yesterday we couldn’t convene because of the events in the city,” the resident began to speak in a voice reinforced with an authoritative tone. “Everybody was working in the ‘autonomous regime.’ However, now we must do some planning. I just returned from a meeting with the ambassador. While I was there, he received a call from Leonid Ilyich Brezhnev. This is why the meeting at Puzanov’s went longer than planned. Now, the Politburo’s main concern is the issue of recognizing the new regime in Afghanistan. My recommendation to Alexander Mikhailovich was to tell Moscow not to rush in recognizing the new authorities. We should let other countries make the first move. For example, Bulgaria, Vietnam, or the GDR. India would be even better. In your opinion, was that the correct recommendation?” Osadchiy peered at his colleagues. There were no objections. “Today is Friday. There will be very few meetings with

agents. Those who had planned meetings should keep their appointments, but be very careful. We will discuss each meeting individually. Those who don't have meetings scheduled, go into the city and gather responses of the population and foreigners to yesterday's events and those of the day before. Do I make myself clear? All information should be collected and brought to Khotyaev. Don't call me unless something very serious occurs. I also want you to focus on a prognosis for future political developments. Sergei Gavrilovich," the resident addressed security officer Bakhturin, "I have a special request for you. Urgently prepare and submit a full report on the Soviet citizens who were affected by the situation and the status of the Soviet colony in Kabul and other Afghan cities." Then quietly, almost intimately, Osadchiy turned to Khotyaev.

"Volodya, go take a nap. You look exhausted."

As if you do not look exhausted, thought Khotyaev gloomily, looking at his chief.

The officers of the KGB Residency gave Vladimir Khotyaev the nickname Vova "Gvozd" ("the nail"). Volodya didn't mind it. Those who had given him that name were younger operatives. Well into his fourth decade, Volodya must have seemed like an old man to them. The analyst's height was accentuated by his straight posture. Thin, with a hooked nose and curly hair, he could have passed for an Englishman. However, it wasn't his appearance that provided the inspiration for his nickname. Vladimir was uncompromising—sometimes too direct—and harsh in his judgment. He would never change his mind, even when he was unsure that he was correct. Sometimes it seemed that Volodya was eager to purposefully irritate his colleagues, whom he didn't care for. Volodya's goal as an analyst was to ensure that his supervisors in Moscow would not only sense the depth of his analyses of the situation in Kabul, but would also do exactly what he proposed.

As evening came, the city was shrouded in darkness. The common room of the KGB Residency was filled with smoke and dust. Khotyaev sat there with his typewriter, drinking black tea from a gigantic cup with a dark ring of residue and smoking a cigarette. He was sorting out a messy stack of papers with reports and analyses of yesterday's coup that had been submitted by his colleagues. Most of the reports described exuberant responses of the "Afghan people" to the new regime's ascent to power.

Volodya often ruminated, what does the notion of "people" really mean? —Soviet people? Afghan people? What is the make-up of the Afghan people? Pashtuns, Tajiks, Parsivans, Hazara, Uzbeks, Aryans from Kafiristan...Muslims—Sunni, Shi'a, Ishmaelites...men, women, children, young and old, healthy and sick, peasants, feudal lords, teachers, bureaucrats, peddlers, bandits, mullahs, soldiers...

"Finally, we've freed ourselves from endless feudal darkness! Finally, we knocked the teeth out of the hated tyrant!" The "Afghan people's" joy poured forth from the crinkled reports about yesterday's revolution. It would be logical to suppose that such a reaction could come from Khalq sympathizers. However, Volodya was certain that not only members of the PDPA, but also many ordinary Afghans shared these sentiments. "Jesus," thought Volodya, "how disgusting this is! Two days ago I wrote to Moscow about the great enthusiasm of the 'Afghan people' related to Mohammad Daoud's trips across the provinces of the country. They held massive welcoming demonstrations. Tens of thousands shouted 'Long live the guarantor of the Constitution!' What's most surprising is that they really loved their president then and were sincerely happy to see him. And now, the same crowds, with the same kind of fervor, rejoice hearing about the death of the president."

Vladimir wrote a cable to the Center regarding the positive reaction of the masses to the

overthrow of Daoud's regime. He put all of the reports from his operatives about the positive response of Afghan society to the coup d'état into a plastic bag with the intention to burn it at home. Testimonies that they had received from informal sources were not considered to be classified and could be destroyed as regular trash. A stove for just this purpose was located on the second floor of the embassy, by the staircase.

Having finished reading the reports, Vladimir looked at a pile of notes, the contents of which were not included in his cable. He put them aside. He knew that the people who had written those notes would prepare a special analysis, "making a cutlet out of shit" in the operative's slang.

One of those operatives wrote: "I met with an official contact, Sufi Sheikh Mobaleg, who owns a store in Maiwand, in the presence of his students. I discussed yesterday's coup with him. Mobaleg said, 'I know that Taraki and his allies carried out this coup for the sake of justice. However, the intellectuals—writers, teachers—do not understand the depth of the notion of "justice." They think like Westerners, unfortunately, as you also may think. The notion of justice in the West has long been lost. Stupidity rules there. They put a person on trial not for the crime of theft, but for the amount that was stolen. What could be more stupid? This is why in the West, as well as for you, there is no justice. For you, righteous justice and righteous judgment do not exist. Those people who came to power yesterday cannot provide justice. They are not Muslims. They are far removed from God. This is why they will never be recognized by the people as true leaders of Afghanistan. They may go to mosques. They may grimace in clownish prayers. They are hypocrites—and hypocrisy is one of the main sins in Islam.

'You, a Russian, a Soviet, who says directly, "I am a Communist. I do not know God," is better for our Muslims than them. You are not hiding your face. We may not like your face—God creates different faces—however, as long as you do not interfere in our affairs or challenge our

honor, religion, and property, we don't care who you are. Thank God, there is a border between our countries. That border passes not only over land or through a river. The border exists within our people's notions about life. You live your way. We want to live the way we live. And no one should cross that border—neither you nor us.

'I know those Khalqis, who are pretending to be Muslims, will certainly begin to impose your Western notions. They will try to change the conscience of our citizens. They are intellectuals. They will try to limit the power of the clergy. That would destroy them, because they will enter into conflict with their own people.

'Daoud murdered hundreds of good Muslims. However, nobody was truly offended. Everybody knew Daoud was "our man." He did not write books about poor people like Taraki. He did not teach in lyceums. He was *sardar*—a feudal lord and a tyrant—he was an Afghani. He killed some Muslims for the good of other Muslims. He was sinful, but he was a Muslim. He was with the people, and nobody ever doubted that. He acted the way it is customary here in our country, in our history. The more people the ruler kills, the more he is respected. Your revolutionaries are not "ours"—they don't belong to the people. They are yours, Western.'

Vladimir grinned. "The way these fundamentalists think...what can come out of such Islamic ruminations? It's scary to even imagine," he thought.

He took another report.

"I met Marik Warren, a consul at the U.S. embassy. We had lunch in New Treton, at the Green Bazaar. We ate salad and pizza with rotten Italian sardines. I brought vodka and paid for lunch, and Marik got drunk. American nerves are good for nothing. And they don't know how to drink. He made stupid faces and indecent gestures when drunk. He tried to speak in Russian, and I duly responded."

Vova burst out laughing, “Well, you had quite a meeting. Good for you! What a funny style of reporting....” Gvozd was fond of his friend’s funny introduction to the report about his meeting with the American diplomat. Khotyaev knew that a serious analysis would follow this lighthearted introduction. He also knew that his friend excelled in Russian grammar, but on occasion would write sloppily to free himself from the constraint of the rules.

“During our conversation, Consul of the United States in Afghanistan Marik Warren expressed his opinion that, as a result of yesterday’s ‘Communist coup,’ the Soviet Union got trapped. Now, according to Warren, the USSR is limited to two options in its Afghan policy, both of which are lose-lose scenarios.

“The first option would be to participate in the realization of the utopian program of the PDPA, which suggests building socialism in Afghanistan. Such participation would demand an investment of enormous material resources by the Soviet Union. Human resources will also be required—highly qualified, disciplined, and familiar with the specifics of Afghanistan. However, according to Warren, the Soviet Union is currently lacking sufficient material and human resources. The return from the investment of Soviet resources would be minimal. So we, the Soviets, would give everything available to Afghanistan without receiving much in return. Our country, having to materially support ‘the socialist blossoming of the southern neighbor’ would end up refusing itself in many aspects, most importantly in defense programs. And what will be the outcome? The United States would benefit!

“The second option, according to Warren, is the following. We, the Soviet Union, will not adequately invest in Afghanistan. As a result, in a month or two our Afghani friends will be forced to think about deliverables to the population, which will expect some progress from them. The people will ask them, ‘Why did you aspire for supreme power? Why did you commit this bloody

revolution and kill the president if you are unable to do anything good for your country? Where are your “reforms” and changes for the better?” Then the unmasking of fools, searching for evil, attempts to clarify the cause of failed expectations will begin. Then they will start pointing fingers and blaming one another. Then they will start fighting each other, and everyone will lose. Their losses will also be a loss for the USSR, because the next regime will not forgive the Soviets for their relationship with the PDPA. The influence of the United States, along with other unfriendly countries to the USSR, will grow in Afghanistan. Besides, Soviet friends in developing countries will stop trusting us.

“During our conversation, Marik expressed his admiration for the pilots who bombed the Ark. He suggested, referring to the American military attaché, that the pilots were not Afghans, but Russians. I told him, ‘believe me, those were Afghan pilots. We can train not only Afghans to fly such planes, but also Americans. Send your pilots for training in the USSR. But they will have to join the Communist Party of the United States of America in that case, and they will have to give an oath of allegiance to “international communism.”’ Marik didn’t appreciate my humor—he was too drunk.”

The analyst picked up another report. It read:

“I met with Ashraf Khan, the landlord of the house that I rent near the embassy. Ashraf Khan is one of the leaders of the Ahmadzai tribe. He is married to Suraya, a daughter of a former Afghan ambassador to the United States, who is also the adopted daughter of the army chief of staff, Colonel General Farouk. Ashraf Khan studied in Czechoslovakia. Former rulers of Afghanistan, the king and Daoud, knew the parents of Ashraf Khan and his relatives. They respected his family for their noble origin and good nature. Ashraf Khan served in the military for some time. He reached the rank of either captain or major. Now he works as the head of the

department in the Ministry of Planning. He is not concerned about his career. Work in the government is not more than an affiliation for him. He owns an enormous amount of land and is very wealthy. His wealth comes from many hectares of fertile lands around Kabul and wineries in the region of Koh-e Daman, and in other places. Amir of Afghanistan Amanullah Khan made a gift to his father of a huge tract of land near the Tajbek Palace, where Ashraf Khan now resides in a villa. Ashraf speaks very good Czech and Russian. He loves the Soviet Union. He often travels to Moscow to buy things for his son, Aziz. He thinks that Soviet goods for children are the best in the world.

“This morning he visited me to find out how I was faring after yesterday’s events. During a short conversation that I imposed on him (he is quite reserved, not a very talkative man), Ashraf said the following:

‘Taraki and those Pashtuns who, along with that PDPA leader, committed coup d’etat yesterday, do not belong to the Afghan aristocracy. They do not have close ties with tribal leaders. Normally Pashtuns, even those not of the most noble origin, know at least seven generations of their ancestors. Does Nur Mohammad Taraki know his ancestors, at least three generations back? Hardly. And if he knows them, can he be proud of them? Hardly. Who are they, his ancestors? Slaves, beggars, cattle herders, laborers.

‘Pashtun tribes always dictated politics in Afghanistan,’ Ashraf said. ‘Only those who are recognized by them can rule. The tribal leaders make decisions. But the Pashtun elite would hardly support the new authorities. That would mean that the new rulers will hardly be supported by commoners.

‘I studied Marxism-Leninism in Czechoslovakia,’ said Ashraf Khan, ‘and I should say, I was very adept at it. I passed my exams very well. I know that Taraki, believing the “class struggle”

theory, thinks as if the Pashtun “lower classes” dream about putting an end to the exploitation by the “upper classes.” He thinks so because he is more an Englishman than a Pashtun. However, besides the knowledge that I received in Prague, I have the knowledge that I received from my father and grandfather—the real Pashtuns. This is why I think that Taraki is wrong. The “class theory” is good for Europe. Don’t think that I’m trying to criticize Marxism-Leninism. It’s a great theory. However, it is not for Afghanistan. It is good for a European society. In our Afghan society, there are no “classes.” We do not have workers, peasants, and capitalists like those who existed during Marx’s life in the West. To be more precise, we do not have such inter-class relations as in Europe at the time. However, we have tribes. Intra-tribal and inter-tribal relations cannot be explained by Marxist-Leninist theory. I’ve thought about it a lot. Here in Afghanistan, the theory of Marxism-Leninism cannot be applied. I am very closely connected with my tribe, and I know that the idea that the lower strata of the tribe can fight against the upper strata is nonsense. Two families may have arguments—then they can fight. But it won’t be a class struggle, because in our tribes, upper and lower strata within the tribe are the same. They are all relatives.”

Vova was thinking about what he had just read. He smoked a cigarette. There was a lot to ponder about, he thought. One threatens our rejection by the Muslims, another says the Soviets will either help too much or too little. The third seems to write from the point of view of a friend, but not the friend of our friends. And all of them are correct. “All of these reports in front of me—I can go and burn them without a problem. Perhaps I shouldn’t burn them, perhaps I should add this information to the cable that has already been written, and spoil the party.”

Deep in his thoughts, Volodya went to Orlov-Morozov’s office with an envelope in his hand that contained the cable and the three reports that he had just read. However, the deputy resident was not in his office. The door was locked. He proceeded to the resident’s office, where he saw

Orlov-Morozov sitting at the side table shuffling papers. "Come in, Volodya," he said quietly. "Vilior Gavrilovich was taken to the hospital. It's possible that he had a heart attack. Do you need a signature for your cable?"

Volodya placed the materials on the desk in front of Orlov-Morozov. "How is Vilior Gavrilovich?" he asked.

"I just returned from visiting him in the hospital. I don't know. I'm not a doctor." Having read and corrected punctuation in the text, the deputy resident was about to sign the cable. His silver fountain pen hovered above the paper. He looked over his glasses at Volodya. "Anything else?" he asked.

"Please read this," Volodya said, pointing to the three reports which stirred him up.

Orlov-Morozov began to read slowly; not a muscle moved on his face. After he finished reading, he signed the cable prepared by Volodya that contained only positive responses to yesterday's revolution. Then he said quietly: "These reports are very good. Save them. We will work on them. You understand that if we load up our leaders in Moscow with this kind of analysis, their heads will burst. Besides, Ivan Ivanovich is arriving here on May 2."

"Why should we be concerned about the state of our leaders' heads, or about Ivan Ivanovich?" exploded Volodya. "Ohh, Ivan Ivanovich!"

The heart attack of the chief, the inability to send the Center good reports from trusted sources, and, more than anything, the news of the arrival of Ivan Ivanovich, had shaken him. He didn't sleep all night, and, interestingly, was not sleepy. "I will go home and get drunk," decided Volodya.

"Do you need me now?" he asked his boss.

"Get out of here and relax," responded Orlov-Morozov, apparently having guessed his

analyst's intentions.

The morning of Saturday, April 29, started for Vladimir Alexandrovich Kryuchkov with his exercise routine. The director of the First Directorate of the KGB of the USSR was a pedant who never changed his rules and rituals. A vigorous morning exercise routine was one of those rituals. He developed the routine himself and did it no matter the setting, at his office *dacha* in Yasenevo or in his Moscow apartment. He would nonchalantly perform his exercise in some ambassadorial residence or at the beach of a KGB sanatorium. The underlings knew of their chief's habit and grew to respect it.

It was Saturday, but even on his days off, Kryuchkov did not slack. He got up at 6 a.m. as usual, put on his training attire, and spent an hour exercising vigorously outside his *dacha*. Then he showered, had a simple breakfast, and took off for work. He insisted on walking to his office. It wasn't far—not more than a kilometer. He had to walk through a fenced compound that was adjacent to the building complex housing Foreign Intelligence. As befitting a secret organization, the complex was located in an area not likely to be frequented by strangers, a forest beyond the Outer Ring Road. The Foreign Intelligence headquarters had moved there seven years earlier. The compound was surrounded by a special defense system. A metallic plaque with the vague title “Scientific Center for Research” was attached to the main gate. Whoever thought up that title must have had some sense of humor. However, very few strangers would dare to approach the main gate on foot or by car in order to see the surprising plaque, because the turn off from Ring Road towards the nest of “scientists” was blocked. Soviet people at that time were disciplined, and respected such warnings signs. They say that only once had this prohibition been violated—by an elk, hunting for sweet grass growing outside of the compound. He managed to penetrate the

defense and treated himself to a feast in the green pastures outside the intelligence compound before falling asleep across the road between the *dachas* and the offices.

Late spring in the Moscow suburbs is almost always the best time of year. The leaves of birch and maple trees are young. Bright green grass covers the ground. The sky is high and impeccably blue. The morning walk served as a continuation of Kryuchkov's morning exercise. It charged him with energy and optimism, but no one would think, looking at the short man marching down the alley, that he was enjoying himself in the slightest.

Kryuchkov's appearance gave no indication that he was a high-level official at an organization that instilled fear in a large part of the world. To be more precise, he didn't look like anything at all. He could be taken for an accountant or a petty bureaucrat, or perhaps a schoolteacher, but not the chief of the world's most powerful special services. He was thin, with a round, balding head, thick-rimmed glasses, and an inexpressive, slightly Tatar-looking face. They said Kryuchkov was a Mordwin from the Moksha tribe. Only his eyes, behind his thick lenses, gave any indication of an extraordinary person. He had a very sharp gaze that made many people uncomfortable.

That morning, as usual, he walked from his *dacha* in a business-like manner, looking straight ahead. His gaze was focused. He gave a subtle nod to colleagues whom he met on his way.

Only the top generals of Foreign Intelligence lived in that development. All of them were very well aware of their chief's habits. They all had a set of rules that would not be violated. For example, walking into Kryuchkov in the morning and joining him in order to raise some issue of concern would be a major *faux pas*. There were very few who would have the gall to disturb Kryuchkov during his walk, but Kryuchkov didn't seem to mind those enthusiastic few, and in fact some of them would end up carving out successful careers in the agency.

Vladimir Alexandrovich was accustomed to using those morning walks to thoroughly plan his workday, to identify the most important and urgent matters that he had to address first thing in the morning. That morning, his thoughts were far from the charm of spring in Moscow's suburbs. Afghanistan had burst into the thoughts of the chief of Foreign Intelligence. The coup that had begun just two days ago was already being called a revolution. Those who came to power as a result of the coup d'état were labeled in KGB files as agents or "trusted contacts." They were leaders of the semi-underground People's Democratic Party. They would receive money from a special account of the Central Committee of the CPSU that was allocated to support leftist forces throughout the world. Kryuchkov's people met with them secretly at safe houses. They tried to convince them against acting rashly or emotionally, and to avoid—at least for the moment—taking any actions against the legal authorities. Unfortunately, the revolutionaries hadn't listened. President Daoud had been killed. His regime was overthrown. Now it was necessary to figure out how to sort through the recent developments.

There were many questions. What were the true goals of the revolutionaries who had so rapidly seized power in Kabul? Who were their supporters? Did they have a program of action, and what was it? What would be the reaction to Afghan events in the West? Would they suspect Moscow's involvement in the coup? How should Moscow react to the murder of a lawful president, as well as his family and ministers, many of whom were friends to the Soviet Union? Finally, what should the KGB Residency in Kabul do in this new situation? How should it develop relations with people who, as of yesterday, were secret agents collaborating with Soviet operatives under pseudonyms and now found themselves occupying the highest positions in the state?

It was obvious that Kryuchkov needed Andropov's advice. Firstly, it was important to understand the Central Committee's attitude toward what had transpired in Afghanistan. That

could not be delayed. Vladimir Alexandrovich Kryuchkov was an experienced bureaucrat, and never made any decisions in the heat of the moment. He considered himself, with good reason, to be a true soldier of the party, who was mobilized by the party to serve in the intelligence community. Some old dogs from Yasenevo could not make peace with his prominence in their closed community. They called Kryuchkov a stranger, a party bureaucrat, a dilettante behind his back. Kryuchkov knew all that from reports that he had received, but who said that an intelligence agency should be headed by James Bond? Let those old dogs mind their own business of recruiting agents, conducting clandestine operations, stealing secrets, and gathering compromising materials. He would do his part. Counterintelligence in the modern world, Kryuchkov was convinced, was the single most important instrument at the disposal of high politics, which meant that it had to be led not by a military man, but by a politician—someone with a party background.

In today's situation in Afghanistan, even the communists at the Central Committee were trying to figure out what to make of such an unexpected "gift." The diplomats in the Foreign Ministry must be in frenzy. But it was clear that all of the dirty work would be tasked to the First Directorate, not only because its people played a prominent role in the events, but also because Kryuchkov sensed that what happened in Afghanistan would not disappear soon. Afghan developments reflected systemic clashes of different people, different groups, different ideologies, countries, and political systems.

Kryuchkov had become head of the First KGB Directorate three years earlier. To be more precise, he had entered the spacious office of the director on the second floor of the modern glass and concrete building three years and four months earlier. Until then, he had spent three years as a deputy: first Sakharovsky's deputy, then Mortin's deputy. Wasn't that experience enough for someone who had a great capacity for learning? Sakharovsky and Mortin were very experienced

intelligence officers, yet they were ordinary craftsmen, regular operatives decorated by big stars on their shoulder straps. Kryuchkov politicized intelligence by tasking his subordinates with major, politically-oriented tasks. The chairman of the KGB, Andropov, soon understood the value of Kryuchkov's efforts and began visiting the "scientists" with increasing regularity. Andropov even had an office in Yasenevo. He would come, gather the leadership, ask them to speak about some foreign policy problems, and would attentively listen. Intelligence officers liked it and were proud of Andropov's attention. Kryuchkov watched, noticing whether his subordinates valued his close relationship with the chairman of the KGB.

Kryuchkov had thought of himself as a capable student from a young age. Without any difficulties, he graduated from Saratov Law School by correspondence while working as a *Komsomol* leader in Stalingrad. He then became a district attorney general. In 1951 he was sent to study in Moscow at the High Diplomatic School of the Foreign Ministry of the USSR. He turned out to be the only student studying Hungarian. Nobody else wanted to learn such a difficult language. Kryuchkov, however, didn't falter. He would sleep only three or four hours per night, but proved to himself and everybody else that he was able to take on more than others. He worked in the Soviet embassy in Budapest during the anti-government coup of 1956. There he met Andropov, who took notice of the young diplomat's unusual work ethic, outstanding memory, analytic abilities, and professional loyalty. Having become the head of the Section of Socialist Countries in the Central Committee, Andropov invited Kryuchkov to be his assistant. Later, when Andropov became a secretary of the Central Committee, he promoted Kryuchkov to be his associate. As a result of the intrigues in the Central Committee in 1967, Andropov was appointed chairman of the KGB. He didn't hesitate to transfer his loyal friend to Lubyanka. Kryuchkov headed the secretariat of the KGB headquarters. That position was much more important than it sounded. Kryuchkov's

office was located across from the chairman's office. From day one, Kryuchkov was constantly present next to Andropov. He watched, listened, and learned.

"True, he didn't receive special training, he didn't graduate from the school of counterintelligence, he didn't work in the field, but he graduated from other universities that were more important for this position, such as the school of party leadership." That's how the head of the most important directorate of the KGB thought of himself.

At 8 a.m. he was in his spacious office, receiving information analytical briefings. Then he signed cables. He read the daily briefing that was prepared by his office for the Central Committee. When he had finally finished these routine matters, he asked his assistant to call his deputy who was handling the Department of the Middle East, the head of that department, and the head of the Department of Information and Analytical Services. The assistant reminded him politely that the head of the Foreign Counterintelligence Services and a resident who had just arrived after a long overseas assignment were waiting for him in the reception room. Kryuchkov replied, "Not now."

The invited parties appeared in the office almost immediately, as if they had been standing outside his door waiting for the invitation, although it's possible that this was the case.

"So, what's going on in Kabul?" asked Kryuchkov dryly when the visitors settled around the large oval table. The subordinates were accustomed to the manner of the chief, who would never beat around the bush. Normally, sometimes without so much as a greeting, Kryuchkov would demand the latest updates.

"News is not so good," his deputy, General Medyanik, said. "It's possible that Osadchiy has had a heart attack. The timing is very bad. It will be difficult there without the resident now."

"Heart attack? Yakov Prokofievich, please consider if we need to assist in his recovery. Should we bring him to Moscow, or can he get an appropriate treatment in Kabul?"

“He thinks that he will recover soon. He is strong.”

“Yes, of course,” Kryuchkov demonstrated his brilliant memory. “You know him well from your joint work in Israel.”

Previously Medyanik had been the KGB resident in Tel-Aviv and Delhi.

“But you are correct,” continued Kryuchkov. “Our business in Kabul should not be left without a resident even for a few days, not under the current circumstances. Do you have any recommendations?”

“We’ve given it some thought.” Medyanik looked at his colleagues as if inviting them to support his statement. “A group headed by Ershov should be sent to Afghanistan right away. Ivan Ivanovich knows the situation and the revolutionaries very well. Now would be the time to take advantage of his unique expertise. He can be useful to both our Residency and the Afghan comrades.”

“When would they depart?”

“We will try to do the paperwork as soon as possible. It will take about three days.”

“Fine. See that it is taken care of.”

Having finished the meeting, Kryuchkov asked Medyanik and General Leonov, who was the head of the Department of Information Analytical Services, to stay. He knew that he would soon speak with Andropov and, as usual, before talking to the chairman he wanted to discuss the situation with colleagues once more to hear their opinions.

“Well, Yakov Prokofievich, the Afghans didn’t listen to us. We told them in no uncertain terms not to touch Daoud and not to act in a rush. Look at how many innocent lives were lost: the president, his whole family, his ministers and guards, the generals loyal to Daoud.”

Kryuchkov turned to Leonov.

“Nikolai Sergeyeovich, what is the world’s reaction to the Afghan coup? ‘Moscow’s hand’?”

“Not without it, although the reaction has been a bit slow. They still have very little information. The West will say that this is a KGB plot.”

“Afghans are such short-tempered people,” lamented Medyanik. “They are very impatient. Who made this ‘revolution’? Officers who studied here, in the Soviet Union. They traveled across our country. They watched, and decided, ‘Why not create something like Soviet Central Asia in Afghanistan?’ Certainly, one can understand their thinking: over there, ‘across the river,’ there is feudalism, poverty, total backwardness in every sphere of life. Here, we have flourishing cities and villages, electricity, schools, culture, medicine, total literacy. And all of this is not far away, not across the ocean, but right next door. One needs only to cross Pyandzh or Amu Darya. And there, the reality is completely different. They are under the illusion that one can change one’s country overnight, like crossing a river.”

Kryuchkov agreed with him. “The revolutionaries don’t need Soviet propaganda. They don’t need to be convinced to like our country. They’ve evolved with the firm conviction that Afghanistan has no other way of development than Soviet. It seems as though they have ready answers to any questions, am I correct?”

“Yes, they have answers,” nodded Medyanik, “although it doesn’t mean that they are correct. Let’s wait. In the next day or two there will be statements by their leaders, most importantly by Taraki. He will have to suggest some sort of ideological basis for their actions, and formulate a program, at least in general terms.”

“God forbid they announce right away that they are planning to build socialism,” added Leonov. “The last thing we need is another pseudo-socialist country as a neighbor. As it is, we are feeding half of the world.”

Three years ago, General Leonov was one of the authors of a top secret report to the CPSU Central Committee, in which leaders of the Soviet intelligence services proposed to limit the sphere of Soviet interests in the world. These people, who had access to all relevant economic, political, and military information, knew very well that brotherly gratuitous assistance to developing countries had become a very heavy burden for the Soviet Union. Wise men from the Central Committee even coined a term for such free-loaders: "Countries of the non-capitalist way of development." In 1975, the intelligence community sensed the first signs of crisis in the Soviet empire. The Soviet Union could no longer feed, teach, and arm such a great number of "friends." The report in question received the nickname "Novel of the Century." However, it was buried in the Central Committee. The influence of the orthodox communist leaders who didn't want anything to change was too strong.

Leonov was one of those generals who afforded himself some free thinking. His chief was the conservative one, but he didn't mind having occasional discussions with "liberals" in his circle.

"You know, Vladimir Alexandrovich," said Medyanik. "I just remembered a story that a colleague told me. It's a remarkable story, and the guy who told it to me was no fool. He worked in Kabul for a long time, and Taraki had been one of his contacts. So, before the founding congress of the PDPA in 1964, Taraki told our man, 'we are in the process of forming political and leadership organs of the party and we will be able to seize power.' The agent had heard such conversations earlier, but hearing it from Taraki angered him. 'Okay, and after you seize power? You will end up begging the Soviet Union for assistance, and in addition, you will ask us to send troops to defend your revolution.' What was remarkable in that story was that Taraki calmly and clearly responded, 'So what? If it is necessary, then yes, we will ask the USSR for assistance. And the Soviet Union, loyal to its sense of international duty, will not say no to us. If necessary, you will send troops.'"

Kryuchkov listened to his deputy without expression.

Medyanik continued, "Then Taraki was invited to Moscow. It was an unofficial visit. We arranged for him to travel under the cover of the Writers' Union invitation, as part of a cultural exchange. Taraki, the literary man, went to meet the men of letters of Moscow. In reality, it was an introduction. He was received at the Central Committee. The deputy head of the International Department of the Central Committee, Ulyanovsky, spoke with him, and he insistently recommended that Taraki not rush into revolution. Soon after his return, Taraki was invited for a cup of tea by King Zahir Shah. They sat beside each other talking about the future of Afghanistan, pondering different scenarios of its development. The king asked, 'Mr. Taraki, I heard you were recently in Moscow, and you were awarded the Lenin Prize for achievements in the field of literature. I am very glad that an Afghan was granted such an honor.' Taraki got confused, because all he received from the Soviet Union was a fur hat, the traditional gift of the Central Committee. 'No,' he said, 'it is a mistake. I did visit Moscow, and met with different cultural figures. That's all.' Then King Zahir Shah, looking straight into his eyes, said, 'You know, Mr. Taraki, I myself am a strong supporter of friendship with the Soviet Union. I do believe that in the future Afghanistan will take the path of socialism. I share such ideas in a way. But now our country is not ready for such ideas. They should not be forced upon us, otherwise we will descend into chaos, destruction, and war.'"

There was a long pause in the office. Kryuchkov continued to sit motionlessly, not reacting to what was just told.

On the one hand, he knew very well about the efforts that the Central Committee applied to cool the heat of revolutionary impulse among its Afghan friends. On the other hand, if the PDPA declared its intention to immediately begin building a socialist state, the reaction from the Soviet

Politburo would be unpredictable. Suslov and Ponomaryov would surely approve it, so it was better not to voice any opinions now. Let these generals bask in their intelligence and wit. At the moment it was more appropriate for him to remain silent.

Medyanik changed the topic. “Do you think that Khalq and Parcham really made peace with each other? For any extended period of time? When they begin to divide portfolios in government, both factions will resume their squabbles. They will even possibly start killing each other.”

“Too bad,” sighed Leonov. “It’s unfortunate that we couldn’t convince the Central Committee that the intelligence services shouldn’t deal with Afghan party politics, calm them down, wipe away their snot.”

Kryuchkov looked at his interlocutor with reproach and shook his head. *Is he criticizing party leadership?* It was permitted to an extent within their circle, but one had to be careful of crossing the line. Although, in general, Leonov was correct. Why bother intelligence with these issues? Khalqis, Parchamis—even their value as sources of political information was doubtful. There were never problems with obtaining information in Afghanistan. Highly placed government bureaucrats, heads of special services and the military, always willingly collaborated with Soviet intelligence. We had our agents even in the closest circle of the king, and then Daoud. These old men in the Central Committee—Ponomaryov, Ulyanovsky, Brutenz—were still thinking along the lines of Communist International, which was long gone. They would only trust intelligence operatives to transfer funds and instructions to “friends.” The intelligence services even had to deal with taking care of the personal affairs of Afghan party functionaries. The contacts of our operatives with members of the underground opposition party could be very dangerous. In any country, an accusation of involvement in covert anti-state actions could lead to severe punishment.

“By the way, Yakov Prokofievich.” A constructive thought had dawned on Kryuchkov. “Don’t you think that this presents a good opportunity to invite comrades from the Central Committee to participate in the project? I am ready to contact the leadership with a proposal to send a group of competent Communist Party advisers to Afghanistan. How do you think our Afghan friends would react to that?”

“They will support it,” agreed Medyanik enthusiastically.

“They will be grateful,” confidently confirmed Leonov.

Kryuchkov stood up. The conversation was over. It was time to call Andropov.

Moscow reacted very quickly to the Kabul KGB Residency’s offer to upgrade ties with the PDPA to a higher level. Puzanov received the following instruction: “You should conduct an unofficial meeting with the leader of the People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan, Nur Mohammad Taraki, who will most probably be proclaimed a leader of the Afghan state in the near future. During the conversation, make an effort to receive information regarding his immediate plans for the new Afghan regime in the areas of domestic and foreign policy and the realization of economic reforms. It’s desirable to find out who will be appointed to the highest state positions. Taraki should be warned in particular not to permit the unleashing of baseless retaliation against representatives of the former regime. The need to attract qualified specialists and bureaucrats who are not hostile towards the Afghan revolution must be pointed out. Establishing a good personal rapport with Taraki will prove to be an important asset.”

The ambassador called Orlov-Morozov to his office. He shared the cable with the deputy resident.

“No problem, Alexander Mikhailovich. When would you like to meet with Taraki?”

Tomorrow? What time? I think it's better to arrange such a meeting in the evening. I will tell Alexei Petrov to invite Taraki at 7:30 pm. Who will interpret at the meeting? Alexei?"

"I will take Rurikov with me. He will take notes of the conversation. Alexei Vladimirovich should focus on the logistics of the meeting. If necessary, I will send my cook and my steward to him."

"I think Alexei will manage without them. It would be good if as few people as possible know of this meeting."

"Yes, but Alexei Vladimirovich should be present at the meeting. I have no secrets from your guys. Who knows what manner of conversation we will have? He, Petrov, is a personal friend of Taraki's."

"Now, here's a protocol question: Who should appear in the TASS office first? You, or Taraki?"

"I think, since this meeting is going to be unofficial, that shouldn't matter. Do as you please."

The next day, the Soviet ambassador to Afghanistan, Alexander Puzanov, and the second secretary of the Soviet embassy, Dmitry Rurikov, arrived at the office of TASS, where Nur Mohammad Taraki and Alexei Petrov, the KGB operative who worked under the cover of head of the Kabul TASS office, were already waiting.

Alexander Mikhailovich had seen Taraki before, at receptions at the Soviet embassy, where the Afghan politician was sometimes invited as a "representative of the intelligentsia." However, he had never spoken with Taraki before. When the Soviet ambassador entered the room, Taraki stood up and, beaming, stretched out his arms to greet him. Puzanov greeted him sincerely in return. After exchanging traditional Afghan pleasantries, all of the participants of the meeting sat down around the table. Taraki had assumed a radiant, victorious manner, as if saying, "You see?

We've done it. We've succeeded in our revolution." He wanted to impress Puzanov with an air of wisdom and success. Alexander Mikhailovich offered a short toast, "To Soviet-Afghan friendship!"

Dmitry Rurikov mentally applauded Puzanov. "Brilliant. This is what 'old-school' means. He's hit a home-run."

Then the conversation began. Taraki said that the military coup that was realized "during the day, not under cover of night"* by the Khalqi officers had been provoked by Daoud and his despotic rule. If it weren't for the murder of Khyber, if it weren't for the arrests of the leadership of the PDPA, the armed uprising could hardly have occurred. However, Taraki saw the practical manifestation of the Hegelian dialectics of objective and subjective in such a development of events.

"Sure, let's put this into Hegelian terms," thought Rurikov skeptically as he interpreted Taraki's musings into Russian.

They moved on to discussing specific issues. Taraki took out a rough draft of the composition of the future leadership of Afghanistan from the pocket of his worn sports coat. For some reason, he gave it to Alexei Petrov instead of the ambassador or Rurikov. Petrov immediately corrected Taraki's mistake by passing the list to the ambassador, who in turn asked Rurikov to read it aloud. He began to read the notes out loud to the ambassador, commenting together with Petrov on the names from the list. After a preliminary discussion of the candidates on the list, the ambassador stated his summary: "It would be good if the leadership of Afghanistan would consist of representatives of all patriotic and progressive forces in the country." Taraki nodded in agreement, but didn't care to further elaborate on the topic.

* It appears as though Taraki had Alexander the Great in mind. Alexander, before the battle of Gavgameli, was offered by his military advisor Parmenion the option to attack at night. He responded, "Alexander does not steal his victories as a thief in the night." Later, the emphasis on victory during the day was very popular in Afghan propaganda.

During the meeting, the issues of Afghanistan's future development were discussed. Taraki said that from now on the country would develop in a socialist and communist way, and that it would reflect the wishes of the Afghan people. Puzanov, with the intention to cool down the revolutionary fervor of his interlocutor, mentioned that such a goal would involve quite a lengthy historical phase, considering the peculiarities of Afghan society. Taraki seemed offended by that remark.

"No," he said. "We will reach communism possibly even earlier than the Soviet Union. The Afghan people already lean towards communism because of their national traditions. All we need to do is to merge Afghan tradition with Marxist-Leninist philosophy."

Puzanov understood that the discussion of the merger of Afghan tradition and Marxism-Leninism would hardly be constructive. This is why, keeping in mind the instructions of the CPSU Central Committee, he expressed his concern about possible reprisals against representatives of the former regime. Taraki asked, "Reprisals against whom? Which representatives of the former regime? Who can you name, specifically? Who must not be persecuted? Tell us specifically and we will take your opinion into consideration." The Soviet ambassador didn't expect such a turn in the conversation, and proceeded to propose a toast to Taraki's health and the success of the new Afghan regime.

They parted very warmly.

On May 1, 1978, one hour before midnight, the colonel of Counterintelligence, Ivan Ershov, was brought to Sheremetevo Airport by a government car. He was leading a group that was traveling with him to Afghanistan. The colonel had met the people in the group just a few hours ago, first at the reception area and then at the office of the chairman of the KGB. The group

consisted of an operative from the Second KGB Directorate (Counterintelligence), an operative from the Ninth KGB Directorate (Physical Protection of Members of Politburo), an operative from the Seventh KGB Directorate (Outside Observation), and an operative of the Fourth Directorate (Technical Operative Support). When Andropov set forth the tasks and asked if everything was clear, everyone remained silent. Nobody expressed any doubt or asked to clarify anything. Now, in the airplane, some started to raise questions.

One of Ivan Ivanovich's colleagues, a tall junior colonel with dark, curly hair, quietly hummed a song from a popular cartoon. He moved a tipsy colleague from the Ninth Directorate, who sat next to Ershov, to a seat across the aisle. Then he sat next to the boss.

"Ivan Ivanovich, as you are not sleeping, may I disturb you? Please tell me, what should my mission be in Kabul? Where shall I begin? To what should I pay particular attention? To tell you the truth, I am a bit anxious. I would like to be worthy of the trust that was bestowed upon me."

Ershov liked what he heard. The officer, from the very beginning, seemed nice, reliable, and concerned about the success of the operation. "This one will not sleep, will not eat, and will stay focused, ensuring that things will work out," thought Ivan Ivanovich. He started to instruct the officer: "An enormous amount of work is ahead of us. We will have to build efficient and powerful modern special services from the ground up. The new Afghan regime will have to fight against many enemies. These will be first the CIA and the intelligence services of NATO countries, as well as the Iranian special services, SAVAK. The Islamic fundamentalists, who are based in Pakistan and Afghan provinces, will certainly begin to fight against the new regime, as well as those whose class interests will be affected during the forthcoming progressive reforms. Lenin, as you remember, used to say, 'The revolution that cannot defend itself is a bad revolution.'

"Until now, Afghanistan has not had intelligence and counterintelligence services as state

institutions. Afghan special services, which is called *Istichbahrat*, was extremely ineffective and was not trusted by the leaders of the country. In the elite, in the army, in the state apparatus, Afghans have always known each other personally. The leadership would make a decision if someone would transgress, but those decisions were based on personal understanding instead of written law. When Afghans served as agents of foreign special services, their covert activities would be considered treason only in the case that the traitor worked against the ruler of Afghanistan, or members of his family or clan. Afghanistan doesn't have any systematic archives of special services. It doesn't have recruitment methodology or criterion of evaluation of covert collaboration. There are no written descriptions of the processes and results of investigations that took place.

"You, personally, will have to organize a powerful counterintelligence apparatus based on law. You will have to establish goals in the sphere of counterintelligence activities for your Afghan colleagues. You will have to develop an organizational plan as soon as possible, prepare a budget, and participate in selecting cadres who are effective and loyal to the revolution. It's possible that some of them will be former officers of *Istichbahrat* and the police."

The junior colonel seemed impressed by the scale of the tasks.

"I asked my boss, are there any normative acts regarding the activities of advisers—KGB operatives abroad—which might provide me with guiding principles in Kabul? I was told that you would familiarize me with them."

Ershov was taken aback. "Yes, but not on the plane! Our office in Kabul has a code of instructions regarding scope of activities of KGB residencies overseas. Tomorrow, if there is time, I will let you read it."

Ivan Ivanovich issued a deep yawn, signaling that he would like now to be left alone.

However, he didn't fall asleep. He knew that he wouldn't be able to sleep on the plane. Every time he flew to Kabul, Ershov was gripped with excitement. He had developed deep connections with that city.

Ershov was born in the Kaluga region of Russia. He grew up in a poor peasant family. He was very short, which was of extreme concern to him, and prompted him to wear high-heeled boots and to have a preference for large, imposing objects. Sometimes, when he drove a government car, it would seem like there was no driver inside and the car was driving by itself. The drivers on the opposite side of the road were horrified at the sight and would often pull off the road. He spoke with a high-pitched voice. He was afraid of women, particularly of his wife, Maya Alexeyevna.

Ivan Ivanovich was a veteran of World War II. At first, being a Navy cadet in Kronstadt, he extinguished Nazi firebombs on the roofs of Leningrad. Later he became a sniper. He was in charge of the *Komsomol* organization of a military regiment when the war was coming to an end. When his regiment freed Bulgaria and was preparing to enter Sofia triumphantly, Ivan Ivanovich decided to enter the city riding horseback. They found a good horse for him, but the saddle that someone had selected for the horse gave Ivan Ivanovich blisters on his buttocks, rendering him too uncomfortable to carry out his plan. Instead of entering Sofia on a horse, Ivan Ivanovich entered the city in an ambulance. Since then, he became very mistrustful, suspecting foul play at every turn.

After the war was over, he enrolled in the Institute of Military Interpreters in Moscow, where he studied French. As one of the most politically reliable and academically inclined graduates, he received an offer to work in the counterintelligence service of the KGB. Ivan Ivanovich agreed. However, having begun to work, he was very surprised that his bosses decided

to prepare him to work in Afghanistan rather than in France. Ershov was unaware then that there were many more people who wanted to work in Paris than those dreaming of the Orient. He was not one of the lucky few who won the lottery. He had to change planes three times just to get to the Afghan capital. When he finally arrived, he was assigned to work in the consular section, which became his cover. He started to study Farsi on his own, and learned to speak it and read basic texts.

The Soviet ambassador in Afghanistan at that time was a wonderful person and an outstanding Soviet diplomat by the name of Degtiar. He liked the modest and efficient officer.

In the spring of 1953, after Beria was arrested, the resident of the Soviet intelligence group in Kabul received a cable. The cable read, "Your agents' network is contaminated by traitors and double agents. You and all of your Residency's operatives should urgently return to Moscow."

Soviet operatives from all over the world who received such a cable quit their important affairs and left for Lubyanka. Having arrived, the officers didn't receive any explanations or instructions, were not attended to by anybody, and spent their days browsing aimlessly, drinking, smoking, and trying to figure out what would happen to them tomorrow.

Ivan Ivanovich, having learned about the directive to return to Moscow, relied on his intuition that told him not to leave Kabul. He came to the ambassador with a folder full of documents and a tragic expression on his face. He explained that the activities of the consular section would be paralyzed if he were to leave. The ambassador, who had strong ties with higher powers, immediately sent a cable to Moscow. The message was: "Every operative stationed in Kabul may leave, but I cannot permit such a valuable staff member of the consular section as Ershov to be let go."

Ivan Ivanovich's colleagues departed. None of them returned. Some were fired from the

security services. Some of them were later dispatched to other countries. For some time, Ershov was the only representative of Soviet counterintelligence in Kabul. Sometime later, other operatives arrived and began to report to him as the resident.

After the first Kabul tour, Ershov's career took off. He became the KGB resident in Tehran. During that tenure, an unpleasant incident occurred. Iranian authorities traced and executed a very valuable agent who had been very loyal to the Soviet Union. That man was subjected to horrible torture in the prison of the secret services, SAVAK. Only one thing was demanded of the agent: his admission that he was working for the Soviet Union. Then he could die in peace. However, he denied his allegiance, thus subjecting himself to terrible suffering and dehumanizing torture. After his execution, his wife and sister were forced to pay to receive the body for burial. That failure left a deep impression on Ivan Ivanovich. After that Tehran experience, he became obsessed with the shrewdness and cruelty of Iranian special services*. Also, Ershov did not like to be alone, inside his home or his office. He insisted that a reliable person be near his side at all times, be it a driver, an operative, or anybody else. All of his doors at home had locks. He was obsessed with locking everything. Once that habit created a serious problem for him. Having left for the office, he locked his wife, Maya Alexeyevna, in the bedroom, where she was forced to spend the morning in dire need of a bathroom. When Ivan Ivanovich came home, he was met with fireworks.

This was Colonel Ershov's third tour to Kabul. This time he was arriving as a maestro of counterintelligence. At least, he thought so.

The first thing he did was meet with the ambassador. He delivered a package from the ambassador's daughter: sausages, kefir, cottage cheese, and herring. Puzanov thanked him for this

* It should be noted that, to date, the Iranian special services are known for their high level of professionalism, cruelty, and insidiousness.

favor, and inquired as to the nature of Ershov's assignment in Kabul. "Yuri Vladimirovich personally tasked me to come here," Ershov informed the ambassador with a tone of significance in his voice. He spoke quietly and mysteriously.

After the meeting, Ivan Ivanovich went upstairs to the familiar quarters of the KGB Kabul Residency. Alexei Petrov sat there smoking and waiting for Ershov's arrival. Ivan Ivanovich beckoned him to the corridor so their conversation would be private. He tasked Alexei, referring to the assignment of the Center, with arranging his meeting with Taraki and Amin as soon as possible.

Ivan Ivanovich's respect was directed not so much at people, but at their high positions, and he now wanted to be received by the new leaders of the country. Petrov understood the task right away and left to make arrangements for the meeting. Ivan Ivanovich began to prepare for the important rendezvous, periodically instructing members of the group that arrived with him.

However, the meeting had still not been arranged after several days. Alexei Petrov swore to Ershov that he had reminded Taraki and Amin of Andropov's representative's request. However, citing busy schedules, they continued to postpone the meeting. Finally, on the fourth day, Alexei excitedly told Ershov that the colonel could meet with Amin in the TASS office.

"And what about Taraki?" asked Ershov.

"Ivan Ivanovich, he has a completely different status now," replied Alexei meekly. "He is now the head of a sovereign state. To tell you the truth, I simply cannot get in touch with him directly."

Earlier, during the years of his work in Kabul as a resident, Ershov met Taraki and Amin in the TASS office quite often. At the time, he didn't take them entirely seriously. The Khalqis themselves didn't treat the Soviet resident particularly favorably. They didn't like him due to a

number of reasons, mostly because of his stuffiness, tense mannerisms, and obvious lack of sincerity. He seemed to them like a flop who didn't care if he fulfilled his promises.

Now Amin was the minister of foreign affairs and the vice chairman of the government. Things had changed. Petrov brought Amin to the meeting at the TASS office. Ivan Ivanovich waited for the newly minted leader sitting on a sofa in the hall. Seeing his "Russian friend," Amin, flashing his American-style smile, dashed towards him. He grabbed Ershov's palm with two hands, squeezed and shook it, murmuring words of the traditional Afghan greeting for an awkward spell of time. He then hugged Ivan Ivanovich by the waist and pulled him to a special meeting room—a space for confidential conversations that was very familiar to Amin. He also passed along warm wishes and sincere greetings from Comrade Taraki and relayed Taraki's regrets that lack of time precluded him from meeting with his "old friend."

Sitting in the room, where a simple meal was served, Amin seemed extremely focused. Ivan Ivanovich thought that little had changed in his relationship with Amin. He took a shot of vodka, leaned against the back of his armchair, and began to vaguely describe the essence of the issue that he wanted to resolve during their meeting. Amin listened attentively, but obviously couldn't understand what Ershov was talking about. He failed to hide his boredom. Then Alexei Petrov, politely securing Ivanov's permission to add to what was said earlier, intervened. Quickly and succinctly, he explained the gist of the issue. "We would like to establish cooperation along the lines of intelligence and counterintelligence on the state level with the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan. We would like to exchange secret information with you. We can send our advisers to you. They will teach the operatives of your special services how to work under difficult conditions."

Amin paused to think. He asked, "How can we resolve the financial aspect of this issue?"

“We will take care of all funding relating to our advisers’ activities in Afghanistan,” said Ershov readily. “Besides, we could allocate some financial means necessary for organizing Afghan special services. We are prepared to supply your security services with the most modern technical equipment. We can also supply Soviet-made cars.”

“Well, this is good!” remarked Amin cheerfully. “We always knew that you were our sincere, reliable friends. I have no doubt that Comrade Taraki, the great leader of our socialist revolution, will approve any agreement regarding collaboration between our special services which you would prepare and submit for our consideration.”

“Who would be the contact person to discuss these issues?” blurted Petrov without consulting his superior.

Ivan Ivanovich pursed his lips and shot his colleague a severe glance.

“Assadullah Sarwari will be your contact. I will tell him to get in touch with you right away,” responded Amin with his radiant smile.

After taking another shot of vodka and sampling the canned sausage, the Afghani politician rushed back to his affairs of state.

Assadullah Sarwari called Petrov later in the evening of the same day. He asked where he could meet with Comrade Ershov. Alexei calculated the time necessary to find Ivan Ivanovich and decided to plan a rendezvous at the square in front of the entrance to the Soviet embassy. When Ershov was told of this plan, he lectured Petrov. “Don’t you know that someone is always watching the entrances of foreign organizations?” he said angrily, putting on a fresh shirt and tying his tie.

“I do know,” replied Alexei modestly.

“Then what are you setting me up for?”

“Setting you up for whom? Even if someone sees you with Sarwari, to whom are they going

to report about your meeting? Sarwari himself?” Petrov responded innocently.

A white Toyota Crown was parked at the square in front of the Soviet embassy. A tall, heavy young man in a wrinkled suit with a kind, intelligent face sat in the driver’s seat. “Funny how this Afghan looks like our movie director Eldar Ryazanov,” thought Ivan Ivanovich. While Ershov exited the embassy, the Afghan quickly leapt from the car. He saluted Ershov in the British manner and introduced himself with a booming voice. “Pilot Assadullah Sarwari.” Then he opened the back door of the car and invited Ivan Ivanovich in.

“Comrade Ivan Ivanovich, is this meeting being held too late for you?” asked Sarwari as they drove in the darkness along Darul Aman Road towards the center of the city. “Comrade Amin said that I should meet you as soon as possible in order to resolve all the issues of establishing cooperation in security-related affairs.”

“Don’t worry about anything,” responded Ershov. “In our work we should not be concerned with keeping a regular schedule.”

“That was the sense that I got!” laughed Assadullah Sarwari happily.

When they reached his office, Sarwari offered Ivan Ivanovich tea with nuts and raisins. He mentioned that he could arrange kebabs, whiskey, or *vatani**. They decided to stick with tea. Ershov, trying to recall the words and expressions in Dari that were used by Alexei Petrov during their conversation with Amin, explained to Sarwari the essence of the Soviet proposal regarding collaboration between their special services. Sarwari, knowing Amin’s attitude toward this matter, was thrilled. However, he had no idea what he should say or do from this point on. Ivan Ivanovich described a set of documents that both sides needed to prepare and sign. He offered to draft a joint plan of activities for the next two months, to consider the staff needs for the future security

* Afghan moonshine, produced by Bukhara Jews living in Kabul. It resembles Georgian *chacha*.

services, and to discuss the budget for operational needs. He also shared with Sarwari important information regarding a situation in Pakistani leadership that he had just received from the Center.

Sarwari, who had beaten several enemies of the revolution to death in his office earlier that day, looked at Ershov sadly with his brown eyes. "Which plans? Which budgets?" Sarwari was appointed to this important revolutionary position to eliminate enemies mercilessly. So he did, day and night. And now this small Soviet comrade suggests that he get engaged in some bureaucratic affairs.

They agreed that the next day Ivan Ivanovich would introduce Sarwari to the KGB operatives who had arrived with him. The former pilot would send his people who knew Russian to Ershov. Those people would be in constant contact with Ershov's group and would assist in translating the necessary documents into Dari and Pashto.

Saying goodbye, Sarwari said that his office doors were always open to Ivan Ivanovich. Introducing his assistant to Ershov, the head of security services said with pride, "This is not just an officer, this is a lion." The assistant drove Ershov back home to the embassy.

An operative at the KGB Residency, Yura Kitaev, was in charge of security for the Soviet colony in Afghanistan. His "cover" position was a vice-consul at the embassy. Besides other responsibilities, he was in charge of the very difficult task of maintaining contacts with Soviet women in Afghanistan.

Who were they? They were women who married Afghans, mostly those Afghan students who, by the thousands, studied at Soviet universities beginning in the 1960s. There were lots of things that were very attractive about Afghan men for Soviet girls. They were more exotic and

masculine in appearance than many Russian men. Their more moderate consumption of alcohol, their accents, and different behavior were other factors of attraction. Afghans were distinguished by generosity, reserved nature, self-control, ability to keep promises, magnanimity towards the weak, respect for their elderly, loyalty in friendship, and a tender, attentive attitude to women and children.

There was a wide array of Soviet women living in Afghanistan: young and old, of various ethnicities, different intellectual backgrounds and aspirations, and different political agendas. Some sincerely loved their Afghan husbands, while some took advantage of them to leave the “Soviet hell” for the “capitalist heaven.”

Yura was fond of women, particularly his wife, Tatiana, but he did not like the women who married Afghans, particularly when they made demands on him constantly and threatened to report him to Brezhnev. Yura often thought about those Soviet women who fled to Afghanistan in order to escape socialism, only to find that their new place of living offered more of the same. “Where would they run now? To Israel? To America? To Madagaskar?” thought Yura to himself when dealing with the disappointed former Soviet women.

Natalya Nurzai called.

“Yura, how did you and your family manage during the events? Did anything happen to you? My husband and I were so concerned about you and your family. Are you well? How are the boys?”

“They’re okay. Everything is okay.”

“My husband and I want to invite you and your wife to visit us in Mikrorayon. Let’s have tea. Let’s catch up. We haven’t seen you in a long time.”

Yura liked Natalya’s husband, Abdul Khayyum Nurzai. He always looked very serious. He

was short, without a moustache despite being an ethnic Pashtun, and a Khalq member since the party's inception. He was close to Taraki. Abdul Khayyum taught at the Pashtun Academy. He was a specialist in the Pashto language and in the history of Afghanistan. He defended his dissertation at Moscow State University under the supervision of one of the most prominent Soviet scholars on Afghanistan, Professor Dvoryankov. Nurzai spoke Russian better than many Russians.

Yura also knew that Natalya, who was a Jew from Odessa, was a formidable cook. That's why, without hesitation, he responded, "If it's okay, we'll come tomorrow."

"Yes, that's fine—come at about five o'clock. Write our address down. Well, you have our address." Yuri had the address because Natalya recently visited him at the consulate to discuss some unpleasant issue.

After he hung up, Yuri thought to himself, "why have they invited us over now, whereas they never had before? Something is not right. I'm going to figure it out when I see them."

The next day Yura and his wife, having bought flowers, candy, vodka, champagne, and toys for the children, came to the Nurzais in Mikrorayon.

Smiling Abdul Khayyum opened the door. Their three-room apartment was filled with the fragrances of delicious foods. Abdul Khayyum hugged Yura and kissed him as if he'd just seen his long-lost brother. They greeted each other, chatted with the children, who were happy to receive the toys, and the dinner began. The theme of the conversation was the military coup.

Yura avoided straight answers when Nurzai asked Yura what he was doing during the military assault. Instead, he raised many toasts and vodka began to flow. Nurzai understood Yura's tricks.

Later, they started a conversation that was purely political. Abdul Khayyum explained how he, a philologist who had never served in the army, received a note from Hafizullah Amin about

liberating PDPA leaders from prison. After receiving the note, he spent all night visiting officers in Mikrorayon and telling them, “tomorrow morning there will be a military coup. Daoud and his fascist pro-American regime should be swept away by the forces of the Afghan military. When you became a member of the People’s Democratic Party, you knew your responsibilities. You must support us. This is an order. If you support us, perhaps you will live, or you may die as a hero. If we win, you will achieve a lot in life. If you don’t support us, we will hang you the next day in front of the windows of your apartment on the power lines, in front of your wife and children.”

Some officers started to cry and threw themselves at Abdul Khayyum’s feet. “Why did I ever get involved with you and your party!” they would exclaim. Abdul Khayyum would respond, “Don’t you think about the risk I take to come to you with such a threat? Do you know who I am? You know that I also have a wife and children. What will happen to me tomorrow, to my wife and my children, if you don’t do what I demand? Think seriously. This is not a joking matter!”

“This is how the coup d’etat happened,” said Yura, in deep thought. “This is the mechanism. Silly us, considering this a revolution, believing this was the work of the people’s masses.”

Nurzai took a look at Yura and his wife and said, “This is how revolutions are made.”

Now Yura understood the purpose of the invitation. It was Nurzai’s wish to create his reputation as a hero of the revolution and to take advantage of the situation for himself.

After having boasted of his role in the military coup, Nurzai poured himself a full glass of vodka and drank it all in silence. Then he started to elaborate about things that, from Yura’s point of view as an operative, were of no interest at all.

Natalya walked Yura and his wife to the car after dinner and explained the dinner’s unsavory end by her husband’s fatigue and anxiety. Saying goodbye, she continued, “Do you know how difficult it was to know for several days that everybody could be killed—my husband, my

children, and myself—and for the sake of what?”

Yura responded, “Stay close to us and nobody will ever hurt you. You are a citizen of the greatest country in the world.”

As Yura drove back home, he thought that what happened that night was a spectacle, a play, and that every actor had played the role well.

On Saturday, closer to lunch, the correspondent of TASS, Alexei Petrov, came into the common room of the KGB Residency with a victorious smile. He looked happy and flushed, perhaps demonstrating evidence of a recent shot or two with some of the newly minted leaders of the country. Petrov nonchalantly dropped a list of the new government appointments of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan on the desk of the analyst Volodya Khotyaev.

“Volodya, write a cable relaying the final list of the cabinet. This list will be published today or tomorrow. Then I need to take it to the ambassador.”

Volodya read the text. Everybody else quit what they were doing and started to look at the list over Volodya’s shoulder.

“Alexei, you can pat yourself on the back. The awards that you received were not for nothing. Look—you spent so much energy trying to unite the party when it seemed hopeless. And you might have just united it! It’s a just list—a very balanced and fair distribution of positions.”

And then he read aloud:

- Nur Muhammad Taraki—Chairman of the Revolutionary Council of the Democratic Party of Afghanistan (D.R.A.), Prime Minister
- Karmal Babrak—Deputy Chairman of the Revolutionary Council, First Deputy Prime

Minister

- Hafizullah Amin (Khalq)—Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs
- Mohammad Aslam Watanjar (Khalq)—Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Communications
- Abdul Qadir (leader of military coup d'état)—Minister of National Defense
- Nur Ahmad Nur (Parcham)—Minister of the Interior
- Sultan Ali Keshtmand (Parcham)—Minister of Planning
- Abdul Karim Misak (Khalq)—Minister of Finance
- Bareq Shafi'i (Parcham, one of the most popular poets in Afghanistan)—Minister of Information and Culture
- Suleyman Layeq (Parcham, also a very popular poet and writer)—Minister of Radio and Television

Then there was a list of people who were less known and who would occupy less significant positions. However, the distribution of Khalqis and Parchamis across the spectrum of new appointments was balanced throughout.

Volodya Khotyaev wrote a cable to the Center including the list that was brought by Petrov. His analysis of the composition of the new Afghan leadership was very positive. He then went to Orlov-Morozov to get his signature. Meanwhile, Petrov decided to take the list of the new Afghan government to the Soviet ambassador.

“Don’t rush. Let our cable go first. Stay here and talk to the people,” implored Victor Bubnov. “Tell your colleagues how you’ve achieved such success in unifying the PDPA.”

Alexei seemed to be relishing the opportunity.

“Yes guys, this list is extraordinary. I won’t attempt to pretend that I am not truly happy and proud. You all witnessed what it took. I spent so much time trying to convince Tarakan* and Karmash** how important it would be to unify the party, and they paid me zero attention. If I tried to put any pressure on them, they would immediately complain about it to Ponomaryov. The most ridiculous thing about this was that it was me who had to deliver their complaints to the CPSU Central Committee. Thankfully, Vilior wrote addendums to those complaints, explaining that it was not my fault that Karmal and Taraki had no interest in unifying their factions.”

“So what are you so happy about now?” asked Bubnov.

“Why not? People who are close to me just became the leaders of the country!”

“Don’t you understand that this isn’t necessarily good for you? In a couple of weeks, if not earlier, nobody will allow you to come close to them. They themselves will hardly want to know who you are. They will have contacts on the level of the ambassador, or even higher Moscow officials. So, who are you going to be working with? With *nafars****? Or with your servant Guliam?”

“Maybe now he will get appointed an adviser to the leadership and will become a Lawrence of Arabia!” someone joked.

Petrov paid no attention to the joke, but realized the truth in what Victor had said. He saddened, and lit a cigarette.

“However, you got an important award. To be awarded the Order of the Red Banner in peacetime is a great achievement,” said Yura Kitaev.

“Nobody has given me that order yet,” replied Petrov.

Orlov-Morozov read the cable brought by Khotyaev with a blank look on his face. Having

* Taraki’s nickname in Russian, literally “cockroach”

** Karmal’s nickname

*** Pejorative indicating those belonging to the lower cast (e.g., servants, guards)

finished, he concluded, “The composition of the leadership seems right. The distribution of positions will be good for this government. Allow me to add that Taraki, when distributing positions, took into consideration the recommendations of the CPSU Central Committee, which were relayed to him during their last meeting at the TASS office. That should make our leaders feel more optimistic.”

“I think they are overly optimistic as it is,” Volodya observed.

“Perhaps, but when people are overly excited, they often become very disappointed at some point.”

“Aren’t you optimistic?”

“Well, there is some optimism, but I don’t know what it will evolve into. I believe that the leadership of Afghanistan will soon change. I’m afraid that we’ll soon have to implore Khalqis and Parchamis to make peace with each other again.”

When Major General Zaplatin received the order to take a business trip to the German city of Potsdam, he wasn’t surprised. Zaplatin served as chief inspector of the Soviet political headquarters of infantry and often had to travel to the German Democratic Republic on business. In the late seventies, when the Cold War was at its height, the Soviet Union concentrated enormous military resources in the West. The territory of GDR was used particularly heavily for military purposes because it was close to the positions of a potential enemy. The top Soviet leadership watched over Soviet troops in Germany very closely. Commissions and inspections were constant. If World War III began, soldiers and officers of the Soviet troops based in the GDR would be the first to perish in nuclear war. But before dying they were tasked with the duty of annihilating all of Western Europe.

This time, General Zaplatin headed the group of inspectors. His wife, seeing him off, was not particularly emotional and only asked him to return by her birthday at the end of May. He gave her a kiss, told her not to worry, and went to the airport. Upon arrival in Potsdam, the commander of the division who was meeting the inspectors at the airport told him, "Comrade General, a member of the Military Council of the Group of Soviet Forces asked you to get in touch with him immediately."

Zaplatin called his colleague from the commander's office.

"What happened?"

"Vasily Petrovich, do you have your personal belongings with you?"

"Yes, I do," responded Zaplatin.

"Go back to the airport immediately. A plane is waiting to take you back to Moscow."

General Zaplatin, who knew better than to be surprised by such changes in plans, transferred leadership over the inspection to a colleague and flew back to Moscow. There he was told, "Your task is to urgently visit Epishev at the main political directorate of the armed forces."

General Epishev headed the main political directorate of the Soviet Union's armed forces. He handled the armed forces as a representative of the CPSU Central Committee in that position, and Zaplatin had rarely seen him before that day.

Epishev asked him, "Did you know that a revolution happened in Afghanistan?" Without waiting for a response, he continued: "People of the Democratic Party overthrew the former regime and proclaimed a progressive course of development for the country. As you know, we do our best to support progressive forces. This is our international duty. The Afghans have requested that we send an adviser to the head of the political directorate of their armed forces. Certainly, they do not have a military-political directorate there. Everything must be built from scratch. I

have consulted on whom to send there with the minister of defense, and we picked you as our candidate. What do you think?"

General Zaplatin thought for a second to ask for his wife's consent, but upon looking at Epishev bulldog-like expression, he felt his reply should be immediate. He had no choice. "Thank you for your trust in me. I will do my best," he proclaimed.

"OK," softened Epishev. He picked up the phone and said, "Boris Nikolayevich, we have found an adviser for the military-political directorate. General Zaplatin, a very experienced political officer, has great overall characteristics. Will you accept him?" After the conversation was over, he told Zaplatin: "Go to the Central Party Committee to meet with the secretary of international affairs, Ponomaryov. He'll instruct you further. You should leave for Kabul within two days."

Having left Epishev, Vasily Petrovich realized with horror that he didn't know anything about Afghanistan. He had heard by chance of the revolution, but was not interested in it in the slightest. Revolutions and coups happened all the time, why should this one be special? Never in his life had he thought that he might someday find himself in Kabul. Now he had to go to the Central Committee to talk with high officials and respond to their questions. He should at least find out some basic facts about this revolution in Afghanistan. Surely there would be some news in the stacks of *Pravda* at the political directorate of the armed forces. Zaplatin, as a good military political officer, knew that one could find an answer to any political question in *Pravda*.

Soon he was scanning the pages of the main Soviet newspaper for information on Kabul. He found a tiny article titled "Message of Kabul Radio." It reported that a military coup had taken place in Afghanistan, and that authority in the country had been transferred to the Military Revolutionary Council. Zaplatin thought, "isn't it strange that this note has arrived from London,

through Reuters? Do we not have our own correspondents in Kabul?" In the April 29 issue, on page five, in the International News section, he found a slightly more detailed article. Zaplatin took a pen and copied it all into his notepad.

"Islamabad, April 28 (TASS). According to messages arriving from Afghanistan, a state coup d'etat occurred there yesterday. The declaration of the Revolutionary Council, announced on Kabul radio by the head of the Air Force Headquarters, Colonel Abdul Qadir, states that: 'Armed forces have taken responsibility for defending society, national independence, freedom, and the honor of the Afghan people.' The Revolutionary Council added that it would conduct its domestic politics based 'on defending the principles of Islam and democracy, freedom and protection of individual rights, and would work to achieve progress in all spheres of Afghan society.'"

Here, he thought, they do not call it a military coup, but a state coup, and the article makes it sound like the plotters have noble goals. But why is this information coming from the capital of Pakistan rather than from Kabul?

On April 30, again from Islamabad, a TASS correspondent reported that the situation in the Afghan capital had stabilized, the shops were open, and the Revolutionary Council had assumed full control of the situation in the country. The next day, a TASS correspondent from Kabul reported that, "The Revolutionary Council of the Democratic Party of Afghanistan had elected the outstanding revolutionary leader Nur Muhammad Taraki as the chairman of the Council and head of state and prime minister."

Vasily Petrovich flipped through the pages of the newspaper with disappointment. You couldn't really get an idea of the situation from those articles. "The situation is being stabilized"; "All power has been transferred into the hands of the people"; "The new authorities represent the interests of suppressed groups of the population"; "Optimism is wide-spread"; "The reasons for

the revolution stem from the sharp social inequalities and intensification of class struggle.” Here, this was important: what happened in Kabul was no longer being called a coup, but a “national democratic revolution.”

An hour later, Zaplatin walked into the reception room of the office of the secretary of the Central Committee. However, the head of the International Affairs Department of the Central Committee did not receive him right away. As his assistant explained, Boris Nikolayevich Ponomaryov was called to see Leonid Ilyich Brezhnev, and Zaplatin should confer instead with Ponomaryov’s deputy, Rostislav Alexandrovich Ulyanovsky. Later, the general would be told that the 74-year-old Ulyanovsky was one of the key figures in the Oriental vector of Soviet politics. He had spent many years studying the southern underbelly of the Soviet Union: India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. At a young age, he had worked at the Soviet embassy in Kabul. He was a well-known theoretician, had a PhD, and had authored many books. He was highly regarded by Oriental specialists. Zaplatin was also told later about another important period from Ulyanovsky’s life. He was a victim of Stalin’s repression—he had spent five years in labor camps, and fifteen more in exile.

But on that day in May, the general knew nothing about the man he was about to meet. If he ever visited that building of the Central Committee, he would go to a different section, which housed the department in charge of administering defense issues.

When the general entered the office, Ulyanovsky turned, smiled, and invited him to sit at the large conference table in his office. Ulyanovsky was tall, gaunt, with a cap of white hair. Fortunately for the general, Ulyanovsky did not ask him any questions regarding the recent events in Afghanistan—Epishev’s blessing carried a lot of weight. The host sat across the table from Zaplatin, bidding Zaplatin to help himself to tea and snacks and explaining to him that there was

much to discuss.

Ulyanovsky started from afar. It was obvious that he knew the Middle East very well. He cited the dates of important historical events, the names of monarchs, their ministers, generals, and diplomats. He spoke about the national specifics (“More than twenty different peoples of five ethnic groups live in this country”), he briefly touched upon the problem of the relationship between the Pashtuns and other ethnic groups (“Pashtuns are the majority, and their position in Afghan society is generally considered to be a privileged one”). With great surprise, Zaplatin discovered that there were lots of Soviet advisers in the Afghan armed forces (“Now there are around three hundred Soviet military advisers there, if I am not mistaken, and the attitude of Afghans to them is most positive”). For a long time, Ulyanovsky talked about the religious factor, particularly that of the extreme right wing of the Islamic clergy (“This is where the forthcoming danger lies”). He told about the formation of the People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan in 1965.

“Well, you are a general!” Ulyanovsky suddenly exclaimed. “How can one talk to a military man without using a map?” He took a map of Afghanistan from his bookshelf. The map was worn out, its margins filled with pencil marks. “Here—I will show you the future theater of your military activities.”

Without any difficulty, he identified the areas on the map in which the Pashtuns, Tajiks, Hazaras, Beluji, and Uzbeks were concentrated. He emphasized the fact that the central power in Afghanistan is traditionally weak, and that tribal authorities are the ones who make decisions. “But when external danger appears, all internal contradictions are forgotten, and the Afghans, as a unified force, fight against the enemy. This must be remembered.”

Then they began to talk about party politics. Zaplatin felt more comfortable in this realm. The political clichés were very similar.

“The PDPA is the first party in the history of Afghanistan that reflects the interests of the working class and all working people,” said Ulyanovsky. “The main goal of the revolution is to provide a transfer of power from bureaucratic, trade, and land-owners’ circles to the new national democratic government, which represents the broader interests of the masses, including mid-level and small national bourgeoisie. Perhaps you, as a political officer, would think of it as bizarre, strange, and almost a blasphemy, but the national bourgeoisie in such countries is capable of playing a progressive role. However, you will see for yourself when you start working that the party pays a lot of attention to the participation of the working class in the revolutionary movement. There are about 300,000 workers—proletarians—in the country, which is a significant force.

“As to the revolution that took place on April 27, it started with a bloodless state coup d’etat that was carried out by PDPA members. But political revolution in Afghanistan is simultaneously social. It cannot limit itself to the replacement of one ruling regime by another one, while preserving the main property rights. In this sense, our—and from now on your— friends will have to do a lot of work. Very soon you will see for yourself how backwards this country is, how many problems must be resolved there.”

He then proceeded to discuss the situation inside the PDPA, explaining the factional conflicts and the difficulties that Soviet comrades had in prodding Afghan comrades towards unification. He described the leaders: Taraki, Karmal, Amin.

“From the outside, the current situation within the PDPA seems favorable. It has been a year since the Khalqis and Parchamis stopped fighting each other, but regrettably,” Rostislav Alexandrovich remarked with sadness, “in reality everything is much more complicated. I’m afraid that now, once the euphoria from the quick victory passes, those contradictions will flare up with

renewed force.

“According to our forecasts, the revolution was supposed to be carried out by the Parchamis. We all thought that they were more decisive and better organized, but we miscalculated. In fact, the opposite has happened. And now, I’m afraid, you will have to deal with the Khalqis, who will receive all the key positions in the government. They are also better positioned in the armed forces.”

After the meeting with Ulyanovsky, Zaplatin was introduced to the secretary of the Central Committee. Ponomaryov, whom the general had only seen in newspaper photos or on TV, energetically stood up to greet him and shook his hand. Ponomaryov acted much more authoritatively than Ulyanovsky. One could make no mistake about the status of Ponomaryov as one of the most distinguished Communist Party veterans, who began his career along with Stalin.

As Zaplatin had already received an extensive briefing with Ulyanovsky, Ponomaryov proceeded to discuss the political situation and Zaplatin’s tasks in Afghanistan. There were lots of them, but the most important one was to make sure that the Afghan armed forces were well prepared for the forthcoming battles against counter-revolution. Ponomaryov seemed to have no doubt in the inevitability of such battles.

By the end of the meeting, Ponomaryov said: “We, I mean the Central Committee of the CPSU, do not have eyes and ears in Afghanistan yet. We have to fully rely on the information of the KGB and GRU. This is why we made the decision to send a group of competent party advisers with the goal of strengthening the People’s Democratic Party. That would ensure that the Central Committee would have many more opportunities to be privy to the internal developments of the PDPA. But that should not preclude you from assisting us as well. You should quickly and honestly inform us about every significant development. Naturally, you should do it via your proper

channels of reporting.”

When the meeting was over, and both Ulyanovsky and Zaplatin walked out of Ponomaryov’s office, Rostislav Alexandrovich asked whether the general had any questions.

Zaplatin had many questions, but he sensed that he had already taken too much of these high officials’ time. He also realized that from now on, he would have to seek the answers to his questions on his own.

“Thank you, Rostislav Alexandrovich.” Zaplatin was about to say good-bye when he heard himself ask, “Don’t we have our own correspondents in Kabul?”

“Why do you think this would be the case?”

“Before visiting the Central Committee, I looked through the last issues of *Pravda*. All of the news about the Afghan revolution came either from London or Islamabad.”

Ulyanovsky burst into laughter. “That’s our Department of International Information being overly cautious. Zamyatin and his boys are concerned that the Soviet Union will be accused of taking part in the coup. That’s their way of distancing us from what happened. We do have correspondents in Afghanistan, and you will meet them very soon.”

Having returned home, the general apologized to his wife. “Alas, you’ll have to celebrate your birthday without me,” he admitted. In three days, he left for Afghanistan as the head of a large contingent of military advisers.

This is how General Zaplatin found himself in Kabul on a bright May morning in 1978. He was greeted at the airport by a young Afghan dressed in civilian clothes who introduced himself in good Russian as Head of Political Directorate of the Armed Forces Iqbal Waziri.

“Welcome, Comrade General. If you’re not tired, I suggest we start working right away. Comrade Hafizullah Amin is waiting for us.”

One evening Starostin was called to an urgent meeting by Agent “Khost.” The meeting took place on a street on the side of Kuh-e Samay Mountain. In the evenings, the street was empty. The only other creatures that could be heard and seen in the street were enormously fat rats running through dumpsters. Agent Khost was an elderly, white-haired, heavy-set Afghan who had difficulty breathing because of a heart ailment. Earlier, he had worked in the Foreign Ministry of Afghanistan, occupying high positions there. Upon retirement, he decided to start a business. Khost was not a very wealthy man, but he was well off. He lived in a big, beautiful house, had a nice family, successful children and grandchildren.

Khost was an undeclared member of the PDPA (Parcham). He didn’t occupy any positions in the party. His name was not listed on any party lists. He was not so much a party member as a personal friend and trusted man of Babrak Karmal. Babrak would often meet with his girlfriend and co-party member Anahita in Khost’s house, and would invite his confidants there for secret conversations.

Seeing Khost, Valery took him by the arm and pulled him into the shadows, greeting him in traditional Afghan style as they walked. Then Valery asked about the cause of this emergency meeting.

“What happened, Ustaz?”

“Now, in my home,” Khost said, nodding in the direction of his house, “sit Babrak Karmal, his brother Baryalai, Nur Ahmad Nur, Anahita Ratebzad, Bareq Shafi’i, and other leaders of the Parcham faction. Officers—Parchamis who are offended by Taraki and Amin—have come to seek their advice. Those officers say that there’s no way for them to make peace with the new

* A very polite Afghan term connoting respect, such as from a student to a teacher.

authorities. Many of them have already been fired from their positions. Their subordinates of just a few days ago have been appointed as their bosses. There are Parchamis who are afraid that they or their family members may be physically eliminated. They are asking the leaders of Parcham to authorize an armed assault with the goal of taking down the Khalqis and establishing a just, democratic regime in our country.”

Starostin felt as if Khost’s words had electrocuted him. Holding back his emotions, he asked the agent, “And how do Karmal and his allies react to such appeals of the officers?”

“Comrade Karmal is trying to calm them down. He is saying that all of the problems with the Khalqis will be solved in the process of an enormous, constructive joint effort. He is saying that the Khalqis will finally understand that those grandiose tasks that the party and all progressive forces of the country face can be resolved only under the condition of party unity.”

“What’s the reason for such a negative attitude of the new leadership of the country toward Parchamis?” asked Starostin. “What are Taraki’s and his comrades’ grievances against you?”

Valery could guess what the answer would be; however, he needed to hear the agent say it.

“First, Taraki and Amin accuse us of collaboration with Daoud’s regime. They wouldn’t tell you, the Soviets, that, nor would they write about it in the newspapers. They know all too well that we were trying to cooperate with Daoud according to recommendations from Moscow. But what they tell their low-ranking party members is that the Parchamis are collaborationists of the criminal regime of Nadirs*. Second, they say that Parchamis are cowards and did not participate in the uprising on April 27, and this is why not only can they not pretend to occupy positions of importance in the state, but they don’t even deserve their current positions. It is true that many

* After the April revolution, in order to uncover the reactionary nature of all the preceding regimes, Afghan propaganda introduced the term “regime of Nadirs,” meaning that the regimes of King Zahir Shah and Daoud were identical to the pro-British regime of the Emir of Afghanistan Nadir Shah.

Parcham officers were passive on the day of the uprising. Some of them didn't understand what was going on, and this is why they were fighting on the side of Daoud, to simply fulfill their military duty. But this is only because they knew nothing about the uprising. I can understand Amin to some degree. In order to start the uprising, he had to lean against only his most trusted officers. He needed those who would not dither. If Amin would have expanded the number of those who were aware of his plans, a discussion might have started. And then you, Soviet comrades, would have learned about it, and would certainly have tried to prevent the coup. However, it is unfair to say that Parchamis didn't participate in carrying out the revolution at all. There were real heroes among our comrades who were fighting beside the Khalqis."

After a meeting that lasted almost forty minutes, Valery whispered to Khost, looking straight into his eyes, "Did you invite me to this meeting yourself, or were you asked to do so by Comrade Karmal?"

Khost calmly and sincerely, it seemed to Valery, responded: "I myself wanted to meet with you and tell you these things. I didn't discuss in detail my message with Karmal. However, I told him that I must tell our Soviet comrades what is currently happening within our party."

"And how did Comrade Karmal respond?"

"He said that we have no secrets from our Soviet friends."

The next day, Starostin waited for Ershov's arrival at the parking lot in front of the Soviet embassy. When Ershov parked the car, Valery greeted him and said that he needed to talk.

As soon as Ivan Ivanovich heard about the preceding day's meeting with Agent Khost and the internal disagreements in the PDPA, he became furious. He started to scold Starostin in a particularly vicious manner, accusing him of lack of awareness of the political and operational situation and of being ignorant in regards to the political processes that were under way in

Afghanistan. Valery attempted to explain to his boss that nothing that he had disclosed reflected his views or interpretation of events, and that he had added nothing to what the agent, whom Ivan Ivanovich had known personally since he had been a KGB operative in Kabul many years ago, had told him yesterday.

“Then your agent is a traitor!” exclaimed Ershov hysterically.

“He is not my agent. This is a KGB Foreign Intelligence agent. I didn’t recruit him. You were the one who ordered me to work with him,” responded Starostin.

“Never mind. Soon you will not have to work with these people.”

Having said that, Ershov quickly walked towards the entrance of the embassy. In order to cool down, Valery took a walk around the embassy compound. He looked at the fresh grass, at the blooming bushes and flowerbeds. After that he went to see Orlov-Morozov. Orlov-Morozov was not alone in his office. He and Khotyaev seemed to be working on some document. Starostin shared the information that he had received at the previous day’s meeting with Khost with them. He also mentioned Ivan Ivanovich’s reaction to the briefing. Khotyaev became emotional. Orlov-Morozov asked, “Do you know, Valery, what is the purpose of Ivan Ivanovich’s mission to Kabul?”

“I think he came to replace Osadchiy, to be our boss.”

“No, he came to conduct negotiations about the establishment of the KGB Representative Office in Afghanistan. So, with that in mind, do you think he needs your information about the intensifying contradictions within the leadership of the country? Now he has a different perspective on what’s happening, and different goals.”

“So are you telling me that we will not be reporting this information to Moscow? This is such an important signal!” Khotyaev said with agitation.

“It’s Ivan Ivanovich, now, who has the right to sign off on your cables. He now is the senior

operative boss,” mused the deputy chief. “What can I do?”

When meeting with their Soviet friends, Nur Muhammad Taraki and Babrak Karmal were normally eager to drink alcohol. However, when meeting with each other they would drink only tea. Right after the coup, the two leaders met over tea to discuss how best to organize the May 1 celebrations and capture in the media the atmosphere of overwhelming joy among the Afghans on the occasion of victorious revolution. They were deciding what to do with the property of Daoud and the monarchical family. They agreed to organize a sale of the possessions of the former rulers of the country. However, the most important issue they discussed was drafting a list of the new leadership in Afghanistan. After some deliberations, such a list was put together. Both factions in that list were represented almost evenly.

There was no hesitation in regards to the appointment of Abdul Qadir as the minister of defense. Who else could be appointed but him? He was a hero of the uprising, a colonel, a member of the PDPA, who voluntarily and without any complications handed the power that he had captured to the party!

Another hero of the revolution, Aslam Watanjar, could also be a candidate for this position. However, he didn't aspire to become the minister of defense. He hadn't asked for anything for himself. So Taraki and Babrak decided to give him the position of deputy prime minister and minister of communications.

And how could they not include in the government such popular figures as Suleyman Layeq and Bareq Shafi'i? They were poets, the idols of the youth. However, the problem was that there was only one relevant ministry portfolio for the two equally deserving candidates. In the end they decided to break it into two positions: minister of information and culture and minister of radio

and television. Bareq Shafi'i got the former post, Suleyman Layeq the latter. Both Parchamis were satisfied with their appointments.

At first, Taraki had some doubts regarding the candidacy of Nur Ahmad Nur to the position of minister of the interior. However, Karmal reminded the head of the Revolutionary Council that Nur's father, Abdul Sattar, one of the most influential landowners, had a personal army (several thousand warriors from the Pashtun tribe Popalzai) who were deeply loyal to him. Those people could be used in the interests of the new regime anywhere, including the tribal territories. In addition, Nur Ahmad Nur had been the head of the underground organization of Parchami officers for a long time. Many former Interior Ministry officers were members of that organization. Based on these arguments, Taraki accepted Nur's candidacy.

Karmal was hoping that he would be included in the first meeting between the "Soviet friends" and Taraki after the victory of April 27. He sincerely believed that he would become the second-in-command in the PDPA, and that Taraki would not make any important decisions without consulting him. However, for some reason the Soviet ambassador had invited only Taraki to come to that crucial first meeting. So the new head of state made sure that Karmal took notice of that, knowing that it would greatly hurt Karmal's self-esteem.

The tipsy and jovial chairman of the Revolutionary Council, having just returned from a meeting with Puzanov in the former Palace Ark (now renamed House of the Peoples), invited Karmal to his new residence in the middle of the night. Hafizullah Amin, who was always ready for action, with his radiant American smile, was present at the meeting.

Taraki informed his guests that the Soviet comrades very much liked the list of the top Afghan leadership that was drafted by him and Karmal. He said that tomorrow morning he would officially approve and make the list public. Karmal responded that he had no objections and was

glad that the Soviet comrades had approved of the list. How could they not? It was almost perfectly divided between the Khalqis and the Parchamis.

With those words, Amin stopped smiling, glanced at Karmal, and said irritably, “Comrade Karmal, when will it be over? Khalqis, Parchamis...almost a year has passed since our unifying party conference. It’s about time to get accustomed to the fact that now there is only one united People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan. There is no Khalq wing or Parcham wing anymore.”

Taraki, who hadn’t expected such a turn of conversation, looked at Amin with interest.

Amin continued, theatrically raising his eyes towards the sky: “Comrades, I propose to call an expanded meeting of the PDPA’s Politburo as soon as possible. There we must resolve the issue of not only the prohibition of splitting tactics within the party. We also must outlaw use of terminology linked to the past split of the party by ordinary members of the party. I propose to harshly punish, including expulsion from the party ranks, any attempts to promote fissures in the party.”

Karmal understood immediately that Amin was informed about his meetings with Parcham officers and about their demands to bring the Khalqi regime to order. Babrak thought that it was possible that Amin’s people were among those officers. He wondered who they might be.

“That’s correct,” replied Taraki. He jumped up from his seat and started to pace around his office. “What do you think, Comrade Babrak?”

“I’ve always supported the unity of the party, and today I am one of the most determined supporters of breaking down barriers between the party members. We have never had disagreements in regards to the goals of our work. You and I, all of us, are communists and Soviets. However, we have not always agreed with each other about specific steps in regards to the tactics

and the cadres of the party. Unfortunately, hostility in our ranks penetrated the hearts of a number of our people. I think that at the expanded meeting of the Politburo we must openly discuss this matter in the presence of our comrades.”

“Then let’s call such a meeting. We can discuss everything then and make decisions,” summed up Taraki. He poured a glass of whisky on the rocks for himself and drank it, neglecting to offer a drink to the others.

Karmal, as a deputy chairman of the Revolutionary Council and the first deputy prime minister, was allocated a huge office in one of the buildings in the former Ark Palace compound.

Everything in that office was disconcerting to its new master. A residue of dust covered the hardwood floors, antique furniture, and walls of the office. The walls that had been painted baby blue twenty years ago and the dark gray ceiling were framed by thick, black cobwebs. The smell of rot emanated from inside the office. The walls smelled like rot, the wooden crossbeams smelled like rot. The space was filled by massive French furniture from the nineteenth century. The size of the office and the enormous desk, thought Babrak, was there to emphasize his diminutive figure and the absurdity of his position.

Very soon, the Parchami leader understood that he had been caught in a golden cage. He did not, and would not, have any real power. All of his high titles were pure fiction and formality. He was called and visited only by his closest friends, and all they talked about was how Taraki, Amin, and their cronies shared power, committed illegal acts, and discriminated against Parchamis as if they were enemies and not party comrades. Babrak would listen to the complaints, promising to resolve the issues, but what could he do? He had no power and no mechanism to leverage the situation. No documents were brought to him for signature. No important information was shared with him. Nobody asked him about candidates for vacant positions. He

wasn't involved in any affairs of the state. After the May 1 celebrations, Taraki didn't invite him to visit any more.

Were Karmal Babrak a regular bureaucrat, he might have liked such a situation. He could just sit in his cavernous office, give commands to sleepy subordinates, and respond to interview requests from Afghan and foreign journalists. He could also use his "administrative resources" to enrich himself, as many others did. He could acquire funds through trusted sources for investment in businesses. He could have arranged beneficial positions for friends and relatives—why not?

But Babrak Karmal never was and would never become a bureaucrat. He was a professional revolutionary. He was not interested in material wealth. He needed action. He wanted to address and agitate crowds of many thousands. He knew that once he voiced an idea from his podium, it would immediately turn into something tangible. People would be indignant or excited. People would do what he told them to do. Karmal subsisted on action. He was going crazy from sitting at his desk doing nothing.

It seemed to him that Taraki had completely forgotten about him. What happened? Is Taraki still in a state of euphoria from the recent victory? Has that joy driven him into prolonged drunkenness? Perhaps he is simply ill? However, Karmal sensed something considerably worse. Taraki was waiting for the right time to deliver a decisive blow against Parcham. Babrak could foresee the beginning of a major campaign that would push him and his comrades out of the political life of the country.

Sitting in his huge, unfriendly office and looking at his silent telephones, Karmal thought unhappy thoughts. Surely Taraki was aware of the growing dissatisfaction among the Parchamis, who by now were being expelled from the armed forces and the state apparatus. Most likely, Taraki has received reports that these people have come to me, their leader, demanding that I

organize and lead another, “truly socialist,” revolution, the goal of which would be the elimination of the Khalqis. But if I decide to do something like this, the new uprising would most probably fail, and my friends and allies would be executed. Soviet comrades will perceive my friends and me as a mad gang of traitors, who oppose the socialist development of Afghanistan. It seems that I have been transferred from one prison to another. Yes—now I am a bird in a golden cage. It would have been better for me to stay in Daoud’s prison. It would have been better for me to have been shot. Then I would have become a hero of the people, a *shaheed* who died for the happiness of Afghans. Who am I now?

Once, Nur Ahmad Nur, who had just been appointed as the minister of the interior, stopped by Karmal’s office with a list of candidates for the top positions in his ministry. Karmal read the document attentively and asked several questions. Having received Nur’s detailed explanations, he agreed with him.

The list consisted of representatives of the past regime, mostly criminologists, technical specialists, and administrative assistants. There were several people there who had direct connections with the major feudal lords and tribal leaders. The list consisted of an equal distribution of Khalqis and Parchamis. Karmal wrote his resolution on the list: “*Agree.*”

Then Nur took the document to Taraki to obtain his signature. Taraki looked at the list and, without saying a word about the candidates, told the minister to consult on the matter with Comrade Hafizullah Amin. Nur Ahmad Nur, not trying to hide his irritation, challenged Taraki.

“Why should the minister of foreign affairs deal with appointments in the Ministry of the Interior?”

Taraki smiled, looked at Nur, and responded, “Well, son, you know as well as I do that Comrade Amin was the head of the underground organization of army and police officers before

the April Revolution.”

The minister of the interior went back to Karmal. Karmal was furious. His face darkened.

“What should we do?” asked Nur.

“What can we do? You cannot approve the appointment of your cadres without the signature of the prime minister. Taraki will not sign it without Amin’s approval. You have no way out.”

While the second-ranking official in the PDPA and the state was ignored, the head of the Foreign Ministry was enjoying notoriety as the “Hero of the Revolution.” Hafizullah Amin, who had been a little-known operative of the PDPA until recently, had suddenly reached celebrity status. When members of foreign press corps wanted to interview representatives of the government of Afghanistan, their questions would be answered solely by Comrade Amin. He was always ready to personally meet with anyone, regardless of the status of the foreigner or the importance of the issue. He managed to attend all of the public gatherings and participated in all of the public events. His face was constantly smiling in the front pages of Afghan newspapers. He was always by the side of the leader, “great Comrade Taraki.”

Once, in May, on a Friday, which is a day off in Afghanistan, Amin called the Soviet embassy using a regular city line. The operator, who did not know Farsi, did not understand who was calling and what the purpose of the call was. Fortunately, Budrin, the deputy director of the Soviet Cultural Center and an expert on the Orient, happened to be walking by when the operator handed him the receiver and asked him to “talk with the foreigner.”

“This is Hafizullah Amin, the first deputy prime minister and minister of foreign affairs of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan. Hello, Comrade!” said the voice in the receiver. “I was trying to reach the office of Mr. Puzanov, but there was no answer.”

“Hello, Comrade Amin. I am the deputy director of the Cultural Center of the USSR in Afghanistan, Ruslan Budrin.”

“Comrade Ruslan, I need to talk with your ambassador. I would like to make arrangements to meet with him as soon as possible. Can you arrange our meeting?”

Budrin covered the phone with his hand and asked the operator, “Where is the ambassador now?”

“He went fishing in Naglu. He’ll be back in the evening.”

“Comrade Amin, our ambassador is currently not at his residence. He is inspecting one of the important sites of Soviet-Afghan cooperation in the southeast of Kabul. Most probably he will arrive in the second half of the day,” Budrin interpreted the operator’s information.

“Comrade Ruslan, could you give me a call right after the ambassador returns? Please, write down my phone number. I will be working at my office and will await his return to the embassy.”

After dictating the phone number, Amin decided to continue the conversation with Budrin.

“Comrade Ruslan, how did you perceive our revolution?”

“I think that the April Revolution can become the decisive step towards the expeditious movement of Afghanistan in building a new, progressive society,” responded Budrin, who was well versed in the political jargon and spoke with great confidence.

“Why did you use the word ‘can’? Does this indicate that you have some doubts regarding our intentions or the creative potential of the PDPA?”

“No, Comrade Amin! I used the word *can* because I understand how powerful the feudal reaction inside your country can be, and how vicious can be the response of international imperialist circles. They will do everything possible to stop the development of Afghanistan towards progress, democracy, and socialism. I think you and your comrades have a lot of work to

do.”

“I have no doubt that we will succeed in this work if the Soviet Union will provide us with the necessary assistance,” responded Amin. Then he continued, “You know, Comrade Ruslan, I would very much like to meet with you personally, so that we can talk about the work of the Soviet Cultural Center in detail. By the way, you speak our language very well, and I think you are a wonderful person. Come to my office. Let’s meet. Please call the number that I left for your ambassador and I will send a car to pick you up right away.”

With these words, Amin hung up.

Ruslan Budrin immediately contacted the second secretary of the embassy, Dmitry Rurikov. Dmitry came to the service building of the embassy without delay. Ruslan told him about Amin’s call and their conversation. Then Budrin and Rurikov played chess in the foyer of the embassy into the evening. They were waiting for the ambassador’s return.

“I don’t understand how the minister of foreign affairs can be calling personally on a city line to a foreign embassy and engage in a conversation with a staff member of a cultural center. In addition, he was interested in *my* opinion of their revolution and invited me to visit him!” ruminated Budrin. “You tell me, Dima, would Gromyko call some foreign embassy this way and start talking with some person, who does not even have diplomatic status? I don’t think this would be possible!”

“You know, Ruslan, these Afghan leaders are not yet corrupted by political positions and the complexities of protocol. They know nothing about the status scale or protocol. They don’t care whom they’re talking to as long as they achieve their goal. These are not the same sorts of people that you see here at this embassy or in high offices in Moscow. Call Amin tomorrow. For sure, he will send a car here and he will meet with you. And for as long as it takes, he will be

interested in offering help to improve the propaganda activities of your cultural center. But if you call him in a month or two, best case scenario he will pretend that he's never heard of you. But I really don't recommend that you call him. If you do, then Alexander Mikhailovich and other comrades would not understand it. You should avoid it by all means."

When Puzanov returned to the embassy, he received a short briefing from Budrin and then, having invited Rurikov to join him, headed to his office to place a call to the minister of foreign affairs of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan.

Amin was putting forth initiatives not only in the foreign policy sphere. From his first days in power, he attentively followed every development in the power structures: the army, the interior, and the security services. No appointments in those organizations would be confirmed without his approval. He started with the ministry of defense, by firing from positions of any significance not only Karmal's supporters, but even politically neutral officers. Parcham members were removed and replaced by their former subordinates. Among those subordinates were primarily Pashtuns from the Paghman tribe of Haruti, who were Amin's relatives.

At the same time, many respected generals of the former regimes were arrested or dismissed, including those who actively assisted the development of Soviet-Afghan military relations. Colonel General Farouk, former head of the General Staff, later the head of the military academy, and a personal friend of Marshal Zhukov, found himself in a dirty and freezing cell in the Puli-Charkhi prison. By the end of November 1978, and only due to the very aggressive efforts of Victor Bubnov, that old, sick man, who was one of the most distinguished military figures, was released from prison.

General Zaplatin was very surprised when, immediately upon his arrival in Kabul, he was

invited to meet with Minister of Foreign Affairs Hafizullah Amin. Iqbal Waziri, the newly minted head of the political directorate of the Afghan armed forces, who picked him up at the airport, explained to Zaplatin: "It's revolution! We have so much to do. Comrade Amin took upon himself responsibility to supervise the army, to help the police and the security services. He works around the clock."

Vasily Petrovich liked Hafizullah Amin right away. He was energetic, full of ideas, and had the desire to immediately realize those ideas. His every expression exuded enormous energy. Conveying his sincere joy on the occasion of the arrival of the military political adviser, the Afghani leader clarified his expectations for Zaplatin.

"You see, Comrade General," the deputy premier was saying energetically, impatiently looking at Iqbal, who was interpreting, "we link great hopes and expectations with our army. The Soviet revolution was carried out by the proletariat and the poorest peasants. In Afghanistan the revolution was made by the army. Officers and soldiers fulfilled the role of the proletariat in Afghanistan. The army should become a filter for thousands of people, molding them to become resilient and motivated defenders of the revolution.

"I wouldn't hide from you that the situation is complicated. After the great April Revolution, we were forced to dismiss almost all of our former commanders, to remove all unreliable officers and generals. They were replaced by young, not very literate people. You will get to meet them soon. Don't be surprised if some of them will seem to you to be unprepared. They should be educated and molded. This is where the army's political branch should play a decisive role.

"This is Comrade Iqbal. The party tasked him to create the political branch of the armed forces. It shouldn't concern you that he is a civilian. Comrade Iqbal graduated from the department of philosophy of Moscow State University. He is an old and trusted party member. Daoud threw

him in jail for his covert activities in the armed forces. His wife and child died of starvation. People like Iqbal represent the very best of our party.”

Zaplatin liked that Iqbal had difficulties interpreting Amin’s last words. He blushed, got confused, and began to stutter before he fell silent.

Amin ordered him to continue interpretation: “We have no secrets from our Soviet friends. They must know who is truly a hero and who is merely pretending to be one. We’ve selected cadres for political work in the army. Please meet with them individually and then share your opinion of them. I ask you to be honest. If you don’t like somebody, tell me that, so we can take your evaluation into consideration.”

Amin told the guest about himself—that he had studied in the States and that he spoke English very well. He also touched upon the situation in the party: “The party ranks are growing in strength and number. The party is becoming a serious political force.”

They agreed to meet weekly. “But if you have questions that require immediate attention, come to me at any time,” said Amin.

After the meeting, Iqbal drove Zaplatin to meet with Taraki. Taraki turned out to be very different from Amin. The general secretary made an impression of a very soft-spoken, smiling grandfather, very different from Amin’s intense personality. It seemed that he was not in any hurry and was prepared to discuss any topic with his guest, including weather in Kabul and the role of political officers in the Soviet armed forces. As to the working instructions, Taraki’s tasks for Zaplatin were similar to Amin’s: to create a political branch in the Afghan army according to the Soviet model, because the army was designated to provide the main support of the new regime.

Zaplatin dedicated the next few days to meetings with selected officers. There were roughly

thirty of them. Two of them were immediately deemed unfit by Zaplatin. One of them was Taraki's personal assistant, Gulabzoi, a twenty-five-year-old officer of military transportation aviation. His candidacy was proposed for one of the top positions at the political directorate of the armed forces. During the interview, Gulabzoi stated that he would like to combine his work in the political branch of the armed forces with the position of the aide-de-camp to the head of state. It became obvious during the interview that this revolutionary was not particularly enthusiastic about the ideological party work. Zaplatin didn't like that.

"It won't work that way," Zaplatin told Gulabzoi. "You'll need to choose one or the other."

"I would have a reliable deputy; he would take care of things."

"You have no idea how important the position is that you would like to take. This person will become the heart and engine of the political branch of the armed forces. There can be no shared responsibilities."

"We'll see," grinned Gulabzoi, and walked out of the office.

The general had no idea that Gulabzoi was like an adopted son to Secretary General Taraki, who adored him. The next day, Taraki attempted to softly convince Zaplatin to show more appreciation for Gulabzoi's wishes. But Zaplatin remained stubbornly unconvinced.

"If you want to create a functioning organization, then trust me. If you want to create an impostor, then do as you wish."

Taraki had to agree with Zaplatin. Amin's nephew, a graduate of the Leningrad Academy of Communications, was appointed to the position instead of Gulabzoi. He spoke good Russian and Zaplatin found him suitable for the task. As a result of it, Zaplatin's reputation in the eyes of Amin grew significantly, without particular effort on the part of the Soviet general.

He maintained good relations with Taraki as well. The head of state received Zaplatin more

often than any of his other Soviet friends. Even the head of the Soviet military advising mission, Lt. Gen. Gorelov, could not visit Palace Ark as informally as Zaplatin. Neither Taraki nor Amin could make peace with the fact that Lt. Gen. Gorelov was Daoud's trusted associate, who accompanied Daoud in his trips across the country. Zaplatin spent a lot of energy trying to convince Afghan leaders that Lev Nikolayevich Gorelov was loyal to the spirit of the revolutionary changes and that his extraordinary military experience would be very useful to them. Eventually Taraki and Amin made peace with Gorelov's presence, but they never fully trusted him.

Zaplatin enthusiastically started to educate selected officers. It was not easy for him to devise a curriculum. He was not quite sure how to begin. What should the first, the most important topic be? As a political apparatchik of the Soviet school, he suggested formulating the topic as such: "The Great October Revolution, Its Historical Meaning, Lessons, Conclusions, and the Need to Safeguard Its Results." It sounded quite good from the point of view of a Soviet political operative, but Amin had his doubts. "Who will write about it? Nothing is yet stable in our party, and there is little clarity in regards to many issues. Let's wait."

Most probably, Amin had in mind that he was the one who eventually should be featured in the discourse as the inspiration behind the success of the April Revolution, but now he had to share his celebrity status with Taraki, Qadir, and Watanjar. In addition, Karmal could mix things up.

After some thoughts, Vasily Petrovich offered a variant on the title: "Our Northern Neighbor, the Soviet Union."

Amin was pleased with this suggestion. He wanted Zaplatin to spend as much time as necessary covering this topic.

Zaplatin allocated ten hours to studying the USSR and soon realized that this was the right

decision. The Afghans listened to his lectures with great interest. They were fascinated by the Soviet Union.

It is possible that whoever reads this book now will not believe us. Why would Afghan officers be so attracted by the Soviet Union but not by the West, where life seemed so much more comfortable? But that was really the case. Surprisingly, those Afghans who had been sent to study civilian professions or military and police affairs in American or Western European (mostly Federal Republic of Germany) universities expressed disappointment in the Western lifestyle, and occasionally even hostility towards it, upon return to Afghanistan. On the basis of that hostility towards the West, they would eagerly become agents of Soviet intelligence and members of the PDPA. They were much more pro-Soviet than their comrades who were educated in the USSR.

Why such disdain for Western society? When the Afghans were asked to explain this, they usually could not articulate the reasons behind their bias. Some talked about immorality and vague concepts such as conscience and honor. Some didn't like that they, officers of the Afghan army, were perceived in the West as second-class and were treated with thinly veiled disdain. Attempting to explain their dislike of the West, the Afghan officers could not formulate the essence of their observations. People of traditional society were repelled by the Western destruction of traditionalism and the dominance of individualism over collectivism. At the same time, in the USSR, those traditional collectivist values were carefully protected and codified in the Moral Code of the Builder of Communism.

Zaplatin was different from many other Soviet advisers who went to Afghanistan (and also to Angola, Ethiopia, Cuba, etc.) to make money. He treated his work with great responsibility. This is why he soon had to deal with unpleasant issues. For example, he discovered that many of his colleagues, instead of working ten- or twelve-hour days as would be expected during

revolutionary transition periods, would only remain in their offices until lunch. After a substantial lunch and a few shots of vodka (for disinfection) they would stay home or visit with colleagues of a similar work ethic.

It was most unpleasant when Vasily Petrovich noticed that even Lt. Gen. Gorelov acted in this fashion. He issued a direct warning to Gorelov: "You have so many issues to resolve and you are never in your office after lunch!" Gorelov was surprised, confused, and tried to turn it into a joke, but the situation was far from being resolved. A week later, Zaplatin came to the officers' club Askari, which housed the secret communications facility of the Soviet General Staff. What did he see in the middle of the day but the Soviet top brass relaxing on the lawn, fresh after a sauna, wrapped in sheets, drinking beer, and chatting away. Head of the Soviet military advising mission Gorelov was among them. Vasily Petrovich became indignant. He pulled Gorelov aside and said, "I'm going to telephone the head of the General Staff and report your behavior. You will be out of Afghanistan in twenty-four hours." He continued on to the communications room. Gorelov, wrapped in his sheet, dashed after him. "I give you my word as a Communist and a Soviet officer that this will not happen again. Forgive me," he pleaded.

It never happened again. About six months later, Gorelov thanked Zaplatin. "Thank you, Petrovich. You saved me from big trouble." But Zaplatin made many enemies among Soviet intelligence officers stationed in Kabul.

The information about the situation in Afghanistan that was sent to the Center used different channels and that created a problem. Vasily Petrovich tried many times to convince his colleagues to coordinate their reports before sending the information to Moscow. Different evaluations of the situation were confusing to the ministries. The KGB resident and the GRU chief were sending their bosses in Moscow contradictory analyses, against their verbal agreement to

coordinate recommendations with each other. Zaplatin, naively perhaps, lamented the situation. “How could this be? Where is their communist honesty? I thought we agreed about certain things.”

However, Zaplatin’s ideals and expectations regarding professional and personal honesty were shaken by some of the Afghans with whom he worked. One such Afghan was Minister of Defense Abdul Qadir. Having met Zaplatin for the first time, the minister said, “Don’t believe me fully, Comrade General. I can trick you, lie to you easily. You don’t know our language and Afghan specifics, so here’s my advice to you: don’t believe everything you’re told.”

Noticing that Zaplatin simply could not understand what he meant, Qadir explained: “You Soviets say what you think. We Afghanis are different. Words don’t mean anything. Don’t believe our words.”

“What, then, should I believe?” asked Zaplatin.

Qadir evaded a straight answer. “If you live here long enough, you will understand what I mean.”

Qadir was a mystery to Zaplatin. He was short, stocky, had a rough peasant face and very cunning eyes that seemed to have a life of their own. They never betrayed Qadir’s real feelings. The minister of defense belonged neither to the Khalq nor Parcham factions. They said that he was playing his own game.

Later, during the meetings, Qadir never returned to that initial conversation. However, he liked to joke about political work in the armed forces.

“Too bad we didn’t have political operatives in the army before,” he would comment, sounding serious. “Now I understand that this was a major oversight. But you will agree, Comrade General, that the automatic rifle should speak before any political operative.”

“Not necessarily,” replied Zaplatin patiently. “Sometimes the right word at the right time

resolves a conflict better than any automatic rifle, and one might be spared having to ever fire.”

Qadir laughed and replied, “Well, well...”

Deputy Resident Orlov-Morozov invited Khotyaev into his office. He put a pile of typed documents in front of him. “These are the materials of the plenary session of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the PDPA that took place yesterday.”

“Who translated this into Russian?”

“The embassy staff. I am glad that they will be dealing with the translation from now on. The ambassador has sent the information cable regarding the plenary meeting of the Politburo. I already read it. It says that the meeting of the Politburo is a big step in achieving full unity within the PDPA. I have my doubts, to tell you the truth. Tell me what you think,” Orlov-Morozov said to Khotyaev.

Vladimir took the materials and went to the common room. He sat on a chair, lit a cigarette, and began to read the documents. The plenary meeting of the Politburo of the Central Committee took place. Taraki delivered a report titled “About the April Revolution and the Tasks of the PDPA.” It seemed like he wrote the text of the report himself. The salient point of Taraki’s message, as it appeared to Khotyaev, was that the principles of Pashtun tribal democracy (the practice of resolving all issues during *jirga*) and of the Marxist-Leninist theory of the democratic-socialist state almost fully coincided. Taraki, in his report, stated that while other, particularly European, countries need decades or even centuries to build a socialist society, Afghanistan already has a cultural predisposition to a democratic-socialist state because of the mentality of its citizens, particularly Pashtuns. At the end of his speech, Taraki recommended some new members be brought into the Central Committee—namely those officers who secured the victory during the

April Revolution.

Then Karmal took the floor. He called everyone's attention to the necessity of collegial collaboration among all members of the PDPA, independent of their past Khalq-Parcham affiliations. He also deemed it unacceptable to rudely interfere in the professional activities of the party leaders based on the fact that they did not belong to the Khalq wing of the PDPA. Without specifically challenging Taraki's thesis about the "predisposition of Afghanistan to a socialist model of development," he called the attention of the participants to a number of factors that presented an obstacle to the progress of Afghan society towards socialism. Among those factors, he named the evil designs of imperialist states, internal reactionary politics, and the economic backwardness of the country. Karmal asked the members of the Central Committee to not consider domestic reactionary forces, such as feudal lords, tribal leaders, and clerics, to be enemies. He appealed to them to not regard the physical elimination of dissenters as a solution, but instead to consider them much as respectful children would regard their aged, old-fashioned parents.

Hafizullah Amin spoke next. He expressed full agreement with Comrade Taraki's ideas. However, he criticized Comrade Karmal for his tolerance of "the domestic reactionary forces," hinting that Babrak had particular reasons to sympathize with some of "the vampires drinking the blood of the Afghan people." He emphasized the importance of the taboo on using the terms that referred to former divisions within the party. "Now, in Afghanistan, there is no Khalq or Parcham," proclaimed Amin. "I demand these terms be prohibited not only within the party ranks, but in the media as well. There exists only the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan. We are all members of this party. Those who disagree are free to leave our ranks."

"Interesting twist," thought Khotyaev. "This way Amin is using the prohibition of the party terminology against Karmal and his people. In Farsi, the name PDPA sounds like Hezb-e

Democratic-e Khalq-e Afghanistan. So the 'brand' Khalq remains in the name of the party, and its banner, while mentioning the name of the other faction is prohibited."

Khotyaev wrote a cable about it to the Center. In the cable, he concluded that the plenary meeting of the Politburo, rather than strengthening the foundation for a unified party, had instead caused further divisions in Khalq-Parcham relations, which in turn could provoke a new split.

He shared the text of the cable with Orlov-Morozov, who, after having read it, commented, "The issue of Afghan terminology will hardly be appreciated in the Center, but as an analyst, Vladimir, you've done a very good job."

Then the deputy resident, along with Khotyaev, took the cable to Osadchiy, who had just returned from Moscow. Vilior Gavrilovich, who looked well after his medical leave and vacation, immediately signed off on the cable to the Center.

The next day, the KGB resident in Kabul gathered his staff members, including technical personnel and a driver, for a meeting. Briefly, with a hint of pride, he informed them that Chairman of the KGB Yuri Vladimirovich Andropov, Secretary of the Central Committee of the CPSU Boris Nikolayevich Ponomaryov, and many other high-level party and government officials had received him during his stay in Moscow. Andropov tasked the operatives to use all available intelligence resources to buttress the new regime against the pressures of domestic and external political conditions. Andropov warned that nobody, under any circumstances, should interfere in the domestic affairs of the sovereign state. He stated that the operatives must not become arbiters in the resolution of controversies within the PDPA, which had become more acute since the April Revolution. At the same time, Yuri Vladimirovich asked us to reconsider maintaining covert contacts with representatives of the Parcham wing of the PDPA. Were Taraki to find out about our contacts with Parchamis and begin to suspect us of covert actions against the regime, a significant

blow would be delivered that would undermine trust in our relations.”*

Vilior Gavrilovich went on to discuss the meeting with Kryuchkov. Kryuchkov must have been aware of Andropov’s doubts regarding the Parchamis. This is why he suggested that contacts with all agents from the Parcham wing of the PDPA be frozen. He also issued instructions to halt any contacts with potential agents, who were being developed, with ties to Parcham. Having shared stories about the news, conversations, and meetings in Moscow, Osadchiy said that he would be discussing specific issues with each operative one-on-one.

While talking about his Moscow vacation, Vilior Gavrilovich didn’t include any details as to his health condition or medical treatment related to his recent heart attack, as if there had been no heart attack.

Alexei Petrov was the first to be called to a meeting with the resident. “You know, Alexei, you will most probably have to leave Afghanistan soon. How long have you been here?”

“A little over four years.”

“Are you tired of it?”

“I don’t know. It is difficult to say.”

“Well, you have served your time here well. They are preparing your successor in Moscow. You have done a lot, and deserve the high award that you’ve received. The KGB leadership regards you highly. You have used your cover as a TASS correspondent well. I know that the TASS leadership was pleased with your work. I am confident that your career will take off. You know well that your presence here in Kabul caused some anxiety in PDPA circles. If a conflict between Karmal and Taraki begins, both of them will run to you to make sure that you contact the Soviet

* This mode of thinking, at the time, was characteristic of Andropov and the leadership of Soviet intelligence. It should be mentioned that the CIA did not conduct intelligence work among the ranks of the anti-Shah opposition in neighboring Iran. It relied on Iranian Special Services (SAVAK) to receive information about the situation in the country. As a result, the Americans missed the advent of the Islamic Revolution.

leadership on their behalf, using covert channels, although now they could simply use open lines of communication. This potential tension must be addressed. Do you understand me, Alexei?"

Alexei nodded in agreement, although he was upset by the resident's words. He remembered what Victor Bubnov had told him recently ("It is not so good that people who are very close to you, Alexei, are now leading Afghanistan"). Petrov understood the arguments of the Center, as described by his chief, and he could not but agree with him. However, he was reluctant to leave Kabul. He knew that he would be offered work in other "nice countries," but he had no interest in those "nice countries." Alexei knew Farsi well, but had difficulty speaking English. He thought of the boredom of having to go to Europe or America. It would bring prestige and good income, but would pale in comparison with the excitement of working in Afghanistan.

Victor Bubnov was the next to be summoned to Osadchiy's office.

"Which agent of yours, Victor Andreyevich, would you say you could part with in light of what I said at the meeting? With which Parchamis could you cut ties?"

Bubnov responded firmly and calmly: "I am not going to part with any of them. Vilior Gavrilovich, you understand as well as I do that those agents are also my friends. You can demand anything you want, but you can't ask me to betray my friends."

"Victor, I don't want you to think that this is what I am asking of you. Besides, I know that you don't have a single Parchami as an agent, but I had to inquire formally. You understand that this is an order from the Center. One does not argue with it.

Starostin was next to come to the chief's office. "Valery, I think that, in light of the new instructions, you should freeze Khost and cut out Agent 'Artem,'" ordered Osadchiy dryly.

"Why?" replied Starostin, who was well prepared for such a conversation and spoke in a similar tone.

“Because they are Parchamis.”

“Vilior Gavrilovich, don’t you think that cutting out Parchami agents would be erroneous? First, this action would discredit our intelligence work. The instruction of the Center allows for the possibility of failure or the leaking of information. People in the Center, for some reason, think that my contacts with my agents may become known to somebody else, besides you and the Center itself. Why do they underestimate us so? What gave them the idea that Khost or Artem would leak the information or fail us as our agents?

“Second, I cannot understand why the Center is not interested in information from the Parcham wing of the PDPA. It’s the cradle of complex and dangerous machinations. How can we find out about their plans and intentions if we cannot maintain contacts with agents from the faction? If they do something crazy tomorrow, the Center will be the one to blame us for our inability to follow the political developments in the country. What, then, would we tell Moscow? Shall we write that you, our dear leaders, prohibited us to work with our Parchami agents? Would the Center accept such an excuse?

“Third, why is the Center so afraid that Taraki and Amin will be informed about our Parchami contacts? Let’s suppose that, however unlikely, it will become known to them. Our friends Taraki and Amin will certainly survive that, and moreover, become more obedient! What would they do without us? Where will they go? To the West? To China? In that case, their closest allies would tear them to pieces.

“Fourth, you know better than I do how difficult it is to freeze an active agent. It would have a very traumatic effect on his psyche. Under current circumstances, Khost and Artem—both of whom are very intelligent—will clearly perceive even temporary rejection of them as cowardice and betrayal on our part. However, let’s suppose we succeeded in freezing Khost and Artem. What

if something happens that would require their assistance? How would we unfreeze and reactivate them? Would they be willing to resume their assistance to us?”

Osadchiy didn't interrupt Starostin's monologue once. When the operative finished speaking, Vilior Gavrilovich responded firmly: “Valery—I know that you're partially correct. But this is an order coming straight from the top. We have no right to object. There is no use in pondering the order. You'd better think about how best to fulfill the order properly.”

“What is there to think about? Khost was never an official PDPA member, and was never known as a Parcham supporter. His name was never listed in any party lists. He never held any party positions, nor did he participate in any party functions. He is retired today, a former bureaucrat from the Foreign Ministry. All of this is described in his file, which is kept in the Center's archives. I think we could always introduce him as a representative of the old regime, who will be used by us for receiving information from the ranks of Afghan aristocracy, royalty, and Daoud's old bureaucracy, as well as counter-revolutionary circles. Shouldn't we be able to collect such information?”

Osadchiy smiled and nodded.

“With Artem, the situation is different. He was indeed an active Parchami. He has been involved in revolutionary activities since high school. He was followed by scores of his peers, and spent time in prison. Even today he maintains a rapport with the highest-ranking Parchamis. However, as it is well known to Parchamis and Khalqis, those outside of the PDPA, Babrak personally kicked him out of the party about three years ago. It was a big scandal then. If you remember, after the scandal that occurred because of Najibullah marriage to a woman of royal descent, Babrak Karmal issued an order to the members of his faction. The order obliged them to seek approval from their immediate party supervisors before making a decision about marriage.

Having decided to marry his current wife, Artem went to Karmal. But he prohibited him to marry the woman, who, at some point, rejected Babrak himself. Artem defied Karmal's order, got married, and was kicked out of the party. So neither Khost nor Artem are members of Parcham."

"Do you know, Valera, why I like you so much?" Osadchiy's mood had lifted. "I like you for the honest glow in your eyes and for your ability to convince people—but don't get ahead of yourself. One can convince a person only when that person wants to be convinced."

"Thank you, Vilior Gavrilovich. So it is my understanding that I may continue working with Khost and Artem."

"Yes, but you must cut down the number of your meetings with them. Exercise extreme caution in dealing with them. Demand that they follow the rules of conspiracy without deviation. What we'll do is list those useless 'dead souls,' who are merely on the books as our agents, as Parchamis."

"And what about Ivan Ivanovich? Would he not report on us?"

"Don't worry about Ivan Ivanovich," Osadchiy concluded. "We will manage somehow."

In the middle of July, Victor Bubnov met with Agent "Mahmoud." Mahmoud seemed to be in bad shape. He had lost a lot of weight, had jaundiced skin, and dark circles under his eyes. He moved slowly and seemed to be less agile because of the wound that he had received during the coup on April 27.

Victor warmly embraced the agent and, for the first time since their acquaintance, called him "brother." They drank vodka with salty snacks and discussed politics. Victor's goal was to find out what was happening in the party. He wanted to hear the Khalqi point of view in regards to the contradictions between the factions, and about possible results of those contradictions. Without

beating around the bush, Victor asked his guest, “How are your relations with Comrade Karmal and his Parchami friends developing? We understand that there is some friction within the party.”

“You know, brother, the situation within the party and the country’s leadership is very complicated,” replied Mahmoud thoughtfully. “To tell you the truth, I don’t like Karmal and his friends. It would be better without them in the party, and in Afghanistan.”

“Why is that?”

“They use too many words—they’re cunning intellectuals—too remote from the needs and aspirations of the Afghan people.”

Hearing these words, Victor remembered an incident that had occurred in a crowded bus when he lived in Leningrad. At that time, in the late sixties, Victor was a young officer with border troops, who arrived in Leningrad from Kirgizia. He had been sent to Leningrad to attend the KGB Academy, where he studied Persian, and was preparing to be transferred to work in Foreign Intelligence. The bus had been crowded, and a man in a hat had stepped on somebody’s foot, inciting a spiteful reaction in which the man was accused of being a nasty intelligentsia wearing a hat.

While working in Afghanistan, Victor thoroughly researched all of the embassy and KGB Residency’s briefings describing the split within the PDPA. He also read analytical reports from the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Soviet Academy of Sciences. Those reports contained important ideas stemming from Marxist-Leninist theories regarding the role and place of the small bourgeoisie in the proletariat revolution. However, the reports didn’t mention anything about the hostilities between some strata of the population and the “intelligentsia in hats.” Bubnov thought, “Perhaps the party split stems from those very hostilities.” He asked the agent to continue.

“I think that Karmal will soon ask Comrade Taraki to send him somewhere as an

ambassador. He, on the one hand, cannot make peace with the isolation in which he now finds himself. On the other hand, he can't support the Parchamis who demand his immediate action to overthrow Taraki. Naturally, he will not agree to serve as an ambassador to capitalist countries like America and the Federal Republic of Germany, and nobody will appoint him as ambassador to the USSR."

"How do you know that Parchamis are plotting to overthrow Taraki?"

"I know this from Assadullah Sarwari, the head of Afghanistan's State Security Service. He is a former pilot and my close friend. Do you know him?"

"No, I don't—however, I've heard of his cruelty, and how he tortures and kills people in the AGSA prison*."

"Believe me, Comrade Sarwari is a very honest man and a real revolutionary. If he shot or tortured anybody, it must have been required for the success of the revolution. Every day Comrade Amin sends many people with murky intentions to Comrade Sarwari. Most of them are Western spies, reactionaries, terrorists. Remember what Lenin used to say: "the revolution that cannot defend itself is a failed revolution." If you and I were in Sarwari's position, we would do the same—perhaps we would be even more cruel."

"So, Sarwari is aware of what's going on around Karmal?"

"What do you think? Sarwari is the one who sends 'fake' Parchamis to Karmal."

"Do you know those people?"

"Certainly not. Why would Sarwari name them, even to me, his friend? I certainly wouldn't feel comfortable asking him about it. If you need to know, ask your adviser, who came from the KGB to assist Comrade Sarwari. He can ask Sarwari."

* AGSA is the main directorate in the defense interests of Afghanistan, analogous to the Soviet KGB.

“Do you think Karmal has any idea that such ‘fake’ Parchamis are being sent to him?”

“I don’t know for sure if Comrade Karmal has any specific information about AGSA’s activities against him. Even if he doesn’t have such information, I have no doubt that he understands what’s going on. He’s very smart, very clever, and is a strategic thinker. Sometimes I believe that he can foresee events, almost as though he has telepathic abilities.”

“So what will happen next?”

“As I already told you—Karmal and his friends will ask to be sent abroad as ambassadors, or to take various other positions in foreign countries. They will want to sit on the fence to see what happens tomorrow. Most probably they will not return to Afghanistan. In any case, we won’t allow them back.”

“I didn’t know that you were such an uncompromising opponent of Parchamis. You never mentioned anything like that to me earlier.”

“‘Uncompromising opponent’ is too strong an expression. Who am I to be such an uncompromising opponent of Comrade Karmal and his famous allies? These are very well known figures in Afghanistan. We may become enemies if Comrade Taraki declares him to be the enemy. To tell you the truth, I really don’t like Parchamis. I know lots of bad things about them. I don’t trust them. However, until Comrade Taraki gives the order, I cannot consider them to be enemies.”

“Has Taraki said anything to that effect?”

“Not yet. I think there is only one sworn enemy of Karmal and the Parchamis in our party. That man is Comrade Amin.”

“Why do you think so?”

“You know that Comrade Karmal is Comrade Taraki’s deputy in every position. If anything should happen to Taraki, like a death or sudden illness, then Karmal would assume leadership of

the state and party, which would mean the end of Comrade Amin's political career."

"What are Amin's ambitions?"

"I think his one and only ambition is to replace Comrade Taraki. This is why it is necessary for him to eliminate Karmal and other Parchami activists."

"Brother, do you think that after the Parchamis are eliminated, Amin will decide to destroy his competitors in Khalq?"

"There are no rivals to Comrade Amin among us Khalqis. After Comrade Taraki, he is number two—Taraki himself makes it very clear. Besides, I am confident that if Comrade Amin decided to plot something against any of us, Comrade Taraki would not allow such unjust actions."

Victor Bubnov sensed that this conversation with Mahmoud was very important. The next day, he described everything that he had learned from the agent in a cable addressed to the Center. However, there was no response to that cable. It seemed that the KGB leadership was not interested in the internal relations in the ruling party of Afghanistan. The Moscow leadership thought that there was a pro-Soviet regime in Afghanistan headed by a pro-Communist politician, and that they should support this regime and Comrade Taraki regardless of the internal politics of the regime. Let the Afghan comrades sort out their internal disputes themselves.

In the beginning of the summer of 1978, Afghanistan was flooded with advisers from different Soviet organizations. The Central Committee of the CPSU sent their representative adviser, Valery Kharazov, to Kabul. Kharazov was the first Communist Party adviser, and was followed by many Communist and *Komsomol* instructors from the USSR, most of whom began arriving in 1980. Soviet Communist advisers were appointed in all provincial committees, in all departments of the PDPA Central Committee. Initially, Kharazov had no desire to be involved in

assisting the April Revolution, and when he was initially tasked with his assignment in Afghanistan, his response to Secretary of the Central Committee Kapitonov was negative. He had genuine reasons to be concerned about taking the job, as he suffered from pain in his legs and lower back.

Kharazov was the second secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Lithuania, candidate to the Central Committee of the CPSU, and a deputy of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. According to the *nomenklatura* scale, that made him a part of the Soviet elite. Why, then, was he the one chosen to go to Afghanistan? Perhaps it was because two years earlier he had successfully fulfilled an analogous assignment as a Communist Party adviser in Angola. His health excuse seemed to be valid as far as the Central Committee was concerned. However, Kharazov made the mistake of frequenting the tennis court as soon as he started feeling better. Kapitonov received word of this indiscretion and changed his tune, musing, “so you can chase a tennis ball but you refuse to go on an important party assignment!”

He gave the Lithuanian secretary three days to pack his bags.

Ulyanovsky, in his instructions to Kharazov before the trip, said: “I’m not sure what you will be doing there upon arrival, but take my advice. Try to avoid three things: a conflict between the Central Committee and the army, a conflict between the government and the clerics, and between the government and the tribes. There have been many cases in the history of Afghanistan when offended tribes came to Kabul to overthrow the government.

Ponomaryov was equally brief: “The situation in the party is complicated. Khalq and Parcham, despite our best efforts, still continue to squabble. The unification that occurred last year is purely a formality. Before, we collaborated with the Parchamis, and we know them better. Incidentally, find out how to refer to the number two in the party—is it Babrak Karmal or Karmal

Bobrak?”

This was the extent of the instructions that Kharazov received before his departure. He understood that people in the Central Committee weren't particularly inclined to chat about Afghanistan. It seemed to him that his colleagues were irritated by the topic. For some reason, it was unpleasant for them. Only a few months later, he would figure out the source of their discomfort: every day, complex, unclear information would arrive from Kabul that required a response, but nobody knew quite what to say. Hence his directions to, “figure things out once you arrive.”

In Afghanistan, as soon as Kharazov stepped onto the tarmac, he was greeted by a short man in Afghan military uniform without insignia. “Welcome, Valery Innokentievich.” Kharazov was glad to see the general. General Gorelov had earlier served as the commander of a paratrooper division in Lithuania, where they had been friends. Now, the senior military adviser became the mentor of the newly arrived Kharazov, and agreed to introduce him to the local scene. However, Kharazov learned of the most acute problem almost immediately upon his arrival in Afghanistan, during his first meeting with the head of the Afghan state. Taraki, after the ritual greetings, told Kharazov about the situation in Afghanistan and assured him that socialism would be instituted there before long. He advised Kharazov to be in constant contact with Comrade Amin, who would assist the newcomer in resolving all the issues that might arise. Then, after having dismissed the other participants at the meeting, Taraki asked Kharazov and Ambassador Puzanov to remain seated. When the others left the room, Taraki said that Babrak Karmal wanted to make a statement to their Soviet comrades. Karmal entered, greeted his Soviet guests coldly, and sat down. An uncomfortable silence descended on the office. Then Karmal began speaking in a voice cracking with emotion.

“I ask our Soviet comrades,” he said, his burning glare not leaving Taraki’s face, “I ask our Soviet comrades to report, to let the Central Committee of the CPSU know that an abnormal situation exists in our Central Committee. There is a lack of any democracy or collegiality in the work of our Politburo. All power in the country and the party has been usurped by two men: Taraki and Amin. They prepare and approve the most important decisions without any collective discussion. They ignore the opinions of the other members of the Central Committee and the Politburo. I am removed from making decisions regarding party and government affairs. It is as if I live in a golden cage. Under these conditions, I should either feign illness or leave and assume a post as ambassador to another country.”

Kharazov was confused. He had been warned of disagreements between the Afghan leaders, but he had no idea that they ran so deep. How could he react to this? Sensing his colleague’s dismay, Puzanov handed the adviser a handwritten note: “After Karmal leaves, ask Comrade Taraki about arranging a separate meeting with him to discuss these sensitive issues.”

Not allowing Karmal to finish his soliloquy, Taraki slammed his fist on the table. “That’s enough! All of it is a lie! There is a full democracy in our party and our state. Every decision is made in full collegiality, but if somebody disagrees with those decisions, we won’t hesitate to steamroll over them to achieve our goals.”

Kharazov was taken aback at this scene. “This is astonishing,” he thought to himself. “I was told that Taraki was a kind, elderly man who wouldn’t harm a fly. This conflict cannot be moderated. They are not only rivals but deadly enemies.”

Babrak Karmal stood up and dryly bid his Soviet guests goodbye. His eyes were bloodshot and darkened with anger. When he left the room, Taraki again slammed the table. “We will steamroll our enemies,” he declared.

Indeed, there would be many more Soviet party advisers in Afghanistan, from provinces, republican Central Committees, and even from the Soviet Central Committee. Some of them, without thinking, would enthusiastically try to transfer the success of Soviet development onto Afghan soil. They would create party committees, conduct party meetings, and organize party schools, all in the Soviet style. Their speakers would quote Lenin, Brezhnev, and Taraki (and later Amin, Karmal, and Najibullah). Their oaths would pledge loyalty to the achievements of the great April Revolution. Communist *subbotniki**, classes dedicated to studying Lenin's writing, socialist competitions, delegates, congresses—in short, all of the Soviet ideological infrastructure—would be mimicked in Afghanistan. All of the emptiness, the hypocrisy, and the formalism would be dragged there from the Soviet Union. In fairness to Kharazov, he rose above such superficiality. He truly wanted to get to the essence of reforming life in Afghanistan, and if he gave any advice, he gave it sincerely and thoughtfully.

Kharazov found a fervent pupil in Amin, with whom he met frequently. Amin wanted to know in great detail about the infrastructure of the CPSU, the role of average party members, and the leading organs of the party. Once, he mentioned that it would be a good idea to name the Afghan party the “Communist Party” as in the Soviet Union, until Kharazov managed to dissuade him.

Amin was very quickly rising in the power structures. Not only was he the minister of foreign affairs, but he also handled the armed forces, special forces, and police. He became deeply involved in economic issues and the development of the party ideology. Gorelov and Zaplatin liked him. Both generals were fond of Amin's enormous energy, industriousness, and his eagerness to take on responsibility. Amin was perceived in a much more favorable light in comparison with

* Weekend civic projects where Soviet citizens “volunteered” to work. [Translators note]

other bureaucrats. The military advisers objected to Kharazov's concerns. Yes, he was rigid, but this was the Orient. In Afghanistan, it couldn't be otherwise—you are either on the top or on the bottom. He may be assuming too much responsibility, but he is not usurping it from anybody. Taraki regularly bestows more and more authority upon him, iterating his belief that nobody is better suited to take on his tasks. Isn't that the case? He may be merciless towards the Parchamis, but the Parchamis could be blamed for lots of things. They were malcontents, demagogues, and liars. Among Soviet military advisers, Amin was highly respected. He was considered to be the main hero of the revolution, the engine behind the current regime's momentum, and the future power of Afghanistan.

Kharazov was in no hurry to arrive at any conclusions about the situation in Afghanistan. He was watching, listening to different opinions. One thing that became obvious to him was that no negotiations or promises would help achieve peace or agreement within the PDPA. The divisive process had become irreversible. This meant that the Soviets would eventually have to make a choice.

During the three months that Kharazov worked in Kabul, Taraki saw him only twice, and it was obvious that he wasn't particularly eager to receive him. The Afghan leader, who was greatly enjoying his reign, was not eager to take advice on how to rule his party from some provincial Soviet adviser from Lithuania. Taraki was rapidly losing his grip on reality. He had come to consider himself as a historical figure, as the father of the nation. He spoke of the forthcoming victory of socialism as a matter that had already been decided. What did Kharazov have to offer him? Some comrades from the Soviet Union obviously did not understand the peculiarities of Afghanistan. They did not appreciate the significance of the April Revolution, nor did they believe in the imminent arrival of socialism. What was there to talk with them about?

Kharazov was tasked by the Central Committee of the CPSU to meet with the Afghan general secretary and deliver a special message, the essence of which was the need to strive for party unity. When they finally met and Kharazov passed along the message, Taraki demonstratively refused to discuss the issue and hissed through his teeth, "Please pass along my gratitude to your leadership for their concern."

When the PDPA Politburo met on June 17, Amin, using his customary revolutionary rhetoric, glorified "our beloved leader and teacher Nur Muhammad Taraki," evaluated the situation within the country and in the party, and sharply criticized Karmal and his allies. According to Amin, Karmal and his cronies, instead of participating in constructive party work, were preoccupied with intrigue and were more interested in deepening existing divisions within the party and Afghan society. Amin asked directly whether such people belong in the leadership of the party. Taraki remained silent. Unable to contain his emotions, Karmal took the bait. "If the comrades believe that such rhetoric makes sense, we are prepared to leave our positions in the party and state."

Amin's trap had worked. "Then I propose a vote," he said, "to send Comrade Karmal and his allies to serve in diplomatic posts in foreign countries." It was over within minutes. Amin's suggestion was adopted by a one-vote majority.

Karmal was appointed to be ambassador to Czechoslovakia. His brother, a Central Committee member, Mahmoud Baryalai, was appointed to head the Afghan diplomatic mission in Pakistan. Another Central Committee member, Dr. Najibullah (the future general secretary and president), received an ambassadorial appointment in Tehran. The minister of the interior, Nur Ahmad Nur, was appointed as ambassador to the United States. Anahita Ratebzad was to become the ambassador to Yugoslavia. Central Committee member Abd-al Majid Sarboland was appointed

as consul general in Bombay.

Before leaving Afghanistan, Karmal secretly gathered his comrades. During that meeting they decided that, in his absence, the minister of planning and economics, Sultan Ali Keshtmand, would become the leader of their faction. Security agents working among the Parchamis immediately reported the outcome of the meeting to Hafizullah Amin.

The KGB operatives also knew that the Parchamis were contemplating some action. Perhaps this is why Puzanov refused to receive Babrak Karmal on the eve of his departure from Kabul. The ambassador understood that Amin would immediately find out about the meeting. On Friday, June 21, Karmal, Baryalai, Sarboland, and Anahita suddenly appeared at the gate of the Soviet embassy. However, after a short exchange with the embassy guards, the cortege of four cars turned around and drove away. The guests were told that the ambassador was out of the embassy, despite the fact that Alexander Mikhailovich was in his office. The group drove to the villa where the TASS correspondent resided. Alexei Petrov, whom Karmal knew well, had already left Kabul and was replaced by a new KGB operative, Leonid Biryukov. Biryukov had just arrived in Kabul and was unaware of the depth of disagreements between the Khalqis and Parchamis. He knew about Karmal and his allies only through the Moscow KGB dossiers. The KGB operative was astonished when, at about 10 p.m., his doorbell rang and he saw the four famous Parchamis outside the gate of his residence.

“I am Babrak Karmal,” Karmal introduced himself to Biryukov, “and these are my comrades from the Central Committee.” He introduced his colleagues to Biryukov.

“Yes, I know you, Comrade Karmal. I am very glad to see you,” mumbled the astonished operative. “Please, come in.”

“It would be better,” said Karmal, “if you would permit us to park our cars in your

courtyard.”

“Yes, of course.” Biryukov opened the gate, and the four cars drove into the courtyard. There were personal bodyguards to the Central Committee members beside the drivers in the cars.

Karmal entered the foyer of the residence, where he had earlier been received by Petrov and Petrov’s predecessor Gavrilin on numerous occasions, as if he owned the place. Anahita, with her six-month-old baby in her arms, the son of Baryalai, went upstairs, into the custody of Biryukov’s wife, Nina. Najib and Sarboland sat in the hall.

“We must urgently meet with Comrade Puzanov,” Karmal explained. “Our earlier request for a meeting was rejected. However, the matter is urgent and cannot wait.”

From what Karmal said, Leonid understood that his guests were convinced that their Soviet comrades did not know how the Politburo decision to send the Parchamis into honorable exile had been made. The visitors were convinced that if their comrades knew the truth, they would immediately intervene with the Khalqis and restore justice.

Biryukov was a newcomer to the Kabul Residency, but he knew certain things about the situation that had evolved by the summer of 1978. Listening to Karmal, he was surprised by how naive Karmal was to place faith in his Soviet comrades’ ability and willingness to aid his cause. But what was to be done? He couldn’t simply kick the guests out, and there they sat, patiently waiting for his assistance.

Leonid served tea and said that he would walk to the embassy and try to find Puzanov there. The embassy staff member grinned when telling him that the ambassador had gone fishing, and claimed that nobody knew when he might return. Leonid saw Ivan Ivanovich Ershov in the KGB Residency. He listened to his colleague and issued “valuable” advice after some rumination.

“Find out what they want and report back in the morning.”

Midnight was approaching. Biryukov didn't have any success at the embassy, and went home. Upon his return, he put every bottle of alcohol available in the residence on the table, along with whatever snacks he could find, and sat down to listen to the complaints of his Parchami visitors. They made some telephone calls, but were speaking Pashto, which Leonid couldn't understand. Some words that were familiar to him and the tone of the conversation sounded like they were calling their military contacts and asking for something.

The situation was completely ridiculous. In the middle of the night, the most prominent Afghan opposition leaders, the enemies of the ruling regime, sat and talked away in the residence of a KGB operative. They openly cursed Taraki and Amin. They used Biryukov's telephone to make the calls, which was surely tapped by Afghan security services, and it looked as though they had no intention to leave until morning. Besides, how could they leave? Very few people would dare to drive through Kabul during curfew, even if they knew the right passwords. Obviously the four Parchamis' situation was precarious, to say the least.

Late at night, Biryukov made a final attempt to solicit assistance from outside. He remembered that the former KGB resident Gavrilin, who had arrived in Kabul for a short visit, currently occupied the nearby villa. Valentin Trofimovich Gavrilin was an experienced member of Ershov's group and was well versed in Afghan politics. However, the colonel, as everyone else, preferred not to get involved. Having learned that the embassy staff and Ershov had left Biryukov to deal with the problem on his own, Gavrilin told his neighbor to wait until the morning, when he would be able to report the situation to his superiors.

The guests left Biryukov's villa at sunrise. Saying good-bye, Babrak Karmal looked into Biryukov's eyes and said with confidence, “You and I, Comrade Leonid, will be seeing each other

again.”

With a clear sense of relief, having locked the gate, Biryukov sat on the cool stone steps and lit a cigarette. Suddenly a helicopter flew right above the roof of his villa, circling the perimeter, then returned and hovered directly over his house. Leonid grew anxious, thinking, “they could throw a grenade and that would be the end of it.” The helicopter roared overhead for several minutes before flying off towards the center of Kabul. Although it was still quite early, Biryukov went to the embassy. Surprisingly, Puzanov was already in his office. The operative, confused and exhausted from lack of sleep, reported the night’s events to the ambassador. It turned out that Alexander Mikhailovich had already been briefed about the incident.

“Calm down, my friend,” he said in an uncharacteristically fatherly manner. “We already informed Moscow that Babrak Karmal and his comrades spent the night in the TASS office. All is well. Now, go and report to your supervisor.”

Having left the ambassador’s office, Biryukov began drafting a cable to the Center. He wrote a cable that was fifteen pages long and took it to Orlov-Morozov’s desk. The unperturbed deputy resident flipped through the pages.

“Do you want to keep your job? You do? Then my advice to you is to tear up what you’ve written and to forget about this little incident. Or allow me to destroy the text.”

Orlov-Morozov knew all too well by then that such cables only caused irritation in Moscow.

Karmal, who failed to obtain support from the Soviet ambassador, decided to have a conversation with Taraki instead. During his farewell visit to the head of state, he attempted to warn him of forthcoming danger. “Nothing will stop your ‘favorite pupil’ on his way to dictatorship. He wants total control. Open your eyes.” In response, Taraki laughed in Babrak’s face, saying, “Your mind has been blinded by the insult. The truth is, Amin is prepared to give his life for

me without second thought.” They parted.

The senior party adviser, Valery Kharazov, was not told anything about the nocturnal incident involving the Parchamis. For some reason, Kharazov did not have any rapport with the KGB operatives. It’s possible that his friendship with Gorelov was the reason for that. Gorelov’s opinions regarding a number of issues differed from those of the KGB operatives by that time. Or, perhaps another reason was Kharazov’s independent character. He enjoyed a close relationship with Ambassador Puzanov and spent a good deal of time talking with the military, but did not meet with the KGB operatives even once during his three-month stay in Kabul. He suspected that the information that he sent to the Central Committee of the CPSU differed greatly from the KGB operatives’ analyses.

Once, the Soviet economic adviser, who had working contacts with the Afghan minister of planning, told Kharazov that Sultan Ali Keshmand wanted to meet with him. Valery Innokentievich suggested they meet in a modest residence where party advisers worked. Keshmand refused (“I don’t want this to be reported to Amin immediately”), and proposed to meet behind the apartment buildings of Mikrorayon instead. This time, Kharazov refused. The official representative of the CPSU Central Committee was above and beyond participating in those cloak-and-dagger games. Within several days, Keshmand was arrested as a plotter, a foreign agent, and an enemy of the revolution.

Soon after Babrak Karmal settled down as ambassador in Prague, he received an order from the PDPA leadership to immediately return to Afghanistan, allegedly for a new appointment. He sensed that something was wrong, and with the help of the Czechoslovakian security services, he left Prague and went into hiding at one of their secret *dachas* not far from the Karlovy Vary resort. Amin was beside himself. He sent a group of assassins to Czechoslovakia, but the Czech

counterintelligence managed to neutralize them.

At the same time, Kabul was visited by the Czechoslovakian Communist Party's government delegation, led by Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia Vasil Bilyak. Taraki and Amin insisted on Karmal's extradition during the meeting with their guests. They threatened, "If you won't extradite him, you are not our friends any longer." But Bilyak politely smiled in response. When the official part of the meeting was over and Taraki left, Amin told his guest, "If we manage to find Karmal, we will bring him to Afghanistan and shoot him as a CIA agent." Bilyak, who had received firm instructions from Moscow regarding Karmal's case, didn't respond to Amin's statement.

Babrak became a big headache in the fall of 1978, not only for the Khalqis, but also for Moscow. On the one hand, as an experienced Afghani revolutionary and loyal, ideological warrior and trusted friend of the USSR, he should have been protected from the vengeance of his "party comrades." On the other hand, Moscow couldn't give Taraki and Amin even the smallest reason for being unhappy. Those two personified the real and legal authority that demanded respect and support. Karmal, however, had no desire to sit quietly in exile. He received prominent Parchamis and discussed plans aimed at combating his enemies. Everything was becoming known to Kabul almost immediately, as the Afghan Security Services watched the out-of-favor revolutionary very closely.

Amin fully understood that Czechoslovakia had offered his adversary a shelter with Moscow's agreement. This is why he wouldn't miss an opportunity to chide his Soviet comrades: "Why are you covering up this plotter and CIA agent? He is conducting covert activities against our regime, and you are assisting him?"

Finally, KGB Resident Vilior Osadchiy wrote a cable to the Center. He insisted that Karmal

had to be restrained: “The former ambassador of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (DRA) in Prague, Karmal Bobrak [the spelling of the name that was used in the Soviet documents of the period], who has received political asylum from our Czech comrades after having been removed from the post of ambassador and having ignored an order to return home, is consolidating Parchami forces abroad (in capitalist and socialist countries) and in Afghanistan for actions directed against the current Afghan regime, the ruling PDPA, and the government of the DRA.”

Deputy Head of the CPSU International Department of the Central Committee Ulyanovsky read Osadchiy’s cable and immediately sent the following note to the Secretariat of the Central Committee: “It would make sense to ask the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia to conduct consultations with K. Bobrak and to impress on him the necessity of putting an end to the activities hostile to the progressive regime of Afghanistan.” Soon the Soviet ambassador in Prague received instructions to meet with one of the leaders of the Czech Communist Party and ask him to instruct the exiled Afghan leader accordingly. The attachment contained the main arguments. In particular, it said that, “such activities of K. Babrak are putting his hosts, as well as Soviet comrades, in an uncomfortable and dishonest position in the eyes of the current revolutionary leaders in Afghanistan.” The Afghan politician was instructed to “draw his own conclusions.”

When Karmal was given the message, his response was, “You wait and see. Soon, these Soviet comrades will speak to me differently.”

He would later be proved correct.

After three months, Kharazov’s mission came to an end. Without any regret, he departed from a country that he never learned to understand and returned to his quiet and cozy home in Vilnius. He stopped in Moscow on the way back to Lithuania to rest and to receive some medical

treatment. He thought that he would be invited to the Central Committee of the CPSU and be asked about the situation in the PDPA. He expected that his opinion about how to develop relationships with the revolutionaries would be sought. Several days passed, but he received no calls from the Central Committee. Then Kharazov dialed Suslov. "Mikhail Andreyevich, I've just returned from an important trip and would like to file a report."

"No, no," responded the second ranking official of the Soviet Communist Party. "This is not my area of expertise. Once Ponomaryov returns from vacation, you can report to him."

Then Kharazov was hospitalized. Ponomaryov, having returned from the south, called him at the hospital.

"It seems Afghanistan has gotten to you."

"I was in imperfect health to begin with," replied Kharazov.

"Could you come to the Central Committee as soon as possible?"

Kharazov rejoiced—finally, his analysis would be heard. "Certainly, Boris Nikolayevich. I'll be on my way immediately."

As soon as Kharazov entered Ponomaryov's office, he was told, "I am going to Kabul myself. Tell me, what does Taraki prefer—vodka or cognac? How about Amin? He probably prefers whiskey because he studied in America."

Ponomaryov had no more questions for Kharazov. Kharazov offered to share some thoughts on the subject of Afghan party politics, but Ponomaryov was not interested.

"Don't bother—I know everything from the cables. We have good sources there."

His deputy, Ulyanovsky, was no more interested in hearing what the former senior party adviser had to say. When Kharazov attempted to tell something about Afghanistan to another one of Ponomaryov's deputies, Zagladin, Zagladin quickly interrupted him to offer his own account of

events in Kabul, having never stepped foot in the country.

During the two and a half months that passed since the April Revolution, about thirty plots against the new regime were uncovered in Afghanistan. The “plotters” were arrested, tortured until they admitted their crimes, and were usually shot without trial.

The head of the General Staff of the armed forces, Shahpur Ahmadzai, and the head of the Kabul hospital, Dr. Ali Akbar, were arrested and accused of treason in August. Neither of them were PDPA members, but the steamroller of repression reached everybody who was suspected of the slightest disloyalty to the new regime. Soon came the turn of the minister of defense.

Abdul Qadir never tried to hide his negative attitude about the squabbles within the PDPA. The minister understood that his views would not serve him well in the long run; however, his stubbornness triumphed over common sense. Shortly after a secret communications center was established in Kabul, Qadir received a call from the Soviet minister of defense, Marshal Ustinov, who called Qadir to congratulate and wish him well. Qadir’s response was, “Comrade Marshal, I am prepared to give my life for the revolution. I am a sincere and loyal friend of the USSR. But you must know that there is disorder in our party, which is being torn by disagreements. We bestow tremendous hope on the wisdom and willpower of your advisers.”

He also asked that detailed maps of Afghanistan be sent for his use.

“We will send you maps immediately,” said Ustinov. “As to the disagreements, do not worry—everything will be fine. We will soon send new, highly respected advisers to Afghanistan. I think that your leaders will value their opinion.”

It is likely that Ustinov believed what he was saying. The Soviet minister of defense had never visited Afghanistan and would never go there in the future, even during the Soviet military

intervention. He had a very vague idea of the Afghan reality, but was firmly convinced that nothing was beyond the Bolsheviks' potential. He thought that as long as he sent the experts, they were bound to succeed. Internal party squabbles unfortunately did not appear to him to be worthy of discussion.

Qadir received the maps very soon. They were classified, so after having been used, they had to be signed for and turned over to General Gorelov. As for the disagreements, new advisers arrived in Afghanistan every day, but the situation continued to deteriorate. By the summer, the Parchamis who had remained in the country and out of jail had gone underground. Qadir was not a Parchami. He still tried to stay out of the conflict, but by that time nobody could remain neutral. Those who didn't come to Taraki and Amin on their knees swearing personal loyalty were considered enemies and deemed expendable.

In May, Amin, perhaps jokingly, asked the minister of defense to bestow the rank of general on him.

"This is not within my powers," replied Qadir. "Only the head of state has the power to bestow the rank of general."

"My dear Qadir," he said, wagging his finger, "you simply refuse to recognize my contribution to the success of our armed uprising."

By then, a brochure that praised Amin and the Khalqis exclusively for the success of the revolution was published and widely distributed in Kabul.

In August, Amin invited Qadir for a visit. There was good reason for the invitation. The minister of defense became a member of the Central Committee of the PDPA, which was a sign of a high degree of trust. Amin's daughter poured expensive Scotch whiskey. There was a map of Afghanistan made from semi-precious stones hanging from the living room wall.

“Do you see this map?” asked Amin. “From Seistan to Badakhshan, it’s all yours. Now, you own this land, under one condition. You will not act against me. Otherwise, you will be dead.”

“I have no interest in going against you,” Qadir assured him. “But tell me, why did you lie to me? Remember, you came to me with Taraki, and you both promised that the party would be united.”

Amin pushed his glass away, spilling the whiskey. He rose and quickly closed in on Qadir, took him by the elbow, and looking straight into his eyes said, “Trust me, and you will be fine.”

Qadir freed his elbow, stepping back.

“I know that you can arrest and even kill me. On the one hand, there are your ambitions and your game, which is unclear to me. On the other, there is the cause of the revolution, which I serve.”

This is what Qadir told us about that conversation. He promised that he didn’t undertake any actions against Taraki and Amin. It is difficult to say whether Qadir was sincere with us. According to the official version of events, Parchamis and some generals from the Ministry of Defense, acting independently of each other, were developing plans for another coup. Afghan sources even cite the date for when the next revolution was scheduled—September 12, 1978. Shahpur Ahmadzai, the head of the General Staff, along with a number of senior officers from the Ministry of Defense, allegedly was instructed to provide support of military units and to neutralize the Khalqi chain of command. The minister of planning, Sultan Ali Keshtmand, and other prominent Parchamis were tasked with working with the civilian population. When prompted, they were supposed to take people out into the streets in solidarity with the adversaries of Taraki and Amin. Everybody tends to think that Abdul Qadir was destined to play the role of the director of the new drama on the political stage of Kabul. However, when speaking with us, he rejected that

interpretation of events. However, the following is known for fact: on August 17, 1978, one hundred twelve days after the April Revolution, one of the main figures of the revolution was imprisoned.

On the eve of that event, the minister of defense was brought a message from the commander of the Twentieth Division, which was stationed in Kunduz, in the north of Afghanistan. The message said the following: "Rebel forces captured the airport. We request assistance."

"Something is not right here," thought Qadir, and ordered the officer on duty to contact Kunduz to make sure that there was no mistake in the message. In a few minutes, he received another plea for help from Kunduz. Qadir went to Taraki. "Here is the situation. I propose to transfer there a detachment of commandos from Fortress Bala Hissar." At that time, Amin, Gulabzoi, and Watanjar entered Taraki's office. Taraki showed them the message from Kunduz, and told about Qadir's proposal to transfer a detachment of commandos to the area of the incident. Amin took the phone and called Kunduz. After his call was over, he said: "Everything is calm in Kunduz. There are no rebels there. These are all Qadir's intrigues. Surely he's trying to engage the special forces to start another coup. He is good at it."

Qadir was outraged. He said to Taraki: "Who are you harboring here? This man is very dangerous. He is more dangerous than any enemy."

Having said that, the minister saluted Taraki and left the office. At that moment, it was absolutely clear to him what would happen next. He figured out the trick with Kunduz. Amin's brother Abdullah was recently appointed by the Revolutionary Council to be in charge of the northern zone. Surely it was he who organized the false alarms about rebels capturing the airport.

The next morning, Gorelov and Zaplatin stopped by Qadir's office as was their routine. The minister cheerfully reported that nothing special occurred at night, that all military detachments

were in their place and engaged in regular scheduled activities. Then the telephone rang. Qadir took the phone, saying: "I understand. I'm coming." He turned to the advisers. "The president asked me to come. If you want, you can wait here until I return." A minute of silence followed. Looking sideways, Qadir added, "Just in case, I will say farewell to you." He returned the secret Soviet maps to Gorelov and left the office.

One hour passed after another. Finally, Qadir's aide-de-camp entered the office and reported, "The minister of defense was arrested and charged with treason."

Gorelov exploded: "What are you talking about? How dare they! He is my friend. He is a hero of the revolution!" He burst into expletives referring to the leaders of Afghanistan.

Zaplatin had a hard time calming him down. In a minute, Gorelov continued: "They are all crazy there. Every minister of defense is either a spy or a plotter, according to them. We should go see Amin immediately."

"Not now," said Zaplatin, trying to calm his colleague down. "You are not yourself now. You are overly emotional and can say things that will cause a scandal. Let's take a break. After lunch we can go to Comrade Amin."

Amin met them as if nothing had happened. He was demonstratively addressing Zaplatin, but not Gorelov, who was more senior in rank and position. The first thing he said was: "I know why you came, my dear Soviet friends. It's true," he lamented with a mournful expression on his face, "we overlooked the enemy, who was acting right under our nose. I want to inform you officially that the former minister of defense Abdul Qadir was a traitor who was masterminding a plot against the revolution."

"Aren't there too many plotters here?" objected Gorelov emotionally. "Two days ago, you arrested the head of the General Staff on the same grounds."

Amin interrupted him coldly: "I would like to inform you, Comrade General, that Head of General Staff Shahpur and his friend and accomplice Ali Akbar have already admitted to treason. Both of them are CIA agents, and will be executed based on the verdict of the Revolutionary Court. Don't worry—Abdul Qadir will admit his wrongdoing as well."

"I have no doubt," Gorelov responded heatedly. "I know that you can get all the admissions you want using your methods. But now, we ask you officially for specific evidence of the minister's guilt. You should have some basis for his arrest."

"Yes, we do," Amin looked only at Zaplatin. "Tell your leadership that we will present that necessary evidence shortly."

Once Qadir entered the Ark compound, he was attacked from behind by four men from security services. They threw him onto the ground, tied him up, and dragged him to the basement. In the evening, they took away his general's uniform, dressed him in soldier's undergarments, and conducted their first interrogation. Qadir knew about the means of such interrogations and was prepared. It was called "to invite Vladimir": an electric current from a field telephone was sent through the extremities, and the person, regardless of his physical stamina, convulsed as if being set on fire. Qadir's former subordinate, a recent pilot, and now the chief of security services, Assadullah Sarwari, cranked the handle of the field telephone personally.

"Admit your treason. Tell us how you wanted to sell our revolution to the Americans."

Qadir was in terrible pain. He screamed: "You can write anything you want in the protocol. I'll sign. I agree with all of your accusations."

"Who is behind you? Who are your accomplices?"

"I am alone. You know me. I do not belong to any factions."

Several days later, Qadir was transferred to the Puli-Charkhi Prison, located about twenty

kilometers outside of the city. Soon he learned that the prominent Parchamis Keshtmand and Raffi were imprisoned in the adjacent cell. According to the interrogators' theory, Qadir was the military leader of the plot, and the others were political leaders.

A member of the Politburo, Minister Sultan Keshtmand, was arrested on the day of his departure for Venezuela to attend the Forum for Developing Countries as the head of the official government delegation. He received a call from Amin's secretary claiming that Comrade Taraki needed to see him urgently. Harboring no suspicions, Keshtmand appeared in the palace, where he was promptly arrested. Asking why he was being arrested, his captors replied that he would find out later.

With a bag on his head, Keshtmand was driven through the city before being thrown into some basement. At midnight, his party colleagues arrived—Sarwari, Tarun, Head of Counterintelligence Aziz Akbari, and Amin's nephew Assadullah. Keshtmand made no attempt to deny that in Babrak Karmal's absence he was a leader of Parcham, and that the leadership of the faction had been meeting secretly and discussing the current situation. The meetings had to be secret because at the time, any open meetings of that kind would be impossible. The participants would all have been arrested. But according to Keshtmand the Parchamis were not planning any coup d'etat, let alone carrying out any hostile actions against the regime. On the contrary, Keshtmand claimed, he had appealed to his colleagues to remain patient and rational and to avoid challenging the authorities. However, those who interrogated him demanded a different sort of story.

Since the very first interrogation, the minister was tortured by electricity. Sarwari could not deny himself the pleasure of watching a human being tortured by electricity emitted from the field telephone. Keshtmand was in convulsions from pain. During the second night, he pleaded for

his tormentors to kill him.

“Everything happens in due time,” laughed Sarwari. “First you will tell us how you prepared a plot against the party. You hate us, don’t you?”

“I hate you now,” admitted Keshtmand. “I hate you because you call yourself communists when in reality you are really fascists.”

“Tell us about your personal involvement in the military plot.”

“What personal participation? I am a civilian. Who would believe my involvement in any plot?”

For ten days straight, Keshtmand was brutally beaten and tortured by an electric current. One of the guards whispered to him that his wife Karima was being tortured in the adjacent room. That made Keshtmand willing to sign any admission, which he did. The protocol that he signed claimed that he was planning to lead his allies into the streets and to organize demonstrations against the regime*.

The country was flooded by a wave of arrests. Amin took advantage of the idea of the possible plot, whether it was only an idea or a real plan. It presented an excellent reason to finish off the internal opposition. In late summer and early fall, more than three thousand Parchamis and people who were suspected of being Parchami sympathizers were arrested or executed without trial. According to official Afghan sources, from April 1978 to September 1979 more than twelve thousand people were arrested and killed.

In September, the Afghan media published transcripts of interrogations, including the confessions of those who had been interrogated. According to the published materials, the goal of the planned coup was to overthrow the Khalqi government, which deviated from “the path of

* In January 1980, right after Babrak Karmal came to power, Keshtmand would be appointed deputy head of the government. Assadullah Sarwari, who tortured him, would also be appointed as a deputy prime minister.

socialism,” and to create a regime that, “would satisfy the aspirations of the broad masses and guarantee the support of all countries in the world.” All leaders of the plot, including Qadir, Keshtmand, Shahpur, and others, were sentenced to capital punishment. Others were sentenced to long prison terms of up to twenty years.

The courageous General Gorelov was not the only Soviet official who sought to save or at least lighten the punishment of the “plotters.” However, when facing Taraki’s arguments, and particularly the unwavering confidence of Amin, the Soviets would usually back off and lose their determination. They already understood who was in charge in the country, and were not willing to undermine his authority, either because of concerns about their personal well being or due to the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of foreign nations.

When Ambassador Puzanov sheepishly inquired as to what was the reason behind the arrest of the minister of defense, Taraki did not even attempt to contain his anger. According to Taraki, an anti-government plot involving the United States, China, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the Federal Republic of Germany had been uncovered in Kabul. The plotters wanted to liquidate Taraki and Amin. How did they find out about it? Shahpur and Dr. Ali Akbar admitted their guilt and gave the names of alleged accomplices, among them Minister of Defense Abdul Qadir, along with a slew of other public figures.

The ambassador nodded with reservation. Yesterday the GRU chief, Pechenenko, told him that, according to his intelligence, Shahpur was tortured to the point that he cried constantly and begged to be shot as soon as possible.

Taraki continued: “Your comrades are defending Qadir, but he also confessed to some mistakes. Our people are working with him now.” These words gave the ambassador goose bumps. “You shouldn’t doubt that we will receive his confession as well. You, Comrade Puzanov,

should ask your colleagues to be more sympathetic to our struggle. Think of your revolution—how many enemies did you have? And how mercilessly, and over how long a time did your leadership have to purge them from the party ranks? Doesn't our campaign against the opportunists inside our party remind you of your own struggle with the Mensheviks? We have simply taken your lessons to heart."

"Still, Comrade Taraki," softly responded the ambassador, "I would like to pass along a request from the Soviet leadership to show some humanity to those whom you have arrested and allow them to live."

The Afghan leader stood up and paced across his office with his chest thrust forward.

"We treat the opinion of our Soviet comrades with great respect," he said. "Your words are law for us. But remember Lenin's words, that one should be merciless to the enemies of the revolution. Remember that in order to achieve the full victory of the October Revolution, you had to eliminate millions of enemies. I agree—repression is an extraordinarily sharp weapon. But the whole history of your country has taught us that we should not hesitate to use this weapon decisively."

At the embassy, Puzanov wrote a cable to the Center: "In our opinion, the actions of the leadership of the PDPA are leading to the cementing of revolutionary authority, strengthening the role of the party in all spheres of Afghan society, foremost in the Afghan military forces. As to the arrest of Minister of Defense Abdul Qadir, according to our observations he was a politically immature person, inclined to adventurism and lacking perspective."

On August 2, "Comrade Vladimirov," the code name of Vladimir Kryuchkov, arrived in Kabul on a covert mission. He was accompanied by Colonel Bogdanov, who would become the first

head of the KGB Representative Office in Kabul, and General Kalugin from PGU, the director of Foreign Intelligence. Kryuchkov received a number of warnings from his colleagues about the careless rhetoric of the young general. By the time of their trip to Kabul, Kryuchkov had amassed an impressive file of compromising material regarding Kalugin, who had been suspected of misdeeds ranging from incompetence to being a CIA agent. Without any idea that his career in Foreign Intelligence was soon to be axed, Kalugin accompanied his boss on his first trip to Afghanistan.

Vladimir Alexandrovich had an unusual way of dealing with colleagues with questionable records. He liked to “study his people” in an intimate environment. For example, he eagerly participated in parties celebrating promotions of his colleagues to the rank of general. Kryuchkov himself almost never drank, but would instead use the banquets as opportunities for probing the character of those who had been promoted, while they were “under the influence” and more exposed.

Now, Kalugin was brought along to see how he would behave in extreme situations and how he would act in close proximity to his chief. While the trip to Kabul was just another short-term adventure for Kalugin (Kabul today, Moscow tomorrow, and on to Prague, Warsaw, and Havana), his colleague Colonel Bogdanov arrived there with a very different mindset. He had to stay in Afghanistan indefinitely, and he had no desire to go in the first place, let alone stay indefinitely.

Leonid Pavlovich Bogdanov had no particular feelings towards Afghanistan. It was uninteresting to him both from the point of view of working and of living there. His interests and aspirations lay elsewhere. Bogdanov had had very successful tours in India and Indonesia. In January 1977 he returned from Iran, where he also had a successful appointment. When, several

years earlier, he was offered a position in the Eighth Department of PGU, which handled the Middle East, Bogdanov agreed on the condition that he would not be sent to Afghanistan on a long-term assignment. Deputy Head of Intelligence Solomatin, who had interviewed him for the job, grinned with understanding. "Nobody wants to go into that shithole." Solomatin liked to use strong language, and was unparalleled among his peers in his verbosity. At the same time, there were very few who could challenge him in his work in the field, namely in the recruitment of new agents. Andropov himself publicly named Solomatin the "intelligence genius." That compliment led colleagues to believe that the general would surely become the next head of the PGU. Alas, the "intelligence genius" had turned out to be a poor player in the bureaucratic arena and was dispatched by Kryuchkov as a resident overseas.

Being stationed in Afghanistan was not a part of Colonel Bogdanov's designs. It was not a step down, nor a step up. He thought he deserved a better appointment. He was very eager to attain the rank of general. His father was a general and an important figure in the border troops. Leonid Pavlovich himself started military service as a 10-year old-boy in the Suvorov military school. He had an impeccable career, so why not be made a general?

However, in the middle of the summer, he was invited for a meeting with a human resources staff member.

"So, Leonid Pavlovich, wouldn't you like to contribute to the defense of the April Revolution?"

"How would I do that?" inquired Bogdanov.

"Comrade Taraki has asked us to assist him in organizing his country's security services. We are going to form a corps of advisers there and the prevailing opinion is that you should be in charge."

Bogdanov very patiently and, he thought, convincingly explained why he could not accept such an offer. Claiming that he had just arrived from a long assignment in Iran, he hinted that it might be time for a break, mentioning some family problems and personal health issues. He referred to some other distinguished colleagues who might want to fall upon the sword of that appointment instead of him. The HR person decided not to object, seeming to accept Bogdanov's reasoning. They parted.

A week later, when Bogdanov had decided that the matter had been closed, he received an urgent call to see Kryuchkov. Kryuchkov, as was his style, went straight to the point. "The leadership of the KGB of the USSR has taken a decision to send you as the head of the KGB Representative Office in Kabul."

"But I already explained to the human resources colleague that I have a number of valid concerns that would preclude my participation in this mission."

"I know it all," Kryuchkov interrupted. "However, your personal and professional qualities make you the most qualified for the job."

"Give me a day to think about it," begged Bogdanov.

"You can think as long as you want," said Kryuchkov, "so long as you understand that our decision as to your assignment is final." He buried his face in his papers, indicating to Bogdanov that their conversation was finished.

Leonid Pavlovich made several more desperate attempts to delay the inevitable. He visited the clinic and got medical reports verifying a number of illnesses, but in the end of July he was again summoned by Kryuchkov.

"We are leaving for Kabul on August 2. I am going as well, to sign an agreement of cooperation with the Afghan side and to introduce you."

“Vladimir Alexandrovich,” begged Bogdanov. “I hope we can return to Moscow together. I haven’t even had my vacation yet.”

“No,” was Kryuchkov’s firm response. “You will stay and work for a couple of months, and then we shall see.”

On August 4, Taraki received three representatives of the Soviet intelligence services: Kryuchkov, Bogdanov, and Ershov. Taraki was cordial and exuded optimism. Everything was going according to plan. The revolution had been won. The Soviet Union, as he had hoped for, intended to provide Afghanistan with broad economic and military assistance. The visit of the head of intelligence was convincing evidence that Moscow would not refuse any of Kabul’s requests.

Kryuchkov gave the new master of the Ark a gift from Brezhnev: a rifle in a wooden box with the business card of the general secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. He informed Taraki that the request of Afghan leadership regarding the creation of a KGB Representative Office in Kabul was granted, and that an agreement between the two organizations would be signed by tomorrow.

Then he congratulated Taraki on the victory of the revolution, adding: “We think that you are only at the beginning of a path that will present you with enormous challenges of an objective nature. It will be difficult to realize the revolutionary changes that you have in mind under the current circumstances, which are not favorable. The declared goal of establishing socialism in the short term raises doubts among our comrades. It is possible that we don’t have all of the necessary information,” noted Kryuchkov diplomatically. “This is why we would be grateful to Comrade Taraki if he shares his plans with us.”

The Afghan leader, having listened to the guests’ statements somewhat condescendingly, smiled and opened his arms, as if forgiving Kryuchkov, and began a long speech, essentially stating

that Moscow did not seem to fully appreciate what had happened in Kabul in April.

“Yes, I remember your comrades’ warnings very well,” said Taraki. “You had given me advice not to rush, and to collaborate with Daoud’s regime. But now it is clear to everybody that we were the ones who were correct. In many respects, our revolution echoes the October Revolution. However, we did not achieve our victory under the cover of night, but in open battle, in the rays of the bright sun, and this gives particular meaning to our victory. What is happening now in Afghanistan is the beginning of a dictatorship of the proletariat in the Soviet style. But what took you sixty years to achieve will take us five years. Come back to us in a year and you will see how much Afghanistan has changed. Our mosques will be empty. Our peasants will have created cooperatives, like your collective farms. Our revolution will show the way to socialism for all of the peoples in the East. I hope that, as a communist, you agree with our position?”

Kryuchkov nodded readily, and shot Bogdanov a pregnant look. The colonel interpreted this look in his own way: “Now, you will be the one listening to these speeches day after day, and you are expected to react correctly. And we shall have to decide what ‘correctly’ means.” Kryuchkov demonstrated his legendary caution and did not allow himself to be dragged into further discussion with Taraki. He listened to Taraki’s monologue politely and uttered some meaningless phrases in response, signaling the end of the meeting.

Kryuchkov met with Amin three times. Later, he recalled that at first, the “favorite pupil of Taraki” left him with the favorable impression of someone who was young, energetic, eloquent, and dedicated to the Soviet Union. But some details had already begun to concern Kryuchkov. For example, it was obvious that Amin considered himself to be the unspoken master of the country, and that he was going to continue mass repressions, justifying them by the need to eliminate all of the obvious and hidden enemies. It was evident that while claiming his loyalty to Soviet comrades,

he intended to play his own game. It was unclear how far he was prepared to go.

When driving from the palace to the embassy, Kryuchkov stared blankly at the scenes of Kabul life. Absolutely pragmatic, he was not inclined to sentimentality. He was untouched by exotic medieval bazaars, indifferent to exhibits of carpets, fur coats, Japanese electronics, American cigarettes, and other smuggled goods. Different things were on his mind. Kryuchkov was trying to guess how the events would continue to develop in Afghanistan. How deeply did the USSR stand to get mired in these developments? What if the miracle of a successful revolution were to actually happen? No, he stopped himself—miracles do not happen. We will have to carry this burden on our shoulders. He recalled the words of his deputy, General Medyanik, who told him how, fourteen years ago, Taraki confidently said to a Soviet intelligence officer, “We will carry out the revolution, and you, loyal to your international duty, will help us. And, if we ask, you will even begin a military intervention.”

Chapter 3

The Main Adversary

Early morning on Friday, Starostin got a call at home from “the Anarchist.” This codename, for the purpose of his reports to the Center, was given by Starostin to an American who had been his buddy for nearly half a year.

“Hi, Valery, it’s me—I’m already here. I returned from the United States via London yesterday.”

“So, how’s the weather in London? Foggy, rainy, cool?” asked Starostin, still drowsy after a hot, stuffy, sleepless night.

“No, the weather is more like here—hot and humid.”

“So we’re not the only ones suffering.”

“Valery, could we meet tonight? I brought you greetings and some gifts from the States.”

“Say no more. I already know. You brought me a ‘hello’ from Langley—an offer that I cannot turn down, along with a million dollars cash in an alligator-skin suitcase?”

“I would be pleased to make you happy that way, but my ‘hellos’ and gifts are considerably more modest.”

“Okay, let’s meet tonight at the entrance to the zoo, at 7:15,” said Starostin. Valery liked the Anarchist. He was an interesting person. The American had graduated from Harvard during the turbulent 1960s (for the West), and had studied both Russian and Persian. He could have begun a career as a Sovietologist. However, he turned down an offer to work for the government for political reasons. During his college years, he explained, he

was so enamored by the ideology of Russian anarchists Mikhail Bakunin and Count Kropotkin that the thought of serving “the American imperialist state” seemed immoral and disgusting to him.

While his former classmates were climbing career ladders at the State Department and the CIA, the Anarchist engaged in whatever came his way, mostly chaotic adventures and attempts to earn easy money by doing strange and often risky things.

During the Arab-Israeli War in 1969, armed with a movie camera, he reached the front lines between the positions of Israeli and Syrian troops and filmed some unique footage. That documentary brought him some income but also a few problems. Then he engaged in sales, and invented some radically new styles of collars for men’s shirts, among other odd jobs. He wrote and published articles on Eastern art and “practical magic.” In the late seventies, he became interested in the business of counterfeiting antique objects and exotic goods, and specialized in the production of Persian rugs using artificial aging techniques. The Anarchist opened a store of exotic Persian goods in Cambridge, hired a manager, and went to Afghanistan, where he organized several workshops to produce carpets and other objects.

One of the Anarchist’s traits was a penchant for the unexpected.

Once, having taken his fedora off of a hat rack in Starostin’s home, he accidentally dropped it directly into Valery’s hands. Starostin noticed that written inside the hat’s lining was the name “Mordecai.” Valery jokingly asked if the hat belonged to the Biblical Mordecai. The Anarchist replied in all seriousness that Mordecai was a traditional Jewish name. That name was for him, his mother, and for God. He added that his secular, English name was for FBI files, in which he would be marked as a friend of a KGB officer by the

name of Starostin. Valery was flustered. He thought that he had successfully avoided giving his friend any indications that he was a KGB operative. The Anarchist, sensing his friend's anxiety, sang to him in Russian: "*Smelo, druzia, ne teriaite bodrost' v neravnom boiu!* (Be brave, my friends, do not lose your courage in an unequal battle!)"

Starostin understood that the American didn't fit the profile of a potential agent. He had a major drawback that was significant—the Anarchist didn't have direct access to secret information. That was why Starostin could not think of any valid arguments to counter the Center's recommendation to cease communication with the Anarchist.

Osadchiy, however, supported the young operative's wish to continue working with the American. He was a representative of the main adversary, was in close communication with American diplomats, and helped those diplomats arrange illicit commercial affairs in Kabul. The Anarchist was also able to provide valuable information about the American colony in Kabul. He had a sophisticated sense of politics. For these reasons, occasional contact with the Anarchist seemed more helpful than harmful. The only loss from those contacts was an insignificant amount of cash spent on alcohol and small treats.

In the correspondence regarding the Anarchist between the Center and the Kabul Residency, the instructions were typically ambiguous.

Having met the Anarchist by the entrance to the zoo, Starostin drove his American friend to his home in Karte Char in his office's Volga. The smell of freshly mowed grass lingered in the air, and a generous dinner with alcohol awaited the American guest in the garden outside Starostin's residence.

Tamara, having offered dinner to the guest, prepared to leave, but the Anarchist asked her to take a seat next to him. Taking a second to find the right words, he exclaimed

in Russian, “*Do chego zhe mir tesen!* (What a small world!)” He then produced a book by Richard Frye, an American expert on Iran and Central Asia, called *The Heritage of Persia* and handed it to Valery. Then, in English, he began to tell in great detail about his relationship with Frye, a professor at Harvard University. He had studied Persian with him and now had a business connection with Frye’s son, who was a leading expert on Persian rugs and rugs as objects of art in general, in America. When Frye learned from his son that the Anarchist had returned to the United States from Afghanistan in June, he expressed a desire to meet with him, and to listen to his impressions as a witness of the April Revolution. Having met, the former teacher and student talked at length about how the revolution came about, the political prognosis for Afghanistan, and the alternative policy options that the United States could pursue in that part of the world. During their conversation, the Anarchist had referred to some of Starostin’s opinions in order to make his arguments seem more convincing. Frye claimed to remember the Russian specialist in Afghanistan—the archeologist and now, unfortunately, the diplomat—quite well. The professor had asked the Anarchist to give Valery a copy of his most important scientific publication, *The Heritage of Persia*.

Having received the book, Valery looked through it attentively, expressing his delight at the quality of the publication. He asked the Anarchist why the professor had neglected to sign his copy. The Anarchist replied that he had asked Frye the same question, but Frye claimed that Valery would understand.

Starostin began to recall the episodes from his life that were related to Richard Frye. He thought of 1966, when he was in the ancient city of Penjikent in Tajikistan. Penjikent was located on the shore of the Zarafshan River, about thirty kilometers from Samarkand.

The archaeologists were working on the excavation of the palace of Sogdian rulers. They lived in small rooms, two persons per room, at the home base of the archeological expedition. They would wake up early in the morning, have breakfast, and then be driven by a truck to the excavation site. They would work until noon. The laborers were local Tajiks, students of technical schools. Starostin's task was to identify and define the objects that might be of scientific interest. By noon, when it was too hot to work outside, the members of the expedition would return to the house to eat a delicious borsch cooked by Gul'djamo, a kind Tajik woman. Then, until night, the scholars would work on their reports and presentations. Others, including Starostin, would stroll among the local orchards, eat grapes and melons, talk to the locals, or visit Samarkand to eat pilaf and drink local wine at a cheap restaurant on Penjikent Street.

That season, unique, well-preserved writings were found on the walls of the palace of Sogdian rulers. Only one person in the world could decipher those writings. His name was Vladimir Livschitz. He worked in the State Hermitage Museum in Leningrad. He was a nice, bright man, who arrived at the expedition site from Samarkand by taxi along with his Uzbek girlfriend and a box of wine for the colleagues.

At the same time, having learned about the discovery of those writings, Richard Frye dashed to Penjikent from America along with his fourteen-year-old son. Frye greatly impressed the expedition participants with his impeccable knowledge of the Russian language and his ability to quote Dostoevsky precisely, as well as with the latest Western technological breakthrough—the Polaroid camera. Nobody in the Soviet Union had seen such a camera.

Starostin often would run into Frye at scientific conferences after that summer. The last time he saw the professor was about a year ago, at a seminar on Kush culture that took place in Kabul. Valery thought that it would be inappropriate not to invite the American scholar to his house. Frye happily accepted the invitation. However, the following day, during a break between seminar sessions, he approached Valery and, expressing great disappointment, declined. Frye explained that, following State Department rules, he had informed the security officer at the embassy about his plans to visit Valery. The officer strongly encouraged Frye to forget about the invitation and avoid future personal contact with the Soviets.

“Perhaps these warnings dissuaded Frye from ‘recording’ his relationship with me by signing his book,” thought Starostin, “but remembering our past interactions, he continued to think warmly of me.”

“So, what’s the esteemed Professor Frye’s opinion regarding the future relationship between the United States and Afghanistan in connection with the April Revolution?”

Frye’s opinion was of great interest to Starostin because of his position as the foremost U.S. scholar of Central Asia, as well as a political adviser to the White House. As an adviser, he could, to some degree, influence the decisions of the U.S. president and his administration.

“I knew you would ask me this question,” grinned the Anarchist. “Do you really think that I came to Frye and asked him, ‘Dear Uncle Sam,* what do you know about this issue which is so important to our Russian friend?’ I certainly couldn’t have had such a

* Richard Frye wore a goatee at the time, perhaps modeling his appearance after Uncle Sam’s famous countenance.

discussion with him. Anyway, I knew in advance what Frye thought about the events, and could only watch his reaction to my story about the April Revolution.

“Based on those observations, I can suppose that the U.S. government is not mourning Daoud’s overthrow. Daoud was an authoritarian ruler who was not shy about openly expressing his distaste for the principles of American democracy. Constitutionally, Daoud established a one-party political system like you have in the Soviet Union. He was an Afghan nationalist, crazy about the idea of re-unification of Pashtuns, who lived on both sides of the Durand Line. It’s quite possible that it was because of Daoud’s pressure on King Zahir Shah that Afghanistan didn’t join the Baghdad Pact. That happened not because the crown prince of the Afghan royal dynasty was in love with you Soviet Communist-Marxists. He never understood you and never liked you or your Lenin, Stalin, and Khrushchev. He only saw you as a political ally who was capable of helping to strengthen the Afghan state. By strengthening his state and, most importantly, his army, Daoud was attending to his nationalistic ambitions.

“We Americans became hostages of British politics in Afghanistan. The Brits dismembered the Afghan state at the time, creating a big problem for Afghan and Pakistani leaders. As Frye confided to me, the White House still remembers that it was Daoud, in the position of the prime minister of the royal government, through his resident in Pashtunistan Akhtar Mohammad,* who organized the powerful armed rebellions of Pashtun tribes in the northwestern provinces of Pakistan. The goal of those rebellions was to destabilize the situation in Pakistan. Daoud was an experienced politician who could precisely calculate his strengths and deliver cruel blows. Frye had no doubt that if Daoud

* Akhtar Mohammad was one of the leaders of the Ahmadzai tribe and the father of the future general secretary of the Central Committee of the PDPA and president of Afghanistan, Najibullah.

were to stay for another year or two as the Afghan leader, he could significantly strengthen the Afghan state and rearm his army and special forces. And then, taking advantage of his friendly ties with you Soviets, he would apply all of his power and resources to the battle of returning Pashtunistan to Afghanistan. That would present a number of unforeseen problems for the United States.

“Daoud was a truly serious politician because of his noble royal lineage and his impeccable political biography. Leaders of many countries of the world, including those countries that ally themselves with the United States, would listen to him and respect his opinion. This is why,” the Anarchist inserted a meaningful pause, “it’s good that he was killed.”

“So, you perceived Daoud to be an undesirable leader?” suggested Starostin to the Anarchist provocatively.

“You don’t think we were the ones who killed him, do you?”

“And what’s Frye’s view, and those of other American experts on international politics, about the arrival of Taraki and his party to power?”

“No problem. The United States never had any serious economic or political interests in Afghanistan. Our gentlemen in the White House always politely considered Afghanistan to be a zone of geopolitical and vital interests for your country, not ours. You share a very long border with Afghanistan. You have the Soviet republics, peoples of which have a blood connection to Afghanistan. They love you Russians here. What about us? What can we do? Roam the country as hippies looking for sacred truths, or produce counterfeit rugs, which I do.”

“Poor Americans!” Starostin mockingly rolled his eyes.

“You can build socialism here,” continued the Anarchist. “Socialism for Afghanistan is probably not a bad socio-economic order. Russia, when the October Revolution took place, was at a very similar level of development. In about fifty years, you will probably incorporate Afghanistan into the USSR as one of your union republics. However, your eagerness to Sovietize Afghanistan may shift the balance of forces in Central Asia and incite a civil war. It would be quite a favorable scenario for the United States, if it happens. Whatever you say, the majority of the Afghan people live in the fourteenth century, according to their local calendar. So, Valery, the arrival of Taraki and his cronies to power didn’t upset American politicians. On the contrary, it gave them hope that the Afghan ‘revolutionaries’ would be so busied by their grandiose and hopeless affair to build socialism in their backwards Asiatic country that they would forever forget about their brothers in Pashtunistan—at least until those brothers reminded them about themselves. Besides, you Russians—and everyone in Washington is certain of this—will do everything possible to stop the Tarakists, or any other Afghan leaders loyal to you, from committing any radical actions directed at upsetting the status quo in Central Asia. And this is exactly what the United States of America needs.”

“So, Mr. Frye and you, my friend, think that the American government respects and will continue to respect our interests in this region of the world, and will leave Afghanistan in our sphere of core interests?”

“I think that the professor is more a scholar of Orientalism and a specialist in the ancient history of Iran than a politician who is capable of fathoming modern Afghan complexities.”

“What do you think yourself?”

“I think that, from the U.S. perspective, Afghanistan and similar Third World countries constitute an area of potential confrontation between two great states. Right after World War II, our government tried to engage Afghans in a military alliance for the purpose of creating a threat near the southern border of the USSR. When strategic bombers were the main delivery systems for nuclear warheads, we Americans built a modern airport in Kandahar. Afghans benefited from that construction tremendously, and they didn’t contribute a cent. Some time ago, your media cited Soviet intelligence reports that Americans had created caves in the mountains surrounding the Kandahar Airport where its bombers could be hidden. I wonder, what idiot could have made this up?”

Valery personally knew those colleagues who wrote about the existence of these caves. They had shared with him the reasons for making up the story. Their intention was for their names to be noticed by the Center. As a result of such “important information,” there was a major panic in the Soviet Ministry of Defense. Significant intelligence resources were allocated to uncover the cave hangars for American strategic bombers in Afghanistan. In the end, the issue was clarified, identified, and forgotten, and those people who created the myth were promoted.

“Really, why would you be carving out caves in those mountains?” asked Starostin.

“When intercontinental missiles appeared,” continued the Anarchist, “Kandahar Airport was neglected. Now, when our countries are locked in psychological warfare, it would be important for us to compromise Taraki’s Communist regime and set up traps for you along the way.”

Valery recalled that the word “trap” was already mentioned in the report of his colleague, written after a meeting with the American diplomat Marik Warren.

Having finished the meeting with the Anarchist, Starostin gave him a ride to downtown Kabul and then returned home. Thinking about their conversation, he internally agreed with the Anarchist that Afghanistan represents only an arena of confrontation with the Soviet Union for the United States. “And what is Afghanistan for us, the Soviet Union? A strategic partner? A platform for possible expansion towards the south? A reliable neutral country that serves as a buffer to prevent a possible nuclear attack? A testing ground for a grandiose social experiment that, in case of success, could spread across all of Asia? Or all of the above?

“Most probably for our Soviet politicians, who do not restrict the allocation of resources for the purpose of keeping Afghanistan in the Soviet orbit, they are guided by an entirely different set of reasons, each of them significant.”

Valery thought that there must be some objective geopolitical laws that determine the aspirations of states and the relations between those states in different parts of the world, independent of political regimes or the socio-economic systems of those states. In the case of Afghanistan, a long time ago, in the middle of the nineteenth century, it was the arena for a rigid confrontation between Czarist Russia and imperial Britain.

Starostin jogged his memory for episodes of that great confrontation of world powers. In the case of Russia and Britain, their interests could be defined and understood. Russia shared a border with Afghanistan in the north, while British colonial possessions bordered Afghanistan in the south and the east. By 1941, Germans were also looking to engage in the region, having created a vast intelligence network. The Germans were effective: when Hitler attacked the USSR, Kabul’s initial reaction was positive. Afghan

leaders were convinced that the Soviets would soon be defeated and would cease to exist as a unified state, making it possible for Afghanistan to expand its territories at the expense of the Central Asian Soviet republics.

The Germans needed Afghanistan as a platform for the realization of their plans to attack India. To counter the Nazis' successful intelligence network, Moscow and London—recent rivals—combined their efforts to counter the German presence in Afghanistan.

The confrontation of special services in this region continued with the advent of the Cold War. In the mid-1950s, Soviet military intelligence sent a group of fifty-six agents who had been recruited in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan to Afghanistan. The group was tasked with conducting covert activities against the United States and its allies in Afghanistan in case of the beginning of a new world war. However, as soon as the group settled in Afghanistan, its deputy head and its communications specialist immediately turned themselves in and confessed to espionage to local authorities, compromising the identities of the other group members. The Afghan authorities didn't appreciate this confession. They were absolutely disinterested in the nature and origins of the group. Afghans understood that the covert activities of potential saboteurs were not directed against their regime.

Nobody prosecuted the failed agents. There was not one publication relating their failed undertaking in the media. Soon they were all imprisoned, and the two traitors found themselves sharing cells with those whom they had betrayed. The Soviet Union denied any connection with this group, claiming it to be a provocation on behalf of special services from Western countries. The former group members spent ten years or more in the Dehmazang Prison in Kabul. Everyone forgot about them, both Soviet authorities and Afghans. But when a period of détente began, the head of the Counterintelligence Residency

in Kabul, Erik Nekrasov, who arrived there in the 1960s, took active measures to free those who remained alive. Some of the former agents returned home, but there were also those who remained in Afghanistan after being released from prison.

In the 1960s, the Soviet Union started a large-scale cooperation with its southern neighbor. Americans, who were not willing to sacrifice their influence in Afghanistan to the Soviets, also offered a number of projects to Kabul. For example, they began building an expensive irrigation complex in Helmand, but it soon became clear that a chunk of the money that was made available for this project had been embezzled by Afghan bureaucrats. Americans who could have prevented the theft had received bribes. A scandalous trial took place, resulting in one of the Afghan bureaucrats being sentenced to capital punishment. Such a sentence—exceptional at the time—shocked the general public.

The Soviet Union, during the same years, successfully completed the construction of an agrarian complex in Jalalabad and built a hydroelectric power plant in Naglu. Soviet engineers built Kabul Polytechnic Institute, which was soon staffed by highly qualified faculty and interpreters. At the same time, a number of less significant sites were constructed.

A devastating drought occurred in Afghanistan in 1971. At the time, the Soviet Union, which had been importing grain from abroad, sent a substantial amount of wheat to Afghanistan. Then the Soviets learned that Afghan bureaucrats had sold that wheat instead of distributing it to the population for free, as was initially stipulated in the agreement. Americans were smarter in this respect. They packaged their wheat in bags that were labeled USAID and tasked their volunteers to hand out the grain.

Thinking about Americans, Valery recalled the ambassador of the United States in Afghanistan, Theodore Eliot. He was such a nice man, thought Valery. Eliot had always displayed a friendly attitude toward the Soviets. He organized wonderful meetings of American and Soviet diplomats. He gave great speeches about the need for Soviet-American cooperation. However, one should remember that his tenure in Kabul coincided with détente, the period when Soviet-American relations were at their most favorable state since World War II. At that time, a joint space expedition took place, and the most important agreements regarding nuclear disarmament were signed. Eliot and his wife had excellent personal relations with the Puzanovs, which played an important role as well. When Eliot worked as an adviser in Moscow at the U.S. embassy, Tatiana Mikhailova Puzanova was the section head at one of the best hospitals in Moscow. There, she helped Eliot's wife deliver a baby. Since then, their friendship had endured.

However, not everything was smooth, even during the years of détente. Valery remembered his recent conversation with the second secretary of the American embassy, Malinovsky. The diplomat proudly declared that he was a relative of the legendary Soviet marshal, the hero of the Great Patriotic War. When Starostin started to compliment the Soviet-American friendship and the effect that collaboration between the two superpowers had in helping such poor countries as Afghanistan, Malinovsky sharply interrupted him. "I would sooner believe in the existence of witches than the possibility of a Soviet-American friendship. We were and always will be strategic adversaries, including here in Afghanistan. This is the reality, and anyone with common sense should learn to accept it."

It should be mentioned that during the peak of détente, Americans significantly reduced their activity in offering economic assistance to Afghanistan. During that time, they

didn't participate in any major economic projects. It is quite possible that they really acknowledged that Afghanistan was a sphere of vital Soviet interests. Perhaps it was something else. Daoud was leaning too openly on the Soviet Union for support at that time. During those years, information began to emerge suggesting that the CIA had established close contacts with leaders of the radical Islamic opposition who had escaped into Pakistan.

Ambassador Eliot kept a professional distance despite a generally friendly rapport with Ambassador Puzanov. He invested a great deal of effort in preparing Daoud's official state visit to the United States, which was to occur in May of 1978. Summing up the events of 1977 in one of his telegraphs, Eliot wrote to Washington: "American-Afghan relations during this period were wonderful. President Daoud supported the positions of the United States in regards to Guam and Puerto Rico at the United Nations. He accepted an invitation to go to the United States on a state visit. We doubled our contribution to the educational program for Afghan officers. The Afghan leadership recently confirmed that it would like American aid to be more visible to counter the domineering Soviet influence."

On April 24, 1978, one day before the PDPA leaders were arrested, Eliot, whose tenure in Afghanistan had already expired, paid a final visit to Daoud. Later, contacts close to the Afghan president informed the Soviets that this "passionate supporter of détente" recommended that the Afghan ruler apply the most severe measures to the PDPA leaders who threatened the security of the existing regime. In exchange, he promised a considerable expansion of cooperation with the United States. It was difficult to determine whether the ambassador was speaking for himself or for the State Department.

Finally, right before his departure from Kabul, Eliot recommended that the State Department formulate its attitude toward Taraki's government as soon as possible. "We

cannot, with full certainty, qualify the new Afghan government as 'communist' or 'non-communist' in the context of the U.S. Foreign Aid Act," Eliot wrote in his cable to Washington. "The new leadership came to power by means of violence and bloodshed, but it declares that this was unavoidable in overthrowing 'the tyrannical, dictatorial regime' of Daoud. It is most probable that the real goals and intentions of the new government will remain in the dark for some time."

The American ambassador appealed to Washington not to turn away from Kabul. Otherwise, "such a position may force the new Afghan regime to become totally dependent on the Soviet Union. Very soon we will be in a position to dictate the terms of the game," he wrote with optimism in his telegram to Washington.

Eliot left Afghanistan in May 1978. He was replaced by another high-ranking American diplomat, Adolph Dubs. To Valery, Ambassador Dubs seemed ordinary and unremarkable in comparison with his predecessor. Since his arrival, contacts between Soviet diplomats and American diplomats were conducted strictly according to protocol.

The American reaction to the arrival of the pro-communist regime to power was very calm. It did disavow its obligations of economic assistance, which had been committed during Daoud's reign. It did not initiate an information war against Taraki and Amin. It simply waited for the results of the revolution to become clear and paid special attention to developments that could be used to diminish Soviet influence in the region. At the same time, the Americans intensified their work with the leaders of the Islamic radical groups in Pakistan who began to form terrorist groups and armed detachments that consisted of religious fanatics and marginalized peoples of all sorts.

The American intelligence operatives in Kabul kept a very low profile after the revolution. Certainly the CIA had its agents, possibly all the way up to the PDPA leadership. However, the CIA operatives were very restrained when dealing with the Soviets, being fully aware of the potential hazards of recruiting Soviet citizens.

Starostin remembered only one case of American recruitment of a Soviet, registered several years ago, during his tenure at the Center. At that time, a very disturbed and frightened young Azeri interpreter working with a group of Soviet military specialists came to the consular section of the Soviet Embassy in Kabul. He claimed that CIA agents had tried to recruit him. At that time, Yuri Surnin, the acting deputy chief of Soviet intelligence in Afghanistan, listened to the interpreter's claims attentively and concluded that the man's perceptions were adequate and he presented a realistic assessment of the situation. He understood that the Americans really intended to recruit a Soviet officer who could prove useful to them in the future. He anticipated that the American agents would soon make an offer to the interpreter. Sensing a valuable opportunity, Surnin had a particularly cordial conversation with the young man and secured his agreement to cooperate with Soviet intelligence.

In the 1970s, CIA operatives made frequent attempts to recruit Soviet citizens living abroad. As a result, Kabul's KGB group developed operation "Kukish."* The goal of the operation was to embarrass their American counterparts and to demonstrate the superiority of their intelligence services. The approach included planting undercover agents to act like recruitment prospects in order to later expose CIA advances.

* Word for a distinctly Russian gesture of contempt, generally accompanying refusal to comply with a request, consisting of extending clenched fist with thumb placed between index and middle fingers

As Surnin predicted, a CIA operative in Kabul who was in charge of “developing” the Soviet citizen told the young Azeri that a very powerful, high-ranking official of the U.S. government would soon arrive from Iran. That important man, he explained, would like to meet their “Soviet friend” in order to establish confidential collaboration with him. The Soviet interpreter, per Surnin’s recommendation, said that he understood the situation. He said that it was possible that he, an Azeri nationalist, whose ancestors fought the Bolsheviks as members of the Musavat Party, would agree to collaborate, on the condition that the Americans fulfill his life-long dream of owning a genuine American Colt. “I am an Azeri, a man of the Caucasus. According to our ancient tradition, giving a weapon is a sign of the highest trust and respect.”

A few days after that conversation, the “American friend” called the interpreter and informed him that the high-ranking official, who had arrived from Tehran, would expect to see him in a certain Kabul restaurant later that evening.

An agent of the Kabul KGB Residency, codenamed “Fateh,” was also involved in the Soviet counter-operation. Fateh was an Afghani, a mid-level official of the Afghan gendarmerie. He had been tasked by Surnin to write a report in advance to his boss. The report would contain important information about the arrival of a dangerous international terrorist in Kabul, a Palestinian member of the organization Black September. At the time, shortly after the hostage crisis involving the Israeli Olympic team in Munich, the world was fearful of Palestinians. Fateh, with a group of commandos, hid in the back of the restaurant before the meeting of the Soviet interpreter and the American official. When the important American visitor (the deputy chief of the CIA Residency in Iran*) and the Soviet interpreter

* William Casey, the future director of the CIA, was then CIA chief in Iran.

met, and after the CIA operative in Kabul who was in charge of recruitment left, the huge commandos in gendarme uniforms stormed the restaurant, seized the alleged “Palestinian terrorist,” loaded him into their car, and sped off.

Fateh interrogated the American with particular vengeance, tying his hostage to a chair before beating him, demanding that he confess his terrorist activities. A holstered Colt and its ammunition served as proof of the American’s subversive intentions. The interrogation was conducted in German and Persian. Then, in the presence of witnesses, a diplomatic passport of an adviser of the American embassy in Tehran was pulled out of the man’s pocket.

The leadership of the gendarmerie sent a report regarding the incident to President Daoud. Outraged, the U.S. State Department sent an angry note to the Afghan Ministry of Foreign Affairs protesting “the unfounded and cruel attack on an American diplomat by Afghan gendarmes.”

It is difficult to say whether the Colt was brought into the restaurant by the American himself, or if it was planted by Fateh, but the KGB fulfilled its plan of warning the CIA about further approaches to Soviet citizens.

The president of Afghanistan, having read the report from the gendarmerie and the official note from the U.S. State Department, remained silent.

In early September 1978, Head of the KGB Representative Office Bogdanov sent his proposals regarding the structure of the Afghan security forces to the Afghan leadership. When Leonid Pavlovich and his group began working on the security project, Amin’s only

wish was for them to make the Afghan State Security Service as powerful as the KGB. The scheme, proposed by the Soviets, was as follows:

- To create a division of Foreign Intelligence analogous to the KGB's First Main Directorate, which would be initially oriented towards Pakistan and India, the two countries that presented the main danger for the DRA.
- To have a powerful counterintelligence service based on the Soviet model (Second Main Directorate). Besides countering the infiltration of foreign agents, this division would be tasked with studying politics involving the clerics and working with tribes.
- To remove the military counterintelligence unit from the Ministry of Defense and subordinate it to the state security services, as in the Soviet Union.
- To transfer the resources of the operational-technical department of the Ministry of the Interior to the state security services. The advisers from the Federal Republic of Germany had worked closely with the minister of the interior before the April Revolution and provided the Afghans with special technologies designed for related activities.
- To organize the services' departments dealing with external monitoring, informational, analytical, and investigative matters.

This structure was named the Main Directorate for the Defense of the Interests of Afghanistan (AGSA). Assadullah Sarwari, one of the heroes of the revolution, became the head of AGSA.

The KGB Representative Office in Kabul was strengthened during this time. Wherever he found himself, Leonid Pavlovich Bogdanov had a habit of molding his surroundings to his liking. He made the Center allocate a Mercedes-Benz to his office, which was delivered from Tehran shortly thereafter. In addition to the Mercedes, several cars were sent from the Soviet Union, along with a specially trained driver and an encryption specialist.

Colonel Vladimir Chuchukin became the first deputy head of the KGB Representative Office in Kabul. Chuchukin had been working in the United States, but was forced to leave his assignment because he had been compromised by an undercover CIA agent.

Life in Kabul was evolving, and that life was not as bad as Bogdanov had anticipated. One of the reasons was that Kabul was visited regularly by Soviet leaders of the highest rank: vice-premiers, ministers, senior military figures, and party bosses. He was obliged to participate in all protocol meetings arranged for the high-ranking guests. Connections with them could benefit Bogdanov in the future.

In late September, the secretary of the Central Committee of the CPSU, Politburo Candidate B. N. Ponomaryov, arrived in Kabul. Because his visit was unofficial, his arrival was not marked by any official ceremony. A government airplane landed and parked at a remote runway. A small cortege of cars with Puzanov, Bogdanov, Sarwari, and Politburo member Shah Wali approached the airplane. As soon as he got into the car, Ponomaryov explained the purpose of his visit. The Soviet leadership had tasked him to meet with Taraki and Amin and to convince them that the mass repressions and lawlessness in the country were pernicious to their socialist aspirations. Moscow seemed to be very concerned by the continuing persecution of Parchamis.

Listening to Boris Nikolayevich, Bogdanov thought that the guest from Moscow had a difficult task ahead of him. Bogdanov himself was already aware that the Afghan leaders refused flatly to discuss those topics. The theme of party unity had been closed for a long time. Nobody had mentioned it since the middle of summer. Most of the Soviet operatives in Afghanistan tried not to irritate the Khalqis by such conversations. There was nothing to be gained.

Ponomaryov, who settled in the guest apartment in the embassy compound, went for a walk in the garden in the evening. Leonid Pavlovich joined him to introduce him to the peculiarities of the situation.

Walking along the alleys of fragrant rose bushes, the colonel was listing what he felt to be the most pressing issues. "The first issue is the obvious leftist bend of the Afghan leaders and their eagerness to immediately realize radical reforms while ignoring the local reality. In doing so, they set themselves politically against the majority of the population, creating scores of enemies for themselves. While agreeing in theory that it was necessary to have allies across a broad range of the population, the reality was that Taraki and Amin were only narrowing the social base of the revolution." Bogdanov was particularly concerned about the mass repressions conducted against Parchamis, the clergy, and anyone who was suspected of disloyalty. There were reports of people who were shot on sight, without due process or a court hearing. Bogdanov added bitterly that those executions were being committed by Soviet-trained Afghan security operatives. "This is why Afghans may think that we are also involved in the repressions, that people are being killed with our approval, or even by direct orders." This last argument was seriously bothering the head of the KGB office in Afghanistan.

The secretary of the Central Committee of the CPSU listened to Bogdanov's concerns silently before asking some insignificant questions. On the morning of September 26, he met with Taraki and Amin and tactfully expressed Moscow's concern. To emphasize the confidential nature of those meetings, Ponomaryov conducted the meetings individually with the PDPA's leaders. Not even the Soviet ambassador had been invited. Both Afghan leaders, who had been forewarned of the subject matter of these conversations, were noticeably tense. It was obvious that they had difficulty restraining their objections. At more than one point, Taraki could not hold back.

"We never trusted Parchamis," he responded emotionally. "Our union was a formality. Parchamis did not participate in the military uprising. After the victory of the revolution they demanded that all of the leading positions in the government be divided equally between Khalq and Parcham. Is this just? When we declined to satisfy their demands, they started to threaten us with an uprising. There was only one way out. It was either us or them."

Taraki's body language betrayed his contempt for the conversation. He slouched in his chair with his legs crossed. His normally kind and welcoming face assumed a blank expression, masking his disgust.

Ponomaryov could consider his mission formally accomplished. He did what he had been tasked to do. He handed the Afghan leaders gifts along with greetings from the Soviet Politburo and "Leonid Ilyich personally." He chose not to meet with the Politburo members of the PDPA, which they found offensive. However, in the evening he gathered a small group of the upper echelon of the Soviet colony at the embassy, asking them to once again, "honestly and principally," evaluate the situation. Everything went well at that meeting

until Bogdanov took the floor. He described the Afghan armed forces with great skepticism, claiming that the army couldn't even defend itself, let alone the nation of Afghanistan, causing an emotional rebuttal from General Zaplatin.

"This isn't correct," claimed the general. "It's true that we should strengthen the Afghan army, but it is unfair to characterize it as lacking the ability to fight. Such an analysis can mislead our leaders and have damaging consequences."

Bogdanov responded, "I don't know what kind of information the dear major general has at his disposal, but our sources tell quite a different story."

A real quarrel ensued. Zaplatin, who didn't like the "sybarite" Bogdanov, stated openly that the KGB operatives in Kabul ought to drink less alcohol. "Then their view of the situation might be clearer." In response, the KGB representative accused the general of incompetence and interference in matters that didn't concern him. "You were sent to Kabul to deal with political activities, so stick to it." Ponomaryov had some difficulty in calming them down.

The Politburo candidate was the highest-ranking official to visit Kabul in 1978. According to the unofficial tradition of the time, the Moscow guest had to be given a gift. Osadchiy and Bogdanov asked a security officer by the name of Bakhturin, "Sergei Gavrilovich, find out through your source, what would please Boris Nikolayevich?" The "source" was an officer from the Ninth Directorate of the KGB, which was in charge of the personal security of Politburo members and candidates. Such a man was in Ponomaryov's entourage and understood immediately the nature of the question. "Boris Nikolayevich's wife would like to have high-quality Astrakhan fur for a coat."

Both colonels started to scheme on how to finance such an exotic gift. High-quality Astrakhan fur was not cheap, even in Kabul. The decision was made to task the Deputy Trade Representative Afanasiev to deal with the issue. Afanasiev had the reputation as someone with a talent for dealing with precisely these types of issues. On the eve of the high-ranking guest's departure, Afanasiev handed a set of Astrakhan pelts to Bakhturin. The gift was immediately handed to Ponomaryov, but soon the officer from the Ninth Directorate relayed Ponomaryov's request to exchange the grey Astrakhan pelts for black ones. Afanasiev was again tasked with fulfilling Boris Nikolayevich's wish, and the issue was resolved by the time of the guest's departure from Kabul. Bogdanov was in awe of the deputy trade representative's talent.

Two years later, Afanasiev and two more specialists from the same office would depart from Kabul in handcuffs, arrested for illegal schemes involving forged contracts, bribes, and embezzlement. The so-called "Vostokintorg Affair" was widely discussed in the offices of Soviet trade representatives abroad.

The next day, Ponomaryov left for Moscow. When Bogdanov saw him off at the airport, he received a perfect *nomenklatura* lesson from the party boss. Boris Nikolayevich delivered a solemn speech about the importance of the April Revolution for the global revolutionary movement, particularly for Asia, where democratic national liberation movements were gaining momentum. Academician Ponomaryov expressed hope that all of the conversations conducted in Kabul would serve the unification of the party and all of the progressive forces in Afghanistan. It remains unknown what the secretary of the Central Committee was personally thinking, but he had played his *nomenklatura* role perfectly. Ponomaryov's primary concern was that the security officers in Kabul would have no

doubts as to the old Communist warrior's enduring allegiance to the ideas of the Communist cause, and would include this assessment in their reports to the Center.

The impact of his trip was negligible. The mass repression continued. The Afghan revolutionaries continued to behave as they pleased.

Moreover, Amin himself became more aggressive. When meeting Bogdanov, he would open a black notebook and name some Soviet staff member in Kabul, stating that this person was "conducting subversive activities against Afghanistan." Once, the person in question happened to be an officer in the KGB Residency, working under a consulate cover. Another time, it was the director of the Soviet Cultural Center. After some analysis, it became obvious that the reason for such accusations was always either secret or overt contacts by the Soviet citizens with Parchamists. As it was later revealed, Amin created a special group within the security services to follow Soviet citizens and record all their conversations and contacts, regardless of their nature.

Hafizullah Amin differed from other friends of the Soviet Union from countries on the path to socialism. On more than one occasion, Bogdanov had to appeal to Amin to release the Afghans linked to Soviet Intelligence Services. Sometimes Amin received a direct explanation about why Moscow was concerned about the fates of those people. Among them were former Vice-Premier Charkh, former Head of Police and Gendarmerie Azhar, and former member of the Revolutionary Council Raffi. Normally Amin would evade Moscow's requests or explain that the person in question was a member of a terrorist group. "Okay," he would say sarcastically, "we are prepared to free your man right away. We can even appoint him as minister, but only under your personal responsibility. Do you agree to these terms?"

A very cautious Bogdanov was not prepared to accept Amin's conditions. In response, he would say that he personally did not know any of those people and therefore could not claim responsibility for their actions. "So, you see?" said Amin, shrugging mockingly. "We are left to act in accordance with law."

The reality was that there was no law. People were kept in prisons without trial or reason. They were tortured cruelly. Mass executions were conducted every night. Those who were doomed to death dug their own graves before their executions.

At the same time, the KGB Representative Office grew rapidly. An adviser from the Ninth Directorate, Yuri Kutepov, arrived to organize the security for the leading figures of the state, such as Taraki. His main partner in this undertaking was Major Yaqub, the head of the Afghan Guard, who would later become chief of staff.

Senior officers were sent to Kabul from Moscow to create border troops and to organize a system for the defense of the Afghan border. The Kremlin elders could not understand why the Afghans chose not to secure their border with Pakistan when rebels crossed freely into Afghanistan. The Soviet leaders lived in a country where, almost immediately after 1917, all borders were reliably sealed by barbed wire and were guarded around-the-clock by an elaborate system of military outposts. In Afghanistan, there could be no border in the south. In the first place, Kabul would never accept the so-called Durand Line that separated Pashtuns living in Afghanistan and Pakistan. To place outposts along the Durand Line would mean complying with a historical injustice committed by Britain. It would mean giving away the disputed territories to Islamabad. Millions of nomads moved from the south into Afghanistan every summer. The local economy depended on counterfeit goods that were readily transported across the border. Secondly, Afghans

simply didn't have the means to organize anything like a network of outposts in the mountainous terrain. The advisers who arrived from the Soviet Union began to consider alternatives to mitigate the situation.

From the time that Bogdanov arrived in the summer of 1978 to the fall of that same year, the staff of the KGB Representative Office in Kabul grew from eight to around fifty. According to the PGU rules for Third World countries, when both an intelligence resident and an official representative of the KGB were working in the same county, the resident would become the senior of the two. However, before leaving for Kabul, Bogdanov managed to convince Kryuchkov to make an exception for him. When both Bogdanov and Vilior Osadchiy had once worked in the Center together, Osadchiy was his subordinate. Bogdanov used this argument to his advantage when making a deal with Kryuchkov. It would take time, however, for Osadchiy to accept Bogdanov as his superior when the latter arrived in Kabul. It was settled after about a year when Andropov issued an order for the KGB resident's position to equal the rank of a general.

In 1978, KGB officers and military advisers still felt relatively safe in Afghanistan. Bogdanov would entertain himself by hunting and fishing, taking trips as far as one hundred and fifty to two hundred kilometers outside of Kabul in the Afghan country. Over time, the security climate in the country began to deteriorate. The religious conservatives fanned the flame of the Afghan people's displeasure over the growing power of infidels in the government. Localized uprisings and terrorist activities flared up around the country.

The KGB Residency in Pakistan and AGSA sources in Peshawar informed the Soviet leadership that the Pakistani Military Intelligence organization, ISI, was attempting to coordinate the rebels' activities. Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Israel began to express interest in

the Islamic armed opposition. The biggest danger, however, certainly came from the United States, or the “Main Adversary” as it was dubbed by the PGU. This is why KGB operatives were ordered to keep a close eye on the Americans.

In April 1978, Vladimir Shuvalov, a Military Intelligence operative and a specialist on the United States, was sent to Kabul. He spoke impeccable English and had studied in an American university. Before his arrival, his colleagues managed to bug the US embassy. Shuvalov began his tenure in Kabul by transcribing long hours of conversations between American diplomats recorded by these microphones, though the recordings did not initially yield anything of particular interest.

At that time, the CIA group in Kabul consisted of several operatives, led by Turko, who worked under the guise of an embassy adviser. The American mission included roughly twenty diplomats and fifty technical staff. Intelligence operatives and “clean” diplomats acted quite cautiously.

In late 1978, Ambassador Dubs’ wife arrived in Afghanistan. Puzanov, as the doyen of the diplomatic corps in Kabul, arranged a lunch on the occasion of her arrival. Over coffee, Bogdanov casually inquired as to U.S. interests in Afghanistan. “None,” responded his American interlocutor flatly.

In the cables from Kabul written by the ambassador and the intelligence operatives, Amin was mentioned more frequently than Taraki. Taraki, who formally remained the head of state and the head of the PDPA, was losing clout by the day to his “favorite pupil.” Taraki portrayed this development as though he was the one who had initiated the gradual transfer of power to Amin, saying, “He will make it. All hope rests on his shoulders.” On the

one hand, there was truth to this statement. Amin's dedication to the cause and his work ethic were astounding. He was known to spend entire nights working in his office. On the other hand, it was not so simple. For a long time, Taraki had been a pawn in Amin's hands. Amin masterfully manipulated his "teacher" and was able to influence Taraki's decision-making to his own benefit.

It became clear to many in Moscow that they soon would have to deal with a new leader in Afghanistan. Amin was unstoppable in his quest for power.

When Bogdanov visited Moscow, Kryuchkov invited him for a conversation. Kryuchkov was his typical self—all business and without emotion.

"What do we have on Amin?" he asked as soon as Leonid Pavlovich entered his office. Bogdanov opened his dossier and began to read: "Hafizullah Amin was born in 1929 in Paghman, in the family of a low-ranking bureaucrat. He comes from the small Pashtun tribe Kharoti. His father died early. Amin was brought up by his oldest brother. He graduated from the Pedagogical School and the general science department of Kabul University. He majored in physics and mathematics. He worked as a faculty member and was deputy head of the Pedagogical School, and later was the director of the Kabul lyceum, Ibn Sina.

"As you see, Vladimir Alexandrovich, there is nothing special about that phase of Amin's life. The only thing that may be of interest to us is the fact that Amin headed an all-male lyceum where only Pashtuns studied. According to our data, Amin was, even then, a fervent Pashtun nationalist." Kryuchkov nodded. Bogdanov continued, "In 1957, our client went to study in the United States. He studied—and I would like you to pay special attention to this—at Columbia University. Yes, the very university that was always closely

watched over by American intelligence services. Columbia is a breeding ground for the CIA. They identify promising foreign students, take note of them, and develop future 'agents of influence.'"

"I know that," said Kryuchkov impatiently, urging Bogdanov to continue.

"Amin received his master's degree in the States. There he was an active member of the Afghan diaspora, also worth noting. Our American colleagues would hardly let such a person go unnoticed. It would be most unlike them. We have no proof of Amin's collaboration with the CIA, but if we were to use our contacts in the States to dig around..."

Kryuchkov's eyes sparked to life. The intelligence chief rose from his desk and paced around his office. Vladimir Alexandrovich was obviously intrigued by this information. Amin, as the minister of foreign affairs and the first vice-premier, was received and shown respect by Andropov and other Soviet leaders in Moscow. Kryuchkov himself, when visiting Kabul, paid his respects to him. Amin was officially recognized as the inspiration behind the April Revolution, as well as its key organizer. When talking with Soviet leaders, he endlessly claimed his loyalty to socialist ideals, referring repeatedly to Lenin and to his own unwavering friendship to the Soviet Union.

"It could be transgressions of youth," murmured Kryuchkov, looking out of his window. "It could happen to anybody. But, continue."

Bogdanov understood that he was in no place to insist on the validity of the possible spy connection. Better to stick to facts.

"After his return from the States, Amin taught at Kabul University before returning to Ibn Sina as the lyceum's director. That was when he became close to Taraki. According to our information, they met each other long before that. They met in the fifties under the

auspices of the “National Pashtun Club,” which was created by Daoud. Then Amin was appointed as the department head of the Pedagogical Staff of the Ministry of Education. In 1962 he returned to the United States to study in a PhD program at Columbia University. He wasn’t a serious PhD candidate then, and never received a doctorate, but was very active in public activities and became the head of the Afghan Students Community.”

“What do you mean by ‘public activities’?” asked Kryuchkov.

“First of all, it involved the organization of various activities supporting the concept of Great Pashtunistan. It was Mohammad Daoud’s idea to unite Pashtuns living on either side of the so-called Durand Line. It sounds like that was when Amin got his first taste of political work. He was good at it, and found that he could lead people.

“He returned to Kabul in 1965. According to his own version of events, he was deported from the United States ‘for political reasons,’ primarily for his role in organizing a mass demonstration in support of the Palestinian cause. That was when he became a member of the newly organized People’s Democratic Party. He ran for Parliament, but failed. He started teaching at a women’s lyceum before becoming a bureaucrat for the Department of Primary Education in the Ministry of Education. In the summer of 1966, Taraki proposed Amin’s candidacy to the party’s Central Committee. After the party split into two factions, Amin became a Central Committee member from the Khalq faction. In 1968, the plenary session of Khalq decided to expel him from the Central Committee for ‘fascist character traits and chauvinistic views.’ However, a year later, Taraki insisted that Amin be forgiven.”

“Interesting,” uttered Kryuchkov, deep in thought. “Interesting what tied Amin and Taraki together. Why was the general secretary so closely linked to Amin? Why take him under his wing?”

“Here, I think, one will find the answer in Amin’s behavior. He is a master in the art of flattery and takes advantage of Taraki’s weaknesses very skillfully, always calling him ‘father of the nation,’ ‘great leader of the revolution,’ ‘beloved teacher.’”

“Go on,” said Kryuchkov.

“That was when Amin, the only one in the Khalq faction, was honored with membership in the Afghan Parliament. Babrak Karmal was already a Parcham representative in the Parliament. Amin made Karmal the object of very sharp and public criticism. His animosity was obvious, despite the fact that they were both members of the same party. I would even go so far as to say it was closer to hatred than animosity.

“After the overthrow of the monarchy and Daoud’s assumption of power, Amin was tasked with the organization of underground activities in the Army. That was when Amin’s leadership talents fully blossomed. During this brief period, he managed to recruit many officers of the Kabul garrison into the Khalq faction, with an emphasis, as ever, on Pashtun issues. They became his guard on April 27, when the military coup began. By the way, right after the so-called ‘revolution,’ Amin still agreed to share the laurels of ‘revolutionary-in-chief’ with Qadir, Watanjar, and other officers. However, now he claims to be the sole hero of the revolution. A feature movie was even produced where Amin played himself, the commander and hero of the revolution. During the film’s production, he personally edited the script, twisting the historical record to his great benefit. A brochure was published where his ‘outstanding role’ in overthrowing Daoud is detailed. Anyone who dares doubt

this version of events becomes the object of Amin's merciless persecution and even physical elimination."

"But he really did play a key role on April 27," remarked Kryuchkov.

"Along with other party comrades," Bogdanov disagreed.

"What else? What about his personal life?"

"He is married, with three sons and four daughters. He is not particularly loyal to his spouse, which, in their tradition, is not considered to be a particular transgression. You know that Karmal himself openly lives with Anahita Ratebzad, and when he has a chance, he doesn't deny himself the company of other women."

Kryuchkov grimaced with disgust. "Continue."

"He knows English well. There is evidence that he is inclined to drug use. According to some old party members, particularly Parchamists, he is a vicious and vengeful person with great ambitions. That is about all."

"Yes," said Kryuchkov, "certainly a bright personality. We should be able to figure out how sincere he is when he goes on about his love of the Soviet Union and his dedication to socialist ideas."

"Once, Amin, talking to one of our delegations, said, 'I am more Soviet than you are.' Nobody ever heard him utter one bad word about the Soviet Union. That's a fact."

Bogdanov added, "Moreover, if anybody would mention anything negative about the Soviet Union in Amin's presence, he would immediately interrupt him, 'Never, ever speak this way again.' According to a source in Amin's entourage, he admires Stalin and tries to emulate him. Very often, he talks about Fidel Castro with great admiration. He met Castro in Cuba

when he participated in a conference of the Non-Aligned Movement. Castro, according to Amin, received him cordially in Havana and allowed Amin to attend Politburo meetings.”

Bogdanov stopped talking. He wanted Kryuchkov to internalize all of the information. The KGB representative in Kabul wanted to add one more note to Amin’s description, but was unsure how it would be received by Kryuchkov. The colonel knew his boss’s character well, and also appreciated his own limitations, although he was very tempted to add that it seemed that both Amin and Taraki internalized the lessons of the Great October Revolution and the first post-revolutionary years well. In particular, in private conversations with Soviet comrades, they had found excuses for their persecution of Parchamis, recalling how severely Lenin and then Stalin had dealt with the Men’sheviks, Trotskyites, Zinovievists, and others whom they suspected of disloyalty. “Do your history books throw any shadow of a doubt on the righteousness of this strategy?” Amin had cornered his Soviet comrades. “We have been taught by Marxist-Leninist theoreticians that the class struggle only grows more acute.” Bogdanov was going to say that Amin was acting in full accordance with Bolshevik tactics and strategies. First, he destroys the opposition and its sympathizers. Then he most probably removes all of his closest allies and anyone who might stand in the way of his personal rule, exactly like his idol Stalin had done. But Bogdanov hesitated to tell this to Kryuchkov. “Who knows how events will develop,” he thought. “It is possible that Amin will become a loyal partner of the Soviet Union for many years to come, like Fidel Castro. Perhaps the Kremlin is betting on him. Anything is possible. This is why I should narrate only facts. If we make references to reports from agents and trusted friends, that information should be thoroughly filtered.”

Kryuchkov remained silent, digesting Bogdanov's report. Bogdanov took several sheets from his folder and presented them to his boss. "Here, Vladimir Alexandrovich. This is a typical example of Amin's rhetoric. It's a transcript of his recent meeting with our delegation from the Academy of Sciences—a very representative document."

Kryuchkov took the papers and began to read. "Having greeted the Soviet delegation, H. Amin said that the April Revolution was a direct consequence of the Great Socialist October Revolution and would serve as an example for many countries. 'We always found inspiration in the ideas of the October Revolution. Many Afghan revolutionaries were brought up by the great Lenin's works.' Talking about Soviet-Afghan relations, Amin mentioned that the Afghans were always very close and sincere with their Soviet friends who 'gave us comprehensive assistance and support. This is the guarantee of the victory of our revolution. From the very first day of our party's creation, we have said that following the Soviet model is the main condition for our success.' Amin promised to assist the work of the Soviet delegation and in conclusion said, 'We don't have secrets from our Soviet friends because we always seek to nurture four main qualities among our party members: patriotism, Marxism, Sovietism, and internationalism.'"

"Nothing new," remarked Kryuchkov after he finished reading. "I heard the same from him when I was in Kabul."

"In principle, this is the case," agreed Bogdanov. "But more and more, I sense that this person is not so simple. I have a persistent feeling that all of his high-style speeches are only smoke and mirrors, part of a game plan that we still don't understand."

Bogdanov hesitated. With difficulty, he held back his desire to tell Kryuchkov that Amin once said straightforwardly that he would like to see a different Soviet ambassador in

Kabul. According to Amin, Puzanov compromised himself by having worked in Afghanistan under the king and under Daoud, didn't understand the essence of the April Revolution, and sent distorted information to Moscow about the situation in Afghanistan. Bogdanov was greatly surprised to hear this account. From what he understood, Puzanov thought very highly of Amin and tended to exaggerate Amin's impact in his telegrams. The Afghan leader, having expressed his wish, was certain that it would be immediately forwarded to Moscow, but he miscalculated. The colonel was too smart for that. He considered it dangerous to become an intermediary in this sort of intrigue. Besides, who knows what Amin said about *him* to others, or about other Soviet representatives?

However, the Afghan vice-premier hadn't forgotten about his conversation with Bogdanov. He tried to check through other channels whether his wish was relayed to the Center.

Having concluded his meeting with Bogdanov, Kryuchkov invited his deputy, General Medyanik, who was in charge of Oriental affairs. He asked Medyanik to share his thoughts regarding Amin. Yakov Prokofievich was not surprised when he was asked this. He reported the following:

"Our colleagues in the American section and we are just beginning to work out the issue of Amin's stay in the United States. We don't have much information yet. When studying at Columbia, Amin was close with Pazhvak—the former minister of education and a fervent anti-communist. They drank together and enjoyed each other's company. On the way back from the States, Amin stopped in Western Germany to visit the Afghan ambassador in Bonn, Ali Ahmad Popal, an openly pro-Western and anti-Soviet politician. We don't know details of their conversations. The question is, what do this self-proclaimed

'true communist' and his friends on the other end of the ideological spectrum have in common? During Amin's election campaign for parliament, he was supported financially by the chairman of a joint-stock company, Spinzar Sarwari Nascher, who was known as a monarchist and was close to King Zahir Shah. After the revolution, Amin released him from prison and allocated a car and driver to him. There was also talk about secret meetings between Amin and some unidentified Americans. That's all we have."

"Nothing particularly substantive," remarked Kryuchkov with displeasure. "Continue working in this direction, but tread carefully. God forbid if Comrade Amin were to find out. Don't forget that you are dealing with a senior statesman and our partner." Medyanik, a professional of the highest caliber, didn't need to be reminded of that.

The next day, Kryuchkov presented a report on the same sensitive issue to Chairman of the KGB Andropov. Kryuchkov, as usual, tried to avoid conclusions and evaluations, relying instead on the facts of the matter. He was very experienced in bureaucratic games, and when communicating with Politburo members, he never permitted himself to issue his own opinion in regards to any major state problems. In the best case, he would limit himself to general remarks and would always emphasize his loyalty to Marxist-Leninist principles. In this case, he chose proven tactics, first listing the undoubtedly positive characteristics of the Afghan leader (his great industriousness, persistence, energy, eagerness to learn) before moving to the drawbacks (indulgent, overly ambitious, intolerant of dissent, often insincere). "The Soviet colleagues had some questions related to the American period of his biography. For instance, not everything was transparent in his bank accounts, which are currently under investigation. But in general, Comrade Amin is loyal to the general secretary and obviously works harder than anybody

else for the good of the April Revolution,” summed up Kryuchkov. “Their course towards establishing socialism is correct.”

“This is most important,” Andropov agreed with Kryuchkov. “But, Volodya, don’t forget that the more successful the Afghans become, the more attention will be given to the region by our adversaries, particularly the United States. By the way, are you watching the activities of the Americans in Pakistan? Do you know what’s happening there now?”

“We have a sense that they are still preparing for some large-scale operations there. Louis Dupree, the leading American specialist on Afghanistan, who had been expelled from Kabul in November, moved to Islamabad. The CIA operatives Lessart, Robinson, David, Brock, and others were also noticed there. It seems as though a whole group is amassing there. According to intelligence, they are trying to establish connections with the rebel leaders and study their profiles for future cooperation. We have the impression that the CIA transferred its regional headquarters from Tehran to Islamabad. According to our intelligence, up to 40,000 commandos—mostly Afghan refugees—are being trained in camps in Pakistan.”

“You see?” Andropov grew lively. “This is only the beginning. Watch this closely.”

In August, Karmal’s brother Mahmoud Baryalai was removed from his ambassadorial post in Pakistan. As many other prominent Parchamis, he refused Amin’s order to come to Kabul to “receive his new appointment.” He knew very well what kind of “appointment” awaited him, and therefore decided to join Babrak Karmal, who was hiding from Amin’s assassins in the forests of Western Czechoslovakia.

Babrak Karmal looked extremely concerned upon his brother's arrival. The future seemed grim. "For now, our Czech comrades will take care of my security," he said bitterly, "but it can be over at any moment."

The situation for the Parchamis at the time was almost hopeless. The main leaders of the faction were forced to live in hiding in different countries. Those who stayed in Kabul were arrested and subjected to terrible torture. Regular party members hid their Parchami connections. Moscow turned a blind eye towards its former allies. Karmal hadn't forgotten how, so recently before leaving for Prague, he had tried in vain to meet with Ambassador Puzanov.

"What kind of communist is he?" Karmal asked angrily. "He is a cowardly opportunist. This is not the way to behave towards allies in need."

"What should we do?" asked Baryalai. "Perhaps we should move deep underground and cease activities against Taraki and Amin."

Karmal finished his favorite Kent cigarette and lit another. Then he began to talk about possible near-term tactics.

"We cannot do anything now that could make the situation worse. Perhaps they are only waiting to finalize the destruction of Parcham and physically eliminate all of us. It's in our best interest to wait. I am certain that soon the situation will swing in our favor. What those madmen are doing to the country will inevitably cause a wave of rage, and that wave will wash them away. The euphoria from the revolution has passed. The people are waiting for the changes that were promised. What do they see instead? One clown is imagining himself as the great leader while another is engaged in murky affairs behind his back. You will see, many people will soon be unhappy with this regime."

“But why do our friends in Moscow behave as if they are deaf and blind?” asked Baryalai.

“This is a mystery to me as well. Perhaps Puzanov and his colleagues are sending distorted information to Moscow? This is most probably the case.”

“Then allow me to leave for Moscow immediately in order to meet with their leaders and open their eyes to what is happening in Afghanistan,” suggested Baryalai.

Karmal agreed. His only condition was that under no circumstances should the Afghan embassy in the Soviet Union catch wind of his visit.

Having arrived in Moscow, Baryalai first called the residence of Erik Nekrasov, who had been his close contact during his tenure as a KGB resident in Kabul. Nekrasov cautiously declined to meet with his Afghan friend, but they spoke at length and in great detail on the phone. Baryalai held nothing back in describing the troublesome situation of the Parchamis.

“If you don’t intervene, there will be big trouble,” he told his former contact. “Comrade Karmal and the rest of us live under a constant threat of death.”

He also lamented the lack of financial support and mentioned that he had a letter from Karmal that was addressed to the leadership of the CPSU. By the end of the conversation, the Afghan was in tears. “In the name of humanism, please save us,” he pleaded.

“You will be contacted,” promised Nekrasov laconically.

Nekrasov immediately reported the conversation to his leadership. The information quickly went up the ladder. Secretary of the Central Committee Ponomaryov was informed on that very day. He immediately called his deputy, Ulyanovsky.

“Think, who could receive this Baryalai and listen to him? Keep in mind necessary means of secrecy. They must not find out about this in Kabul.”

Ulyanovsky understood that he himself should not play this game. Finally, a staff member of the International Department, Genrich Polyakov, met with Baryalai. Baryalai was happy to be received. He gave Polyakov a letter from Karmal and repeated everything that he had told Nekrasov.

“The physical elimination of real communists is occurring in Afghanistan,” Baryalai said bitterly. “All true friends of the Soviet Union are rotting in prisons. Many have been shot. Ambassador Puzanov is misinforming you. He is more interested in his career than anything else. What should I do, Comrade Polyakov? Should I return to Kabul or do you recommend that I go into hiding in another country?”

Polyakov, who had received specific instructions to avoid this sort of discussion, shrugged his shoulders, suggesting that Baryalai should decide on his own. Baryalai exploded.

“Not long ago the Soviets advised us on how to proceed in difficult situations. We couldn’t take one step without your advice. You trained us to be your younger brothers, who must always listen to their elder brothers. Now you’re turning your back on us. You have abandoned us. You’ve placed your bets on villains who are a shame to socialism, who compromise you.”

Polyakov winced. These issues had not been on the meeting’s agenda. He assured Baryalai that he would do his best. They parted.

At that time, the staff of the International Department of the CPSU Central Committee had little time to console members of the Afghan opposition. In the USSR, preparations for the first state visit of the head of the Afghan state, general secretary of the Central Committee of the PDPA, chairman of the Revolutionary Council, prime minister of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan, Nur Mohammad Taraki, were underway.

On November 27, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Kozyrev invited the DRA's ambassador to the Soviet Union to a meeting to discuss details of the forthcoming visit with him. Raz Mohammad Paktin, until recently an anchor of Kabul Radio, had become the ambassador in the summer. He asked his Soviet comrades to allocate a personal tutor to him who would educate him in social sciences and international relations to "acquire the experience in political work that I lack." Paktin assured them that he, along with other Afghans studying in the Soviet Union at the time, would be a dedicated student of Marxism-Leninism. He assured his Soviet colleagues that from now on, all Afghan students studying in the Soviet Union would return to their motherland as communists.

On the eve of Taraki's visit, Paktin confirmed the Afghan side's readiness to sign the Treaty on Friendship, Good-Neighborliness and Cooperation, as well as the agreement on establishing the permanent Soviet-Afghan Commission for Economic Cooperation, and the draft of the Joint Communiqué about Taraki's visit in Moscow. Deputy Minister Kozyrev expressed his wish that the Soviet side provide the guest with an opportunity to speak on Soviet television, and to receive a complementary medical examination in one of the clinics of the Fourth Directorate of the Ministry of Health, which was in charge of the health of the Soviet *nomenklatura*.

Preparations for the first state visit were underway in Afghanistan. The text of the Treaty of Friendship, Good-Neighborliness, and Cooperation was discussed with Afghan leaders. When preparing the document, both sides were led by Lenin's principles of the Treaty of 1921, which was signed by Soviet Russia and Afghanistan, with the added considerations of the new reality. Experts honed the wording and argued about punctuation. Ambassador Puzanov was constantly in touch with the Afghan Ministry of International Affairs to keep the minister of foreign affairs abreast of the evolution of the document. Hafizullah Amin, leafing through the document, admired the culture of Soviet diplomacy and the perfection of the translation into Dari, but didn't seem to be particularly interested in the substance of the treaty. If the Soviets wrote the document, it must have been correct.

The state leaders of Afghanistan didn't particularly concern themselves with this treaty, much like the other treaties they had previously signed. Afghans did not attach particular significance to such papers and documents. They kept to the spirit of agreements only so long as it was to their benefit.

Not only politicians were preparing for the visit. Officers of the Ninth Directorate of the KGB were researching the gastronomic preferences of Comrade Taraki and the members of his delegation in order to organize their meals in Moscow accordingly. It turned out that the arriving Afghans were not particularly fussy about cuisine. They drank tea in the morning and ate flatbread with goat cheese. For lunch they preferred vegetable soup with carrots, onions, and turnips. In the evening they ate *kerai*—fried eggs with lamb and onion. On special occasions, they would eat pilaf and shish kebab.

A discussion regarding the languages to be used during the meetings was held, and it was decided that the leading Soviet experts in Dari, diplomats Dmitry Rurikov and Stanislav Gavrilov, would handle interpretation during the meeting of the leaders. The protocol staff agreed on the ceremony for greeting the Afghan delegation at the airport and discussed what ties and sports jackets the leaders should wear.

On November 27, a plenary session of the Central Committee of the PDPA was held that was supposed to mark the end of intra-party turmoil. The following day, the *Kabul Times* published an article about the event. The article contained the customary set of ideological clichés: “The plenary session is a historical step forward in the workers’ movement”; “The plenary session demonstrated the PDPA’s commitment to proletarian internationalism and the defense of global peace”; “The plenary was the expression of the brilliant leadership of the party and of the people by Comrade Taraki.”

Decree Number Eight of the Revolutionary Council of the DRA, “Regarding the Issue of Land Reform,” was discussed and approved. The most important goal of the meeting—to deliver a final blow to the Parchamis—was achieved. Seven members of the Central Committee and two members of the Revolutionary Council (Babrak Karmal, Nur Ahmad Nur, Keshtmand, Anahita Ratebzad, Baryalai, Vakil, Najib, Qadir, and Raffi) were officially expelled from the PDPA, “for their participation in a traitorous plot against the Great April Revolution, the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan, and our glorious party.” Four more members of the Central Committee were subjected to softer punishment; they were reduced in the rank from members to candidates, “in order to be re-educated based on criticism and self-criticism.”

The papers also published Comrade Taraki's speech from the plenary session. The main message of the speech dealt with the plotters who had been expelled from the party. Taraki's rhetoric echoed that of Stalin's, who destroyed his opposition as "hired hands and agents of imperialism." Taraki asserted that, "Imperialism has organized a plot against the April Revolution, and the imperialist circles in Kabul have established contacts with their agents. Our security services have received information that indicates our comrades' participation in this plot, under the leadership of Babrak Karmal, Qadir, and others. In order to resolve the situation, and to uncover the role of imperialist circles...the decision was made to appoint as ambassadors B. Karmal to Prague, N. A. Nur to Washington, Wakil to London, Anahita to Belgrade, Najib to Tehran, and Baryalai to Islamabad. After the arrests of Qadir, Ali Akbar, and Shahpur, we were able to obtain a number of documents that implicated Sultan Ali Keshtmand and Raffi in the plot. The ambassadors were recalled. Not only did they fail to return, they embezzled state embassy funds."

Information about the uncovered plot was received with enthusiastic applause. Those in attendance shouted appeals to punish the plotters severely. All of this echoed similar events in the Soviet Union during the thirties and fifties.

It is well known that every revolution devours its children. The April Revolution was a classic example. Having completed a military coup, Afghan revolutionaries first killed the remaining allies of the former regime, continued on to eliminate their personal enemies, and then moved against the opposition within their own ranks. Seemingly intoxicated by bloodlust and encouraged by the perception of impunity, the country's new leaders

escalated mass repressions, killing anyone suspected of disloyalty of the slightest degree. Many of their victims were simply in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Major landowners, merchants, bankers, and entrepreneurs were executed simply because they belonged to the “wrong class of ideological persuasion.” Clerics were killed because the state deemed religion unfit for their state designs. The intelligentsia was killed just in case. Mass executions of peasants were staged because peasants were unreliable and allegedly would join the counter-revolution at any moment. The areas of traditional settlement by Pashtun tribes were bombed by the Air Force. Tribal settlements were destroyed by artillery fire. Teams of assassins were sent wherever, according to intelligence reports, small groups of *ikhvans* were noticed.

When the Soviet advisers attempted to stop this orgy of violence, they were reminded of their own Great October Revolution. “Remember how during the Civil War, and in the following decades, you rooted out and eliminated any real and potential enemies in the most cruel and merciless way, gradually guaranteeing the triumph of socialism?” The advisers attempted to object, claiming that the Soviets had admitted that these repressive actions were wrong and that they had also made other mistakes. But their objections went unheard. Afghan leaders of every rank seemed to be embroiled in a perverse competition over who could kill more of their own citizens. Their actions were encouraged from the very top of the Afghan leadership.

A Soviet adviser on fighting banditry and crime with the Ministry of the Interior of the DRA, Colonel Kliushnikov, once appeared in the Soviet embassy in an extremely agitated state. He met Bogdanov and told him the following story: “Young PDPA activists arrived in the center of the Paktia province in the south of the country. They gathered

young people at the square, told them about the revolution, distributed badges with Taraki's portrait, and invited them to enter the local party organization. Local youth were interested in what the visitors had to say. They were very surprised to see girls who had arrived from Kabul not wearing *burqas*. Some of the youth pinned the badges to their shirts. However, right after the visitors departed, the 'apostates' were publically executed—Islamic fanatics tore seven of the youngsters to shreds. Amin ordered everybody who had participated in the murder to be brought to Kabul. Soldiers arrested roughly one hundred people without paying particular attention to who was directly involved in the murder and who merely happened to be in the vicinity.

Late in the evening, one of the leaders of the Tsarandoi came to Kliushnikov. "They are going to try one hundred people at the same time in the Ministry of the Interior. It would be good if you could come." When the colonel entered the vestibule of the ministry, he saw dozens of poorly dressed people crouching on the floor. The head of Tsarandoi, Major Tarun, was sitting above them in an armchair. Tarun's deputy approached Kliushnikov, claiming that all those present were bandits and deserved death. The colonel recommended that each one be interrogated separately and that sentencing ought not to be rushed. Despite Kliushnikov's advice, the interrogations began right in the vestibule. The adviser returned to his office. After some time, he heard the sound of bus engines. Looking out the window, he watched as the remaining captives were shoved into the buses.

At sunrise, that very same deputy head of Tsarandoi came with two of his staff members to see the adviser. They seemed confused and were very pale. They poured vodka and said that every one of their captives had been shot. After the collective interrogation,

which was witnessed by Kliushnikov, they were all sentenced to death and executed immediately.

Bogdanov, having heard this account, was not surprised. He shared another story with his colleague. Often when arriving at his office at the security services early in the morning, he saw Assadullah Sarwari looking tired, with traces of mud on his boots and clothes. Gradually, Bogdanov discovered that every night the head of AGSA personally participated in mass executions at a testing facility in the suburbs of Kabul. After some time, Sarwari didn't bother to hide that from the KGB operatives. "Today, another hundred traitors will be sent to Pakistan," he would giggle. That was the adopted jargon for the regime's mass executions.

In the fall, rumors spread that those who had been arrested and accused of counter-revolutionary actions were not killed, but were taken to the Soviet Union, where they worked in Siberian mines or in the Urals. Rumors spread of the existence of letters describing deplorable conditions in Soviet uranium mines, purportedly accounts of the unfortunate Afghans.

People couldn't believe the more terrifying truth, that those arrested by AGSA were executed right outside of their own homes. This widespread fear, however, had the effect of producing enemies of the regime rather than increasing its authority.

News of rebellion in Nuristan arrived in the summer. Amin ordered the rebellion to be suppressed immediately and without mercy. The entire region was reduced to rubble by the Air Force. The unrest spread to Kunar province, adjacent to Nuristan. Bad news arrived from the Pandjsher Gorge. For now the resistance there was unorganized, but according to intelligence, Afghan emigrants in Pakistan had begun to create an alliance of the most

influential Islamist organizations. It was named the National Salvation Front, and was the first alliance of mujahadeen. The Front was led by Burhanuddin Rabbani, who would serve for many years as one of the main leaders of jihad.

Taraki left for Moscow on December 4. He was provided with an Il-62 airplane for the journey from the aviation group that served the top Soviet leadership. Two days prior to his departure, Soviet representatives in Kabul had to resolve an unexpected issue. It was assumed that during Taraki's absence, Amin, his undisputed right-hand man in the state and in the party, would fulfill his functions. Suddenly, however, after all of the protocol issues had already been settled and the delegation lists confirmed, Amin informed Colonel Bogdanov that he also would like to "quietly and unofficially" visit Moscow. Bogdanov couldn't hide his astonishment. "Does it make sense for the two leaders of the country to leave during such a precarious situation?"

But Amin wouldn't take no for an answer. "We have other respected comrades. For example, Sarwari and Watanjar," he responded. "And you, Comrade Bogdanov, are staying here to perform your duties. If needed, you will always be able to instruct my colleagues. I trust you to make the right decision. I personally ask you to help govern our state in our absence. And besides," Amin added, "I would like to meet with Comrade Andropov."

Bogdanov decided that Amin could have made arrangements for that meeting through his own channels, bypassing the KGB representative. He decided not to argue any further.

A splendidly arranged departure ceremony took place at the airport for the Afghan delegation. Bogdanov also stood in the line of Soviet embassy staff waiting to shake the

hand of the departing leader. At the height of the ceremony, from the corner of his eye, he noticed Hafizullah Amin scuttling up the gangway and sneaking onto the airplane.

Another splendid ceremony awaited the Afghan guests at the government airport Vnukovo 2. The guests were greeted by General Secretary L.I. Brezhnev and other Soviet leaders. According to tradition, there were embraces and kisses, the national anthem was played, and the honor guards marched. Leonid Ilyich invited the Afghan leader to join him in his car. The adviser of the Afghan Department of Foreign Affairs, Stanislav Gavrillov, was their interpreter. During the trip from Vnukovo to the Kremlin, Brezhnev tried to speak to Taraki. Gavrillov readily interpreted into Dari. However, the Afghani pretended that he didn't understand. "Comrade Taraki must be tired," commented the general secretary condescendingly. "Perhaps he should have a nap while we are driving. He has spent the last seven hours up in the air."

The official program of the visit began the next day. The second secretary of the Soviet embassy in Kabul, Dmitry Rurikov, was to interpret for the two leaders. Gavrillov was on standby. However, before the negotiations began, Taraki unexpectedly declared, "We, members of the delegation that have arrived in the friendly Soviet Union, are Afghans. To be more precise, we are Pashtuns. This is why we would like Pashto to be used in this remarkable setting. As far as I know, your interpreters do not speak Pashto. This is why we have included a Pashtun officer in our delegation who has studied in your country and is fluent in Russian."

Leonid Ilyich, who understood very little of what was said, reacted to Taraki's words very calmly. To be more precise, he showed no reaction whatsoever. The head of the Soviet government, Premier Kosygin, stared at the documents that had been laid out in front of

him as though considering their contents. The face of Minister of Foreign Affairs Gromyko dropped. Ambassador Puzanov first turned white, then a deep red hue.

Rurikov quickly approached Gromyko to remind him that they had agreed with Amin in Kabul that the interpretation was to be from Dari into Russian. Gromyko, who was very sensitive about following protocol, mumbled that he remembered that agreement very well. Then Andrei Andreyevich whispered into Ponomaryov's ear, "Sure, sign agreements with such fellows. Today they will sign them, and tomorrow they'll violate them."

The artillery captain, who appeared crushed by the responsibility bestowed upon him by the "Great Leader," mixing up political and legal terminology, began to interpret. It was a pitiful scene. Gromyko, feeling offended, addressed the captain. "Speak louder. Your words are unclear." However, this made the officer even more nervous, and his quaking voice was hardly audible. Then Andrei Andreyevich said very loudly, "It seems that comrade interpreter did not eat enough kasha!" The members of the Soviet delegation smiled sarcastically. Then Gromyko whispered to his assistant, asking if there was a qualified specialist in the Foreign Ministry who knew Pashto. The assistant consulted with Gavrilov. Yes, there was such a person; however, at this time he was studying at the Diplomatic Academy. "Find him and bring him to the Kremlin immediately," snapped the minister of foreign affairs.

Vladimir Kozin, a graduate student at the Diplomatic Academy, was one of the few people in the Soviet Union who had perfect command of this rare and difficult language. Kozin himself could hardly believe the fact that he was the single expert in Pashto. Pashtuns were the main ethnic group in Afghanistan. They comprised the majority of the

population. Pashto and Dari were the most widely spoken languages in the highest echelons of power. So why did the Soviets, after so many years of friendship with Afghanistan, fail to prepare a sufficient number of interpreters? There was no answer to this question.

At the Moscow State Institute of International Relations, Vladimir had mastered Pashto, Dari, and English. There were only two people who had wished to study Pashto in his cohort. They disappeared soon after having received their diplomas. When Vladimir entered the Foreign Ministry, he discovered to his surprise that he was the only one in the ministry capable of speaking Pashto.

About a month after graduation, Vladimir was sent to work in the Soviet Embassy in Kabul. Again, the situation repeated itself. He was the only one at the embassy who could freely communicate with Pashtuns. He was jokingly referred to as “the Pashtun nationalist” at the embassy. Four years later, in the fall of 1976, he returned to the Soviet Union and was appointed to work at the Department of the Middle East in the Foreign Ministry. The April Revolution was received with great enthusiasm by the Foreign Ministry staff. Everybody thought that because the leaders of the revolution were true ideological allies, life in Afghanistan would only improve. Then Vladimir entered a graduate program at the Diplomatic Academy.

Never before had he been given a chance to interpret in the Kremlin for the top leaders of the country. Moreover, according to existing government rules, he could not be trusted to carry out such an important government job, as he lacked the necessary security clearance. It would take time to arrange this, since the State Security apparatus carried out very thorough investigations before granting such clearance. However, an order from the

Politburo superseded all protocol. The graduate student quickly grew accustomed to the work environment in the glorious halls of the Kremlin and managed his responsibilities well throughout the course of the visit.

The signing of the Treaty of Friendship, Good-Neighborliness and Cooperation went according to protocol. Having signed this most important document, the leaders of the two countries, raising flutes of champagne, thanked the ministers of foreign affairs Gromyko and Amin, as well as all comrades who had participated in the preparation of the treaty.

Then Kosygin and Amin, who were joined by the leaders of the related ministries and organizations, signed agreements to increase military supplies and to send an additional contingent of Soviet military specialists to Afghanistan, as well as agreements to expand existing trade cooperation and to provide Afghanistan with comprehensive economic assistance. A plan for ties between the Communist Party and the PDPA was also signed.

Meanwhile, Amin wasted no time. During the second day of his visit, he arranged a personal meeting with Premier Kosygin. Dmitry Rurikov interpreted their conversation. Amin began the conversation with a historical discourse. He reminded Alexei Nikolayevich that in 1893, during the Second British-Afghan War, Britain annexed part of the territory of Afghanistan. As a result, Peshawar, one of the great Afghan cities, became a part of British India. This city and other former Afghan territories were now part of the northwest frontier province of Pakistan. Almost seven million Pashtuns, about the same number of those living in Afghanistan, are forced to consider themselves citizens of another state against their wishes. Then Hafizullah Amin expressed his concern about the recent developments in Pakistan that resulted in General Zia ul-Haq's emergence as its leader.

According to Amin, this reactionary, pro-American general, with the help of his “handlers from the States,” was doing everything in his power to extinguish the young Afghan revolution. The Pakistanis, according to Amin, were planning to send gangs of religious fanatics and terrorists to the DRA. This is why he and Comrade Taraki had to act. Analyzing the situation in Pakistan, “the Great Leader of all Pashtuns”—Taraki and he, Amin—had decided that Zia ul-Haq’s regime was not very strong. Its strength was based on the support of some army divisions loyal to the general. The Pashtuns and Baluchi, as well as allies of the overthrown prime minister, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, and Pakistani Communists were well positioned to rebel against Zia ul-Haq. However, they would need financial support, arms, ammunition, and means of transportation and communication to do so. If the Soviet Union would provide such assistance, the Afghans themselves would assume responsibility for its delivery and distribution in the tribal areas.

Alexei Nikolayevich Kosygin, who, unlike Brezhnev, was in good physical shape, was the best negotiator among Politburo members. He immediately understood the logic behind Taraki’s spectacle the previous evening. When Taraki demonstratively refused to speak in Dari, his main intention was to present himself as a “Pashtunist.” That suggested that the key topic of their visit to Moscow, in the eyes of the Afghan leaders, was Pashtunistan. The Friendship Treaty was a formality. They never had any doubt that the USSR would become their primary ally and sponsor. However, the guests’ ambitions appeared to go well beyond existing Afghan borders. This was strange, however, because they themselves had complained about the number of serious problems in all spheres of Afghan society. Indeed, information at the disposal of the Soviet leaders painted a bleak picture of internal affairs in Afghanistan. The idea of declaring war on a neighboring state

with obvious Soviet participation was nothing less than audacious. It envisaged the Soviet Union lending support to Pakistani Pashtuns, Baluchi, and other opposition elements in Pakistan. This assistance would become widely known. The government of Pakistan would voice its justified indignation about subversive activities conducted by the Soviet Union. The Soviet relationship with the United States and its allies would immediately sour. In short, the chances of success for this plan bordered on zero, while its inevitable complications would last for decades.

Kosygin looked at Amin attentively. Either this man was extremely naive about issues of global politics, he decided, or he was intent on some sort of provocation. The Chairman of the Council of Ministers calmly and firmly responded that promoting subversive activities on the territories of sovereign states, even states that were hostile to the USSR and its allies, was against the principles of Soviet foreign policy.

On the same day, Brezhnev and Taraki had a one-on-one meeting in the “Winter Garden” of the Kremlin. Rurikov, who was interpreting at the meeting, was prepared for any surprises. However, the Afghan leader, who seemed to have been warned by Amin about the premier’s uncompromising stance, didn’t say anything unexpected. He only repeated what his deputy said an hour or two ago, without going into the history of the Second British-Afghan War. Leonid Ilyich listened to Taraki and nodded his head, although he had no idea what his guest wanted from him. Brezhnev didn’t give any response regarding the thrust of the Afghan leader’s message, although he promised that the issue raised by Taraki would receive thorough consideration.

In order to give Taraki an opportunity to speak in front of representatives of the West, the program of the visit—at Gromyko’s initiative—included a meeting with high-

ranking foreign diplomats accredited in Moscow. Taraki, who spoke excellent English, elected to address the diplomats in Pashto. The ambassador of Afghanistan in the Soviet Union, Paktin, did a poor job of translating his speech into Russian. It seemed as though Taraki didn't have a very good idea of what he wanted to convey to the diplomatic corps. Perhaps he had experienced a sleepless night. For whatever reason, he got carried away by the topic of diplomatic immunity. Paktin, who was so tense that he began to quiver, translated into Russian: "Each of you has diplomatic immunity. An ambassador cannot be arrested or put into prison. This is why ambassadors should work well and send accurate information to the government." This comment drew laughter from the audience. Those diplomats who were familiar with the notion of a Freudian slip understood the underlying issue immediately. A cruel, repressive regime had been established in Afghanistan, and Ambassador Paktin feared for his life.

After the meeting adjourned, a dinner for the members of the Politburo and the Afghan delegation was arranged in the Granovitaya chamber of the Kremlin. Gavrilov, Rurikov, and Kozin were all invited to interpret, just to be on the safe side. Brezhnev placed the graduate student Kozin directly at his side. Vladimir was shy. He had sustained an injury while hammering a nail in his apartment right before the dinner. His shyness was accentuated by what seemed like a hastily bandaged finger, which was awkwardly exposed when he was holding his fork and a knife. Taraki sat across from Brezhnev. Kosygin sat across from Kozin. At the end of the dinner, Brezhnev suddenly noticed that all three glasses placed in front of the nervous interpreter remained untouched. Kozin hadn't had a sip of red wine, white wine, or vodka.

"Why aren't you drinking?" the general secretary asked Kozin.

“I am working, Leonid Ilyich!” exclaimed Kozin. “I can’t drink.”

Brezhnev was obviously nonplussed by his response. He looked at the interpreter disapprovingly. “And I suppose you think we are vacationing here?” The general secretary himself was drinking Zubrovka, which was poured for him from a special decanter.

“May I ask to sample what you’re drinking Leonid Ilyich?” Kozin asked the general secretary.

Brezhnev gestured to the waiter, who filled Kozin’s glass with Zubrovka from the special decanter. Then the general secretary tapped the microphone with his finger, either checking the microphone’s connection or motioning for those present to be silent. Then he stood up with difficulty.

“I’d like to propose a toast—to our interpreter!”

Everybody at the table rose, clearly confused as to the nature of the toast. This young man had hardly spent two days in the Kremlin. Why this special treatment? Nevertheless, they all complied and drank to Kozin. Later, Kozin’s colleagues in the Foreign Ministry inquired as to why the general secretary acted with such respect towards him. Kozin’s diplomatic rank was immediately raised by two positions, just in case.

The results of the visit were characterized as positive in a classified memorandum that had been prepared by the Central Committee. It emphasized that relations between the USSR and the DRA had been raised to a new level, and were now based on class values and filled with the spirit of camaraderie and revolutionary solidarity. The DRA leadership was told that it could firmly rely on Soviet assistance and support in matters of the revolutionary reorganization of Afghan society.

The authors of this classified memorandum did not neglect to note the delicate issue of Taraki's and Amin's requests for support in their campaign for the "Great Pashtunistan."

"Afghan leaders expressed their concern regarding anti-Afghan activities based on the territory of Pakistan, and they emphasized disagreements with Pakistan concerning the issue of Pashtuns and Baluchi," read the classified Central Committee memorandum. "Our side tactfully expressed the undesirability of employing any extreme measures that could be taken advantage of by the external and domestic enemies of Afghanistan."

One evening, Starostin was told that Nikolai Alexandrovich Dvoryankov, a professor of Moscow State University, would arrive on an Aeroflot flight in Kabul the following day. Valery knew that he had to put everything aside to greet the scholar.

Dvoryankov visited Afghanistan regularly in the sixties and seventies. He was a leading specialist of Pashto and the history of Afghanistan who was known for delivering brilliant presentations at scholarly conferences in Kabul. During his visits, Nikolai Alexandrovich eagerly gave interviews on Afghan Radio. Those interviews were always well-received, and stirred the minds of Afghan intellectuals. One of the reasons was that they had difficulty understanding how a foreigner could speak so eloquently in their language. Not only could he speak Pashto, but he wrote poetry and translated Pushkin and Mayakovski from Russian into Pashto.

Dvoryankov was an old friend of Taraki's. When they first met, Taraki was known in Afghanistan as a would-be writer, an author of sentimental stories detailing the difficulties of life among the poor in Afghanistan.

Once, the professor and the future Afghan ruler traveled together to the Afghan-Pakistan border, to Pashtunistan. Nikolai Alexandrovich made a bet with Taraki for a bottle of top French cognac. Dvoryankov would pretend to be a Pashtun who had left his native land during childhood. Nikolai Alexandrovich claimed that nobody would be able to uncover the truth. The professor had no problem upholding the linguistic aspect of his bet. However, he didn't think through the legend of his origin sufficiently. He could not respond to Pashtuns' inquiries about who was his great-great-grandfather, great-great-great-grandfather, great-great-great-great-grandfather, his father, brother, uncle, second uncle, and so on. Every Afghan Pashtun could trace his paternal lineage back at least seven generations. Before long, the Pashtuns suspected that Dvoryankov was a foreigner. However, Taraki recognized Nikolai Alexandrovich's victory in their wager, and they drank the spoils together.

Dvoryankov was a world-renowned professor and had authored many scholarly works. He had taught at Moscow State University and held the position of deputy chairman of the Society of Soviet-Afghan Friendship. He was a smart, charming, and confident man, who had many friends in the Soviet government, mainly among his former students. It was easy for him to open many doors in the Foreign Ministry and the Central Committee.

When Taraki was just beginning his political career, it was Dvoryankov who organized invitations for his visits to the Soviet Union. The future leader of Afghanistan was invited by the Union of Writers and the Society of Soviet-Afghan Friendship. The professor used his connections to arrange free medical treatments for his Afghan friend in resorts in the Caucasus, and to publish his writings in Azerbaijan. In short, Moscow learned about Taraki due to Dvoryankov.

Now, having become the head of the Afghan State, Taraki remembered all of the favors that his Soviet *ustaz** had done for him. The Afghan administration sent an invitation through the Soviet Foreign Ministry for Nikolai Alexandrovich to visit Afghanistan as Taraki's personal guest.

Nikolai Alexandrovich was met by officers from Taraki's secretariat at Kabul Airport. The president of the Academy of Sciences of the DRA, Nurzai (a former student of the professor), was there along with the officers from the secretariat. Valery Starostin greeted the professor warmly. They agreed that he would drive the guest from the hotel to the Soviet embassy. Dvoryankov, like most other visitors from the Soviet Union, settled in Hotel Kabul. Starostin drove him to the Soviet embassy to meet Puzanov. However, the professor didn't remain at the ambassador's office for long. He left in a flustered and agitated state. He relayed to Starostin how the conversation had transpired.

Puzanov: "So, how will you and I arrange a visit to Taraki? When will he be able to see us?"

Dvoryankov: "Alexander Mikhailovich, perhaps I didn't understand you correctly—are you expecting to visit Taraki together with me?"

Puzanov: "Of course—how else?"

Dvoryankov: "Taraki invited me as his close personal friend. How does this concern you? I'm sorry, but I will go to the meeting with Taraki alone, or I will not go to the meeting at all!"

"You were pretty direct," commented Starostin. "You may have unwittingly created a dangerous enemy for yourself."

* Teacher, professor, or mentor

As soon as they entered Dvoryankov's hotel room, the telephone rang. Someone from Taraki's administration said that a limousine with guards had been dispatched to drive Nikolai Alexandrovich to the residence of the chairman of the Revolutionary Council. While they waited for the car, Starostin showed Dvoryankov the latest issue of the Afghan English-language newspaper, *The Kabul Times*. On the front page, a photograph portrayed a blissfully smiling "giant" Taraki sitting at his "chairman's" T-shaped desk with government members as "Liliputs" gathered around, staring admiringly at the chairman of the Revolutionary Council.

"You see, Nikolai Alexandrovich, what sort of photographs are being published in Afghani papers!" exclaimed Starostin angrily. "It's completely ridiculous. Remember, I showed you portraits of 'The Great Leader' that had been placed all over the city? Did you notice that Taraki is painted in a greenish-blue tint? The posters are ridiculously designed, and he is depicted with an idiotic smile, his head sticking out of some ridiculous goffered collar, as if he is Tartuffe or some medieval Spanish king. How can one explain this? Could the mass circulation of this depiction mean that someone from Taraki's entourage is trying to compromise the head of state, depicting him as deranged? Or could it be that his comprehension of reality is simply inadequate?"

"Valery, you are accustomed to suspect everything and everybody. I understand that this is your profession. However, I am almost sure that such an image—an image of a kind, simple man of the people—has been created deliberately by Afghan propaganda as a contrast to Daoud, a gloomy, arrogant aristocrat who almost never smiled. I think that this image of Taraki could be well-received by Afghanistan's lower classes, workers, and peasants."

“And the English-only *Kabul Times* is published for whom? For Afghan workers and peasants?” remarked Starostin sarcastically.

Dvoryankov didn't have a chance to respond. There was a polite knock on the door. A young officer with a bushy moustache, who was an aide-de-camp of the head of state, invited the professor downstairs, where the car was waiting. Dvoryankov took an attaché case filled with gifts and went towards the door, handing Starostin the room key. Bidding Dvoryankov farewell, Valery asked him to call as soon as he returned to the hotel.

Nikolai Alexandrovich called around 10 a.m. the following morning. He was agitated and told Valery that while he was returning to the hotel, Taraki's car was involved in an accident. Nobody was hurt, but it was suspected that the head of state was the object of a terrorist attack. The driver of the car that impacted Taraki's limousine was arrested and under investigation.

Valery stopped by his residence to pick up some cold beer before continuing to the hotel. Dvoryankov was not alone in his hotel room. The professor was having a lively conversation with his guests, including Nurzai, the president of the Academy of Sciences, and other Afghans who sat on the bed and chairs in the room. The Afghans were in obvious admiration of the scholar, who was in his teaching mode trance. Valery thought that they looked like sparrows sitting on bare branches of a wintery tree. They would utter from time to time in Pashto, “*Ustaza! Ustaza!* (Oh Teacher, Oh Teacher).”

When Dvoryankov saw Valery, he told his visitors that he had to leave for the embassy right away. The guests filed out of the room. Starostin drove Nikolai Alexandrovich not to the embassy or to his home, but to Paghman. There, in the empty park, designed by Italians in the early twentieth century during the rule of Amir Amanullah

Khan, Valery treated Dvoryankov to a cold beer. Then they walked and talked, shuffling amidst dry red and yellow leaves.

Nikolai Alexandrovich told Valery that he had had a very warm meeting with Taraki. They drank Queen Anne whisky through the night. They ate pilaf and kebab. Taraki was very relaxed and down-to-earth. They addressed each other as close friends and reminisced, reciting poetry in Pashto and joking with one another.

The professor, keeping in mind the conversation with Starostin in the hotel room, asked Taraki, “What is your opinion of the propaganda campaign to establish your image as the head of state among ordinary Afghans?” Taraki seemed puzzled by this question. He evaded a direct answer, instead suggesting that Dvoryankov discuss it with Hafizullah Amin. According to Taraki, Amin had given orders pertaining to this campaign to the Ministry of Information and Culture. Amin was also in charge of monitoring the realization of his recommendations.

After Dvoryankov had inhaled a sufficient volume of the fresh mountain air, Starostin invited Nikolai Alexandrovich for dinner at his home. He had no doubt that Tamara had cooked a delicious dinner and awaited their arrival.

Their conversation continued in Starostin’s home.

“My visit with Taraki strengthened my confidence that the April Revolution is becoming stronger and stronger,” declared Dvoryankov. “The decisive destruction of the upper and most dangerous echelon of the internal enemies—the Parchamis—is a testament to my conviction.”

“Nikolai Alexandrovich—the Khalqis have destroyed this first, upper echelon, but what’s next? There will be a second, third, fourth, and other echelons. The power of the

new regime is still very weak. This is why it seems to me that Taraki and his allies have made a mistake by depriving themselves of support from Karmal and his circle. I think that in this current phase, they should have relied upon a broad front of democratic and patriotic forces, rather than limiting their opportunities by relying on a small sect of Pashtun Khalqis.”

Having heard the word “sect,” Dvoryankov was offended. “Then consider me to be a Pashtun sectarian as well. Yes, me, this Soviet Communist and Bolshevik is a dedicated Khalqi.”

Tamara, sensing that the men might start fighting over this topic, shifted the conversation to the Institute of Oriental Studies, where she had worked previously. However, the professor, who was a great polemist, had already committed to his position in the political discussion with Starostin and was determined to defeat his opponent.

“Valery,” he asked, “are you a smart man, or aren’t you?”

“I don’t know. I’m not in particular need of a great mind. I’m not a scientist. I do not work in a scientific institution.”

“Right now, you’re talking just like your Ambassador Puzanov. Have you not studied history? You don’t know that real revolutions cannot be based on a broad front, a democracy? This is true in any part of the world, in any country, and particularly in Afghanistan. If democracy begins here, then there will never be a revolution, only empty arguments and conversations about the need of a revolution and of possible ways for its realization. The real revolution can only take place when some political party in a certain part of the society succeeds in imposing unconditional respect for the iron will of those who aspire to carry on the revolution. Revolution involves the greatest violence.

Sometimes, one should act extremely cruelly because every person should understand that if he does not support the revolution, he will simply be killed. A real revolution needs a guillotine working around the clock in the main squares of the cities.”

“Well...” Starostin was taken aback. “You claim that a revolution needs victims to feed its guillotine, but for the sake of what? For what did the Afghan military kill each other? Why was blood spilled? I saw it with my own eyes. It was horrific and painful for me to watch. Why did those people die? What positive results were achieved during those months that passed after April 27? Where are the flowers that were to sprout from their blood-soaked soil?”

“All of these sacrifices were made in order to realize the most progressive program for Afghanistan: ‘The Main Directions of Revolutionary Tasks.’ You remember, it was adopted on the twelfth day after the revolution.”

“Yes, this program was adopted. I’ve read it, and even helped translate it into Russian. The program is really good, although its title is not very accurately formulated, and the text is quite awkward. However, even today it remains nothing more than a declaration. Where are the attempts to introduce this program into society? Just words, words, words,” said Starostin, trying to imitate the melody of a popular song by Dalida.

“First of all, the meaning of it is a declaration of the Revolutionary Council’s decrees which are the most important for this country,” Dvoryankov began to lecture. “Valery, don’t you know that the previously unheard of transformation has begun in this country? The changes are unseen now, but this country will be turned around soon. It will be turned from a pocket of crime and poverty, forgotten by the rest of the world, into an avant-garde socialist state.”

“Where? In the texts of the cables that are sent to Moscow from our party advisers? In the speeches of the Afghan leaders? In their decrees?”

“What is it in their decrees that you don’t like?”

“Well, let’s have a look.” Starostin took a manila folder from the bookshelf. “Here’s Decree Number One. It proclaims the creation of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan and establishes a one-party system in the country. Frankly, as a Soviet man and a CPSU member, I am not against a one-party system. I may accept that, for example, a one-party democracy may not be worse than a two-party or multi-party bourgeois democracy. A one-party system was confirmed in Mohammad Daoud’s constitution before the April Revolution as ‘reflecting the hopes and traditions of the Afghan people.’ Taraki didn’t introduce anything new here. It’s unfortunate that this Afghan style one-party system hurt their former allies, the Parchamis, so badly, as well as other undesirable folks.”

“Yes, but they, those Parchamists, were preparing a coup d’etat! Taraki told me about it last night. They were preparing a military coup.”

“Fine, Nikolai Alexandrovich. Let’s leave the Parchamis alone. Let’s move on. Here’s Decree Number Two. The members of the royal family who remain in Afghanistan are to be arrested and their citizenship and property confiscated. What do you think, my dear Nikolai Alexandrovich, of the act of taking away civil rights and, most importantly, confiscating the property of the direct representatives of the monarchical lineage from the Mohammadzai dynasty? Would you say this reflects the national spirit and traditions of the Afghan people? You are the one who should know well that during almost a hundred and fifty years, the leaders of the Mohammadzai dynasty were fighting for the independence of this country. It was due to the courage and patriotism of this clan that Afghanistan never

became a colony of Britain. Afghan troops led by the national heroes from this particular tribe successfully defeated the Brits in three wars. And here appears some unknown Ghilzai from the Taraki tribe and announces that the descendants of the nation's leaders are traitors? And he goes and confiscates their property? What do you suppose other Afghans think about that?"

Dvoryankov was thinking, frowning his brow.

"After that second decree was issued," continued Starostin, "the belongings of the families of King Zahir Shah and President Daoud were pawned off. Tamara and I went to the auction. A hand-woven carpet with a portrait of the former president of Afghanistan that had been given to him as a sign of love and respect by residents of either Baghlan or Mazar-i-Sharif was spread in front of the entrance. The exhibition's organizers thought that, entering the pavilion, every visitor should step and wipe their dirty feet on Daoud's face. I don't understand—from where does the desire to defile images of defeated enemies arise? As far as I know, this is not representative of Afghan culture. We certainly did not step on that carpet, and many Afghans had similar reservations.

"There were different things exhibited there: clothes, footwear, dishes, jewelry. Most of the pieces were cheap and old. It was a very sad sight. All of the visitors, including Afghans and foreigners, were surprised at how modest the members of the Afghan monarchical clan were. I met my old American friend Lenox, a CIA operative, at the sale. He asked me if I bought anything. I showed him a pajama top that Mohammad Daoud supposedly wore upon returning home from work. I paid close to nothing for it, still more than it was worth. The item was of interest for me only as a souvenir. Lenox showed me two small silver rings with lapis lazuli and a coffee cup made of Lomonosov porcelain from

Leningrad that he bought at the auction. I said to him, 'Well, the families of Daoud and the king didn't lead a particularly *chic* lifestyle.' Lenox, however, objected. According to him, the Kabul monarchal family's property had been estimated to be worth millions of dollars. However, the auction never reached that amount because the valuable items had already been stolen by the Afghan revolutionaries."

Dvoryankov, after withholding an initial impulse to argue, quietly asked, "Do you really think that Taraki is a marauder?"

"I don't allow myself to think that way, but I wouldn't put it past Amin and some of his officers to make off with some of the loot. But let's not talk about this mundane issue. Let's return to our discussion of the decrees.

"In accordance with Decree Number Three, Daoud's constitution was annulled. All of the laws that had been adopted earlier, 'except for those that do not contradict the goals and tasks of the April Revolution,' were abolished. Isn't this a strange formula? As if Daoud, while adopting his laws, was thinking about the goals of the revolution, as a result of which he would be murdered. In accordance with this decree, the functions of the Supreme Court are transferred to the Supreme Court Council of the DRA, which reports directly to the Revolutionary Council. The minister of justice becomes the supreme judge. The Military Revolutionary Tribunal will report to the Revolutionary Council. This means that the new Afghan regime elected to consolidate all power in the Revolutionary Council, rejecting the separation of the judicial, legislative, and executive branches, effectively concentrating all power in the hands of one person—Taraki."

“Valery, do you think that we would have built socialism in the USSR, that we would have won World War II, if power hadn’t been concentrated in the hands of one person—Stalin?”

“The USSR and Afghanistan are different countries. We have different histories and different destinies. And, besides, look how the world has changed between the time of our revolution and the military coup in Afghanistan. It seems to me that we cannot accept such convenient parallels in understanding history. To be more precise, I want to say that we have no right to transfer the historical experience of the Soviet Union onto Afghan soil.”

Dvoryankov remained silent for a while. Then, betraying his exhaustion from the challenging and apparently endless discussion, he turned to Tamara and began to tell her of his second marriage. At fifty-four, after the death of his first wife, he married again.

Starostin, shooting his wife a threatening glance, continued where he left off.

“And now, Nikolai Alexandrovich, let’s move on to Decree Number Four, which establishes the state symbols of Afghanistan. The state flag is red. Red is the color of Pashtuns and all Aryan peoples. Afghans, as far as I know, perceive this color favorably. However, look at the coat of arms. Why does it need the word ‘Khalq’ on it, the name of the ruling party? Imagine if our flag boasted the letters ‘CPSU.’ I suppose that it would be much more appropriate to put some sort of symbol on the flag of the DRA. Perhaps a mountain eagle, a snow leopard, or an ibex. Or a universal slogan, lines taken from the poetry by Ajmal Khattak, or from some other well-known classical Afghan poet.”

“Well,” started Dvoryankov, “I agree that our friends have not fully thought it through, and I didn’t do much to help them. There certainly could have been more interesting variants. Let’s move to the fifth decree,” suggested the professor.

“Decree Number Five seems to declare the final resolution of the fate of the members of the former royal family, who now live in Italy. Twenty-three members of this family, including King Zahir Shah, former Queen Umaira, Crown Prince Ahmad Shah, and many other family members, including the King’s son-in-law, former Commander of the Kabul Garrison Abdul Wali, are declared traitors and stripped of their Afghan citizenship. Was there any need to issue this decree, or is it to disguise fear and lies? Not one member of the royal family had intended to return to Afghanistan and to fight the Khalqi regime. They are faring well in Europe, but if any one of them wished to fight against the Khalqis, they would have started it without giving Taraki’s decree any consideration. As, for example, it happened in the spring of 1929, when Nadir Khan and his brothers Shah Mahmud Khan and Marshal Shah Abdul Wali Ghazi gathered an army from Pashtun tribes and marched on Kabul to overthrow the bandit regime of Bacha Saqao.”

Dvoryankov decided not to argue. This is why Starostin suggested that they look at Decree Number Six, which had been published in July, in detail. According to that decree, Afghan peasants were freed from repaying their debts to landlords and Jewish moneylenders*. Peasants and laborers who didn’t own land were fully freed from repaying debts and loans, regardless of their terms. Peasants who owned little land or no land and who owed money to private individuals until 1974 received similar privileges.

Decree Number Six was accompanied by a stipulation that established committees tasked with resolving peasant problems on the regional, provincial, and local levels. The regional committees were to play an important role in the realization of that task. The chairman of the committee would be appointed by the new authorities. He would be joined

* According to Islam, Muslims are not allowed to engage in money-lending. This is why moneylenders in Afghanistan were exclusively Jewish.

in the committee by a bureaucrat from the property fund, a representative from the prosecutor's office, the Ministry of Education, and the Ministry of Agriculture, as well as two respected representatives of peasants. Such a committee was supposed to conduct the fair resolution of arguments between peasants and landlords and to resolve issues regarding the return of the loaned property to its former owners. The establishment of the size of the property owners' land fund would be based on documents that established the right to own land, as well as on accounting books that recorded the repayment of the land tax, and so on. If need be, a regional committee would determine the distribution of private plots of land, examine and verify loan documentation, determine the statistics of landless peasants, examine the documentation of debt, determine debts that were arranged as property- or land-lending, as well as the amount of loans and interest rate payments.

As one can see from this list of tasks that partially comprised the mandate of the regional committees, those bodies had extraordinary power and influence on their territories. Members of the committees had to be very honest and competent. However, the reality was different.

By November 1978, the creation of committees for the resolution of peasant problems was announced in all 27 provinces and 179 administrative districts. But, strangely enough, peasants around the country gathered to protest against local authorities when the sixth decree was issued.

Starostin said, "Sure, this legislative act has a powerful reach. It undermines socio-economic relations that had developed over centuries in Afghan villages. This decree could literally uproot Afghanistan, and would cause serious dissatisfaction, not only among landowners and lenders, who would be robbed of the monies that they had loaned, but also

among peasants, who would stop receiving any sort of loans from the lenders. God forbid, Khalqi authorities will actually begin to zealously implement the provisions of the decree and severely disrupt rural life.”

“I don’t think this is going to happen,” objected Dvoryankov categorically. “You know well that the proclaimed creation of provincial, regional, and local committees to resolve peasant problems still is nothing more than a declaration. Sure, in some districts, some committees have already been created, but a lot of time will pass before they start having any sort of an effect. On the other hand, you must agree, Valery, that all of us want the problems of the Afghan peasants to be resolved successfully. It is the twentieth century, and they are still living in medieval times. Should they always be in the servitude of landowners and moneylenders? Besides, if the reforms outlined by the decree are successful, new authorities will acquire a serious social base among the peasants.”

“And if they are not successful?” asked Starostin skeptically. “And what about the discontent that may arise from uprooting ancient village traditions, on top of dissatisfaction with the other steps taken by the new authorities? Which brings us to Decree Number Seven...”

Nikolai Alexandrovich sighed. “Yes, this decree can cause serious problems,” he admitted.

Decree Number Seven, published on October 17, was issued to “provide women equal rights with men in the sphere of civil rights, liquidate unfair, feudal-patriarchal relations between husband and wife, and further strengthen good family relations.”

This document limited financial or material dowry for a bride (*kalym*). Now *kalym* could not exceed more than 10 *dirhem*, which was set by *sharia* law. That sum was equal to

300 Afghani, according to an exchange rate that had been calculated by an unknown financial authority. Three hundred Afghani was the cost of a carton of American cigarettes at the local market. The argument for that amount was that Prophet Mohammad paid a *kalym* of 10 *dirhem*, and no other Muslim should pay more, lest he appear more generous than the Prophet. It was prohibited to force the groom to give any gifts to the bride or her family on the occasion of holidays or social events. It was prohibited to force anyone to marry, as well as to prevent a legal wedding by means of threat, violence, or imposing unrealistic wedding budgets. A minimum age of entering wedlock was established: sixteen for women, eighteen for men. Any violation of this decree was punishable by imprisonment of between six months to three years, and the confiscation of *kalym* and other gifts.

“Nikolai Alexandrovich, do you remember how the *basmach*i movement in Central Asia began?” asked Starostin, going on to answer his own question. “It began with the ‘liberation of women’ and the prohibition of polygamy, the removal of the *burqa*, and with forcing girls to attend schools and to learn professions. I studied the history of the *basmach*i resistance with special attention. The Soviet authorities fought them for many years, only managing to overcome them because we had a multinational and multi-confessional country. Mostly Russians, Ukrainians, and Latvians fought the *basmach*i. Parallel to this struggle, the population of Central Asia was generously diluted by representatives of non-Muslim nationalities. It happened not only in the cities. Rural areas, too, received many Russian teachers and doctors who demonstrated their way of life to peasants. In Afghanistan, more than 99% of the population is Muslim. If a broad, anti-government movement similar to *basmach*i were to begin here, the authorities would not be able to suppress it.

“I also believe that the Afghans, as most people, do not care which power exists in their country. They don’t care so long as this power doesn’t reach into their wallets or their homes to impose a particular way of family life. When this happens, people will develop a strong dissatisfaction that may evolve into dangerous action.”

“On this item, Valery, I agree with you, and I spoke to Taraki about this last night.”

“What was his response?”

“Taraki thinks that the adoption of Decree Number Seven should demonstrate to the Afghans, and the whole world, the progressive nature of their revolution. I also think that the results of this decree may be very difficult to control. This is why its nature is more declarative and propagandist than practical.”

“This is exactly the case,” responded Starostin thoughtfully. “There will be zero practical results, but the enemies of the revolution will receive an excellent opportunity to exploit this document in their propaganda.”

Then Dvoryankov and Starostin elaborated the lengthy text of Decree Number Eight and began to ponder its contents. It was a decree on land reform. It introduced a general limit on the size of land ownership for one family. The size of land that could be owned was thirty *djeribs* (six hectares) for the first category (such as orchards, vineyards, and fertile land that yields two harvests per year) or an equivalent amount of land of other categories. Anything that the family owned beyond this limit was to be expropriated without compensation. Landless peasants, agricultural workers, and nomads without any possessions would receive land free of charge if they agreed to work on that land themselves.

The decree authorized the re-expropriation of the land if the peasant had not begun to work on it within three months after having received it. According to the decree, the land could not be further divided into segments less than five *djeribs*, and it was impermissible to loan, rent, or sell it to others. One exception to the rule was for women and small children, if they were the only members of the family and were unable to work on their land. In that case, they were allowed to rent it. In addition to women and children who were unable to work on the land, state bureaucrats and craftsmen also were given the right to rent land.

Land to be redistributed was expropriated from people who possessed plots larger than thirty *djeribs*, as well as state land, land of the royal family, and land that was the product of irrigation projects but was deemed unfit for state farms. A special exemption was given to land belonging to mosques. The decree also established an order for the distribution of expropriated land with priority given to landless peasants who had worked on land that belonged to others. The last to benefit from the decree were landless peasants and nomads from other provinces in those cases in which no land was available in their own provinces.

During the course of land reform, it was planned to unite peasants into cooperatives as soon as possible, and to provide cooperatives with low-interest bank loans for acquiring agricultural tools, pesticides, and seeds. It also was proposed to establish repair shops for agricultural tools, cooperatives to sell meat and milk produced by nomads, and programs for village banking.

Dvoryankov finished reading the document. "It's not bad. It's not without its drawbacks, but the goals are good, in my opinion. The decree should regulate land

ownership somehow. It should decrease exploitation of the poorest peasants and stimulate the development of agriculture, thereby improving the material well being of the population. It's important that the plan is implemented mindfully."

"Do you think that the expropriation of land beyond the established limit will result in the bankruptcy of well-established systems of large landlords?"

"I already said that the agrarian reform should be conducted mindfully. Why shouldn't such well-established systems be turned into cooperatives right away?"

"Would the landowner who possessed that land become a member of the cooperative?"

"Well, a cooperative can thrive without such a landowner."

"And what of the landowner? You should consider that many wealthy landowners have a great number of servants, armed militias, and sons who are army officers. Landowners, as a rule, have ties with representatives of the higher clergy. *Mirabs* who distribute water in the fields are accustomed to obeying them. You know, Nikolai Alexandrovich, it seems to me sometimes that Taraki's government's reforms are purposefully provoking people to fight the new regime."

"You're exaggerating, Valery. Yes, they may have acted a little hastily. There is a tendency to imitate our revolutionary experience to the 'T.' Afghan traditions are not being adequately considered. There is insufficient propaganda work in the provinces. But I wouldn't say that the publication of these decrees is provoking peasants to rebel against the government."

After lunch, Starostin drove the professor back to Hotel Kabul.

Having said goodbye to him, Valery felt a pang of guilt. He realized that he hadn't conducted the discussion with the scholar on honest terms. As an operative living in the country, he had full disclosure about the growing anti-government movement in the provinces. He knew that in Pakistan, the leaders of the Islamic movement and parties had already begun to form and train military groups to invade Afghan territory. He knew all too well how serious were the leaders of Pashtun tribes, religious clerics, and American-Pakistani special services conducting the work. He knew how well the people who were preparing to rebel against the Kabul regime were armed. And he knew how ineffectual the counter-measures of the government of the DRA were.

Some reports regarding the unrest in separate provinces of the country were certainly mentioned by TASS. However, in general, the Soviet mass media at the time enthusiastically described the triumphant march of the April Revolution across Afghanistan, support of the revolutionary changes by the majority of the Afghan people, and the potential for the further development of Soviet-Afghan relations. The celebratory tone was set by the Central Committee. Dvoryankov undoubtedly had access to classified materials prepared by TASS for distribution among the Soviet *nomenklatura*. However, he could not imagine fully the kind of threat that loomed over Afghanistan by late 1978.

Having returned to Moscow, the professor sent Starostin and his wife a letter. In it, he wrote, "The Afghan leadership asked several times to have me sent to help resolve specific issues, to help the country and the people, for the sake of peace and progress. However, the red-faced ambassador reacted to such requests of red Khalqists as would a low-bred bull to red pants." Dvoryankov cited his poem in that letter as well:

The sun rose at the embassy
Ambassador Puzan walked
With a caravan of beaten Parchamis
Following him melancholically.
Who were those sons of generals?
Where were they from?
Where, again, do such Judases find value?
Scum and double agents!
In order to figure it all out,
It is not enough to drink vodka and wine.
“Are these our class brothers?”
Puzan should have been asked.
But, those who were Communists
Could not be asked about this.
And trouble lurked everywhere
To last for decades.
The sun set in the embassy.
Ambassador Puzan
Went to the backyard
And stood sadly by the fence.
A fine example of nafar-police-Afghan....

Nikolai Alexandrovich Dvoryankov died of a heart attack on December 17, 1979. He lived only two months longer than his Afghan friend Taraki.

Chapter 4:

Kabul Hotel. The Mystery of Room 117

In the early morning of Wednesday, February 14, KGB operative Leonid Biryukov, working undercover as a TASS correspondent, arrived in the center of Kabul to meet his Afghan friend. The friend was not his agent, but he eagerly shared information with Biryukov, as did most other Afghans, who were sincerely attracted to Soviet citizens. It is possible that those Afghans thought that all Soviet citizens living in Kabul were intelligence operatives and therefore believed that assisting them in any possible way was almost a personal duty. You help the all-powerful Soviets and they in return would help you.

Leonid's friend was one of the bureaucrats in the Ministry of Information who monitored the Afghan Information Agency. However, as soon as the two settled down in the office near Hotel Spinzar and started an unhurried morning tea ceremony, the Afghan host was called away to take an urgent telephone call. He returned in an agitated state. "Please forgive me, Comrade Biryukov," the Afghan apologized, "but the American ambassador Adolph Dubs has just been captured by unknown persons. He is being held hostage at the Kabul Hotel."

Biryukov issued a whistle. "Well, this is quite some news." He dialed the number of the Soviet embassy. They had no knowledge of the incident with Dubs.

That morning, the head of the American embassy had exited his residence, located in the elite district of Shahr-e naw, and walked towards his car as usual. Dubs was an experienced bureaucrat who had jumped through all the necessary hoops to become the American ambassador to Kabul. The KGB believed that he had a certain relationship with

American intelligence services, even though formally his curriculum vitae was impeccable, consisting exclusively of service for the State Department.

Adolph Dubs assumed the most professional countenance as he approached his polished limousine. As always, he left his personal life and sentiments behind the door of his residence until his return. The Afghan driver opened the back door for Dubs, and the ambassador settled into his usual seat. Gol Mohammad raised his graying eyebrow to the ambassador.

“To the embassy?”

“Yes, go ahead,” responded Dubs softly and with quiet power in his voice, as befit the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United States of America.

The limousine, flying the star spangled banner, sailed through the snow-strewn streets of Kabul. The Khamidi store was to the right, the Pakistani embassy to the left, Chiken Street was on the right, the antique stalls of Abdul Khayyum and Abdul Karim were on the left. They were in the intersection next to the American Cultural Center.

“Stop!”

Shivers ran down the ambassador’s spine. His body tensed as if he was about to jump into freezing waters.

An Afghan transport policeman in a gray felt uniform motioned with his baton for the limousine to stop. “Stop!” The driver looked at the ambassador in the rearview mirror. The ambassador nodded.

The policeman leaned towards the car. “We must check your car, *saib*,” he said in Dari.

Dubs, trying to suppress his irritation, nodded again. "Go ahead." His diplomatic immunity gave him the right to ignore the order to stop, but such checks on the streets of Kabul had become customary, and the ambassador began to regard them as an inevitable inconvenience. This policeman will look inside the car and possibly ask to open and check the trunk before allowing them to pass. Nothing to worry about, Dubs reasoned. He noticed, however, that the policeman was behaving strangely. He pulled open the backdoor of the limousine, which for some reason was unlocked. Within a second, he was sitting beside the ambassador, holding a revolver against his body. The next moment, two more Afghans wearing civilian clothes jumped inside the car, also armed with revolvers. One of them grinned crookedly into his unkempt moustache and ordered the driver to go to Hotel Kabul.

Gol Mohammad, still in a state of shock, gripped the steering wheel with white knuckles. He looked into his mirror, guiltily observing the ambassador, who was relatively calm and seemed to be attempting a smile.

"Let's go," confirmed Dubs somewhat indifferently.

The car proceeded on its way to the hotel. Armed Afghans escorted the ambassador into the foyer.

An elderly Hazara administrator stood at the reception desk, located to the right of the entrance. He was grinning like a Cheshire cat. A young man in his early twenties wearing a faded navy jacket was talking to the hotel administrator. As soon as the group entered the hotel, the young man joined them, silently motioning them to continue to the second floor, to Room 117. While ascending the marble staircase, the ambassador looked back for a second. Through the window of the vestibule, he saw his car drive towards Pashtunistan Square, in the direction of the U.S. embassy. The clock showed 8:50 a.m.

Sergei Bakhturin, an assistant to the Soviet ambassador on security matters, understood immediately that something extraordinary had happened when he arrived at work. The face of the guard was very alarmed, and people moved nervously. He met a staff member of the Ninth Directorate of the KGB, Major Kutepov, who was in charge of security for the top Afghan leaders. He also seemed concerned.

“Do we have problems, Yuri?” asked Bakhturin.

“You haven’t heard? Some unknown persons captured Dubs, the American ambassador. He has been held in Hotel Kabul since 9 a.m.”

Bakhturin was shocked to receive the news. Hotel Kabul was located in the very center of the city, and was the favored residence of Soviet visitors. About thirty Soviet specialists lived there at the time: advisers, journalists, diplomats, and military officials. Many had families. Lt. Colonel Bakhturin, the operative of the foreign counterintelligence branch of the PGU, was in charge of security for the Soviet colony. He was not indifferent to the fate of the American ambassador, but at that moment his top priority was the security of Soviet citizens.

“Yuri, go to Bogdanov and report to him about the situation. I will go to Alexander Mikhailovich and to Osadchiy. Let’s meet back here in ten minutes.”

Puzanov didn’t ask any unnecessary questions. “Go there, Sergei Gavrilovich, and try to evacuate our folks to a safe location. Call me right away if you need my support.”

Bakhturin drove Kutepov’s Toyota to the center of Kabul. By then, all approaches to Hotel Kabul were blocked by the police. Their car was stopped twice, but allowed to proceed once the policemen identified the passengers as Soviet citizens. When Kutepov and

Bakhturin entered the hotel, they saw Col. Kliushnikov, an adviser at the Ministry of the Interior of Afghanistan. Kliushnikov briefed them on what had happened that morning and the current status. According to Kliushnikov, the terrorists who had kidnapped the ambassador were threatening to trigger a bomb in the hotel room if their demands were not met. They demanded the release from captivity of Badruddin Bahes, one of the leaders of Setam-e Milli*, also known as Tahir Badakhshi's organization. The terrorists also demanded an opportunity to speak on national television and safe passage by air, along with the American ambassador, to another country.

"Who is this Bahes?" asked Bakhturin. "Where is he imprisoned?"

"If I only knew," Kliushnikov shrugged his shoulders. "Tarun says that he is almost certainly a Parchami, and hints that he is nowhere to be found. I understand that he was killed some time ago."

A group of Americans were standing nearby. Their security officer by the name of Charlie approached Bakhturin. "Colleague, I have a request for you. Please, don't take any action that would jeopardize Ambassador Dubs's life."

"I can promise you that, but you'd be better off asking the Afghans," Bakhturin replied. "They are the hosts of the place, after all."

At the reception desk, Bakhturin received a list of rooms occupied by Soviet citizens, and proceeded to different floors to warn every Soviet staying at the hotel of the potential danger. A decision was made to gather the hotel guests at a vacant restaurant on the ground floor. A problem arose when Bakhturin knocked on the door of the room directly adjacent to Room 117, where the terrorists were based. Chief Party Adviser Veselov and his

* Setam-i Milli: "National Oppression," the name of the extremist militant organization fighting for the rights of ethnic minorities living in northern Afghanistan.

wife were staying in the room. Veselov himself had left for work early that morning, but his wife categorically refused to open the door. She was scared to death by the sounds that came from the corridor and the large number of armed people running around outside the hotel. Bakhturin tried very hard to convince the woman to let him in and implored her to wait out the situation in the relative safety of the restaurant on the ground floor.

Some hotel guests were afraid to leave their rooms, more fearful that they might lose some of the exotic items they had acquired abroad than they were of the immediate terrorist threat. Afghanistan was certainly a poor country, but it was possible to buy all sorts of goods that were highly desirable for Soviet citizens in Afghan bazaars: tape recorders, electronic watches, jeans, and shearling coats. Nothing like this could be found in the Soviet Union. This is why the Soviet citizens who had been evacuated from their rooms had in tow massive bags and suitcases filled with goods purchased in Afghanistan. Needless to say, the Americans regarded this procession with astonishment.

The operation at the hotel was led by the Afghan police (Tsarandoi). Major Tarun, the head of Tsarandoi, and Saifuddin, the chief of police, were in charge of the operation. The Afghans sought Alexander Kliushnikov's advice repeatedly. The colonel eagerly gave professional instructions to his Afghan counterparts. When the terrorists demanded a handgun be given to them, Kliushnikov recommended that they give them a faulty one. The plan was to storm Room 117 at the moment the handgun was delivered to the terrorists. The terrorists, however, must have sensed danger and refused to open the door of the room.

Gradually, the leaders of the rescue operation, along with Kliushnikov, Bakhturin, and Kutepov, moved from the second floor to the third floor, where it was a bit calmer.

Charlie kept repeating to Bakhturin that they should refrain from storming the room, urging them to stall for as long as possible and to pursue negotiations with the terrorists, but he did not suggest an alternate plan to free the ambassador.

Suddenly, there was movement in the hotel corridor. AGSA officers, dressed in plainclothes, entered the hall. AGSA was the Afghan special services. It had only recently been formed, but already instilled fear in anybody who might possibly be perceived to be an enemy of the Afghan revolution. The appearance of the representatives of the competing Afghan special services annoyed Major Tarun. Tarun, a cocky fellow, who was one of Hafizullah Amin's favorites, interrupted his conversation with a staff member of the American embassy's security services and quickly approached the AGSA group. They began an animated discussion in Pashto, after which the AGSA group vanished as quickly as it had appeared.

That winter, a syndrome akin to gold rush fever could be observed among Western diplomats. The imaginations of Americans, Brits, and other Westerners was excited by the discovery of a golden treasure by the Soviet archaeologist Sarianidi near the town of Shibergan in the north of Afghanistan. Sarianidi unearthed the burial site of six Bactrian princes from the second millennium B.C. Archaeologists found about seven kilograms of extraordinary gold jewelry at the site.

Discovery of the treasure became the hot topic at diplomatic receptions. Everybody addressed questions about the treasure to Valery Starostin, who knew a lot about Bactria and those archaeological digs.

On February 13, a reception in honor of the departing consul of the People's Republic of China in Kabul was held at the Chinese embassy. Starostin was present at the reception and conducted some intelligence work there. He met with "Van," a person of great interest to him. He received information regarding the Islamic Revolution from the Iranian consul, Deeb (who happened to be a distant relative of the wife of the overthrown shah). He had some other useful conversations with diplomats from embassies of both large and small countries. While smoothly moving from one conversation to another, Valery was stopped by Louisa Turko, the wife of an American diplomat who was considered by Soviet intelligence to be the CIA resident in Kabul. Louisa said that she had once been very interested in archaeology and asked when and where she could meet with Sarianidi. Starostin, pretending that the famous archaeologist was his best friend, said that he would do his best to arrange a meeting and promised to inform her about the logistics the following morning.

In the morning of February 14, Starostin arrived at the embassy a little later than usual. The workday was already in full swing. Valery peeked into the Protocol Section to greet his friends and to receive an update. The Protocol staff looked both excited and alarmed. One of them whispered that the American ambassador, Dubs, had been captured by terrorists. Another produced an envelope from the U.S. embassy addressed to Starostin. Moving towards the common room of the KGB Residence, Valery bumped into one of his colleagues. He told Starostin that the resident had been looking for him, and recommended he stop by Osadchiy's office. Starostin immediately went to see the resident.

Vilior Gavrilovich seemed extremely anxious, but welcomed Valery with a smile. He politely gestured for Valery to sit and wait while he finished a conversation with Sergei

Bakhturin. When seated, Starostin began to read the letter that he had received from the Protocol staff while listening to Osadchiy's conversation with Bakhturin.

"The ambassador is correct. You should go to Hotel Kabul immediately. Those party advisers there..." Osadchiy winked to Bakhturin. "God forbid something should happen to them. If evacuation is necessary, make the decision on the spot, without seeking my approval."

"I know they will grab their suitcases and we won't be able to move them, even if the hotel is about to explode," Bakhturin, who was an expert on the behavior of Soviet specialists overseas, gloomily prophesized.

"You need to be firm," asserted Osadchiy. "And keep an eye on the Americans, see who they arrive with, whom they speak to, what they are doing. You don't need me to remind you of this. Good luck."

Bakhturin shook Starostin's hand and exited Osadchiy's office. Valery settled into his seat.

"How was your meeting with Van yesterday?" asked Osadchiy. Starostin, in great detail but perhaps too emotionally, reported on his meeting with the person whom Soviet intelligence considered to be a potentially valuable agent. He also mentioned his conversation with Louisa Turko. "Do you know that her husband is the CIA resident?" asked Osadchiy.

"Yes, you mentioned it at the briefing. Here is the letter I received from her this morning," said Starostin, showing Osadchiy the letter. In the letter, Louisa reminded Starostin of their conversation the preceding night and informed Valery that she would like

to invite the archaeologist to speak to the members of the Oriental Studies section of the American International Women's Club.

"Here's what you should do, Valery. Quickly find out about Sarianidi and call this lady at home. Talk as if you know nothing about the ambassador's kidnapping."

"I truly know nothing about it," lied Starostin, with a begrudging undertone.

"I do not know more than you do, so I can't tell you anything. Go ahead and call Louisa, then come see me."

Starostin quickly discovered that Sarianidi would not be in Kabul for the next two weeks. He then went to the Protocol Section, where all the calls to the city were made, and phoned Louisa Turko at home. Her husband took the phone and cheerfully informed Starostin that his wife was taking a bath, and that he could try to call again after twenty to thirty minutes. Valery tried to place the second call half an hour later, again reaching Louisa's husband, who then informed him that his wife was combing her hair. Eventually, Louisa took the receiver and spoke with Starostin. After their conversation, Valery returned to Osadchiy's office.

"Our colleagues from the CIA have an interesting lifestyle," he reported. "The CIA resident seems to be relaxing at home with his freshly bathed wife while their ambassador is being held at gunpoint by the terrorists. Interesting..."

Osadchiy thoughtfully scratched his bald head.

The sun was very bright in Kabul that morning. The snow that had fallen the night before was turning into slush. However, night frost still hid in the shade of the street. In those contrasts of light and dark, cold and warm, the broad, central streets and the

alleyways, lay the peculiar charm of Kabul. The Paghman Mountains, high above the capital, were ruled by snow and light, and were turned pale pink by the morning sun.

The city began its busy day. The plots of political struggle were of little concern to those who had to earn their daily bread. Vegetable traders covering their heads with wool blankets pushed their carts, sandaled feet schlepping on the melting snow. The staff members of the Da Afghanistan Bank, situated across from Hotel Kabul, masterly counted stacks of currency. Older bills with Mohammad Daoud's portrait were to be replaced with the fresh new Khalqi-issued money.

The halls and corridors of Hotel Kabul were unusually busy. Tsarandoi operatives were everywhere. These were not untidy, plain, malnourished policemen, who could be seen at every city corner with automatic guns or old rifles. Tsarandoi was represented in the Hotel Kabul by tall, broad-shouldered, and confident men sporting elegant uniforms, regal Pashtun moustaches, and imposing automatic weaponry. Of particular pride to Tsarandoi men were the revolvers from top international manufacturers, hung proudly at their hips in open holsters.

Tarun returned to the group of American embassy staff members. Charlie introduced Minister-Counselor Amstutz. Tarun began to brief Amstutz, obviously trying to impress him with his knowledge of English, including terms that he had heard in American police movies. He specially repeated the terrorists' demands to the diplomat. "They are demanding that their comrade Badruddin Bahes be freed and delivered to Hotel Kabul. Then they want to speak with foreign journalists and receive guarantees of safe passage to a country of their choosing, accompanied by the American ambassador. They are giving us

a little over two hours to fulfill all their demands,” concluded Tarun, glancing at his Omega-Geneva watch, which Hafizullah Amin had recently given him as a gift.

“What are you going to do?” inquired Amstutz dryly, having in mind the terrorists’ demands.

Tarun was smart, and pretended to understand the question differently. He started to tell Amstutz that the walls of the hotel were very thick, made of bricks, and that the room doors were made of thick planks of oak and were outfitted with strong, reliable locks. “This is why it would be dangerous and difficult to storm the room from the corridor. However, snipers will arrive any minute to be placed in Da Afghanistan Bank, across from the room with the ambassador. Besides, my people went to pick up gas that can be injected under the door to paralyze the terrorists.” Then Tarun turned to the American security officer and, to evade further deliberations about his plan, asked him what sort of countermeasures the Americans planned to pursue.

Charlie, the American security officer, appeared visibly nervous. He was eager to act, but conceded that it was too dangerous to storm the room from the corridor. Then he said that marines from the Embassy Guard would try to climb to the second floor from the street. He motioned to four young, neatly dressed Americans who were standing by, and proceeded to exit the hotel with them.

A chain of policemen that prevented passers-by from approaching Kabul Hotel’s entrance began to attract public attention. Different groups of people began to assemble across the street. A few young boys crouched near the wall of the bank, waiting patiently, wondering what was about to happen. Drivers going by gawked at the armed policemen.

Finally, the patience of the street spectators was rewarded. First, a group consisting of European-looking foreigners and Afghan policemen assembled near the entrance of the hotel. Then three tall, muscular men with a huge ladder ran along the outer wall of the building. At some point they stopped and propped up the ladder. One began to climb to the second story, but having reached the bottom of the window, he couldn't force himself to look inside.

To those who did not know the circumstances of the situation, the scene must have appeared quite comical. It caused agitation not only on the street, but also inside the bank. The bank staff and the clients, distracted from their financial affairs, watched the strange activities performed by the foreigners with great interest.

The leaders of the operation soon realized that nothing would make the marine on the top of the ladder lift his head to peer inside the window. Certain death awaited him. You look in, and get a bullet in the head. What for? The marines were obviously not eager to lay down their lives for the ambassador.

Many know the general rules of how to free hostages. There exists a set of measures developed by special services, the ABCs of the trade. Books have been written about it, and movies produced. A set of instructions is developed. A list of means necessary to conduct such special operations is defined. A list of skills necessary is determined. All of this is necessary, but not always applicable. Sometimes life doesn't want to confine itself to theoretical schemes and notions.

It's good when operatives of special services understand the crime, and the logic of terrorists' actions. It's good when one understands the psychological state of those who

keep hostages in captivity. In other words, it's good when the situation is more or less clear. Then one can foresee the evolution of the situation with a sufficient degree of certainty. One can undertake certain steps directed at forestalling the terrorists' actions. It is good when experienced operatives, who know each other well, work together while trying to save hostages, when they report to a single central command, and when external conditions are favorable to the team.

In the case of Adolph Dubs, everything was bad. Soon both Bakhturin and Kliushnikov understood that the terrorists felt as if they were the hostages of the situation, even more so than the captured ambassador. They felt themselves to be prisoners of an unmanageable affair that they should never have started. It seemed that here, in Room 117 of Hotel Kabul, the terrorists were not making their own decisions, but were directed by somebody's evil will. While they seemed quite calm and collected during the capture of the ambassador, now something had shattered that calm, and something unforeseen was gradually becoming more and more obvious to them. One could feel that they were becoming increasingly agitated, inevitably approaching the state of nervous breakdown that could be provoked by the most innocuous trigger. If such a breakdown were to occur, they—spirited by nature—would not seek a logical way out. On the contrary, they would act irrationally, and possibly, like desperate predators, would attack those who would arrive to free the ambassador.

On the other hand, the Americans were also acting very strangely. They behaved as if they knew more than what the Soviet officers had been told. It seemed as if they were waiting for some kind of evolution of events known only to them. They acted as if they had no doubt that the situation's conclusion would occur exactly as expected. It appeared as if

freeing the ambassador was not a top priority to them at the time, as if something else, even more important and known only to them, was on their minds.

But that was not the strangest thing that occurred on the morning of February 14 at Kabul Hotel.

It appeared that Major Tarun was not only leading the operation to free the ambassador, but also was seeking a way out of the extremely sensitive, uncomfortable situation that had evolved because of the morning incident. The Americans would frequently lose sight of him, as he would disappear to meet often and privately with his closest advisers to explain something or to seek advice. Tarun tensed when Amstutz asked him whether the Afghan leaders knew of the capture of the ambassador, and if so, what their reaction was. "I called Comrade Amin, but he is nowhere to be found," the major responded, looking both embarrassed and incensed by this question.

Meanwhile, what was happening at the hotel had turned into a separate reality, almost a mystical space like the one between life and death. Most prosaic were the junior policemen, guerillas who were trained only to kill and destroy. They stared at the massive oak door of Room 117 more and more frequently, as if assessing the options available to them. They seemed not to believe that in their country, it was possible to take advantage of clever tricks and sophisticated devices that were in possession of the special services of other, more developed, countries. And seemingly, they were not that far away from the truth.

Tanks of gas that had been given as a gift to the Afghan police by the Federal Republic of Germany during Daoud's rule, or possibly even earlier than that, were brought in. Hoses were attached to the tanks and the valves were opened. The tanks hissed. Then it

was discovered that the gas in the tanks was long past its expiration date, adding to the dubious nature of the ploy.

Afghan snipers arrived. They were placed in rooms of the Da Afghanistan Bank across the street from the hotel. The snipers spent a long time staring through their scopes into the window that had been pointed out to them. However, they refused to shoot, citing the blinding sun as an obstacle.

Tarun and Saifuddin approached the Room 117 door periodically, addressing the terrorists through a megaphone. Police attempted to convince the terrorists that all of the necessary steps were being taken, but more time was needed to resolve technical problems related to meeting their demands. The reality, of course, was that there had been no movement undertaken to appease the terrorists, not least because their main demand could never be satisfied—Bahes had long since perished. The police were stalling in hopes of discovering some way out of the situation. Most probably, the lies were obvious to those who kept making the empty promises and to those who listened to them. All of that made the negotiations process empty and unemotional, merely a formality.

Around noon, the Americans asked the terrorists to give them an opportunity to speak with their ambassador through Tarun. They agreed, on the condition that the conversation would be conducted in English. Judging by his voice, Dubs had kept his spirits up. He spoke with his diplomats energetically and even attempted to joke. The ambassador claimed that he felt great, and that the “gentlemen” who had captured him were sufficiently well behaved. Bakhturin and Kliushnikov exchanged glances. It seemed improbable to them that a man in such a situation would appear so calm and confident. Dubs talked as if he was absolutely convinced that everything would end well.

Extreme nervous tension had exhausted the participants on both sides of the oak door. It seemed as if they were tiring of the spectacle in expectation of the finale.

The terrorists were the first to move the situation towards a resolution. One of them, standing behind the wall beside the door, shouted in a high, uneven voice that the time limit given to fulfill their demands was coming to an end. According to him, if their demands were not satisfied immediately, they were prepared to kill the hostage. In response, Tarun, pronouncing his words very carefully and making long pauses, informed the terrorists that the difficulties were gradually but successfully being overcome. "Very soon you will receive proof of the goodwill of the authorities. Badruddin Bahes is already on his way to the hotel."

Without any further arguments, the terrorists agreed to wait for ten more minutes. Some sounds and loud voices could be heard from behind the door. It seemed that the terrorists were arguing about something amongst themselves, and were explaining something to Dubs.

Then Tarun addressed Amstutz and Charlie.

"The room should be stormed through the door. I think we will start the attack in the next few minutes. There will not be other opportunities to free Mr. Dubs."

The American embassy's security officer gesticulated with his hand, as if trying to object. His decisive motions and his intonations did not match. "Try to buy us more time," he recommended in an uncertain voice.

"What will more time give us?" asked Tarun. "The danger of the ambassador being killed is becoming more of a reality with every passing minute. It is time to act."

“But how would the safety of Mr. Dubs be guaranteed if you start storming the room?” asked Amstutz with apparent anxiety.

“I have an idea,” Kliushnikov joined in.

The Soviet adviser didn’t waste any time. He had already examined a hotel room analogous to the one where Dubs was kept. After thoroughly studying the floor plan of the room, he devised a plan for organizing the operation of rescuing the ambassador. The plan was for Dubs to ask to use the bathroom, which was located to the right of the hotel room door, at an agreed time. The rescue group would destroy the door lock by machine gun fire and storm the room. It was a good plan, but how to inform the ambassador that at a certain moment he must ask the terrorists to allow him to use the bathroom? The Afghans who captured the diplomat seemed to know English, so communication in English was not a possibility.

“What languages, other than English, does Mr. Dubs know?” asked Kliushnikov through Bakhturin.

“He knows Russian,” responded the American embassy’s political counselor, Flatin.

“He also knows German,” added Amstutz. “He, like me, has German roots.”

“Very good,” responded Kliushnikov cheerfully. “Then I will ask you to speak with the ambassador through the door. Begin your conversation in English, and then add one or two phrases in German, just so those assholes won’t notice. The goal is to have the ambassador simulate as if he is becoming physically ill. He should simulate vomiting and diarrhea, ask to use the bathroom, and lock himself in it until everything is over.”

When Tarun understood the plan, he began to look more lively. “We agree,” he said, transferring the megaphone to Amstutz. “Please inform the ambassador where he is to hide.”

Amstutz agreed, and meekly took the megaphone. While speaking with the ambassador about how he felt in English, he quickly switched to German, saying a few phrases. He said it as quickly and unclearly as only native speakers can. The terrorists immediately noticed that something was amiss. They demanded that Amstutz cease to speak, and started shouting in protest. In spite of the terrorists’ reaction, there remained a glimmer of hope that the simple plan could actually work.

However, this hope quickly evaporated. The policemen who were sent to bring the machine gun were delayed. They showed up at the door of Room 117 after twenty minutes, long after Dubs was forced back out of the bathroom. Kliushnikov suggested hatching another plan.

Meanwhile, the terrorists demanded that foreign journalists be gathered in front of Hotel Kabul, and that the head of the country be brought to negotiate with them personally.

“Sure,” grinned Tarun. “We should finish them off. It’s time to storm the room.”

“Let’s discuss a new plan,” countered Kliushnikov. “There are too many ears around us,” he said under his breath. “Let’s find a quiet place to talk.”

Tarun, Saifuddin, Kliushnikov, Bakhturin, and Kutepov went to the hotel administrator’s office. Tarun immediately suggested that they act decisively to destroy the door by gunfire, storm into the room, and then do what was necessary, depending on the circumstances.

“But then you should realize that the life of the American ambassador will be subjected to great risk,” said Kliushnikov. “This option leaves him practically no chance of survival.”

“We have no other ideas,” replied Tarun. He turned to telephone someone, who appeared to be a higher-up. They spoke in Pashto. Tarun appeared to be complaining to his superior about the “willful behavior of the Soviet adviser.” According to him, Colonel Kliushnikov was meddling in the police’s attempts to carry out the rescue operation. Having finished the conversation, Tarun victoriously informed the adviser that he was in no position to intervene in their domestic affairs.

Alexander Kliushnikov, indignant, left the room. In the hall, he said, “A dangerous and unintelligent decision has been made that, if realized, would subject the American ambassador to extreme danger. I tried to object, but I was brushed aside in a most offensive manner. It would be better to give an airplane to the terrorists and allow them to leave with Mr. Dubs to a third country.”

Tarun went upstairs to the second floor. Now he was the only person in charge of the operation that would decide the diplomat’s fate. Pausing, he gestured for everybody who was not directly involved in the operation to walk away from the door.

Amstutz understood that something was about to happen and that he would be better off not seeing or participating in the action. He felt lost and exhausted. He could foresee what the ending would be. Looking at his feet, the diplomat walked down the hallway, away from the room.

Officers in bulletproof vests and World War II era German helmets quietly and quickly approached the door of Room 117. One of them, the tallest, who wielded a

Kalashnikov machine gun, began firing at the door lock. Sparks and shards of wood sprayed through the smoke. Another officer hit the door with a battering ram. Simultaneously, the snipers, perched in the bank across from the hotel, opened fire. The door swayed open. Policemen directed a massive wall of fire from the entrance to the room and leapt inside. Tarun followed them, continuously shooting from his revolver.

Having read the text, Volodya began to examine it closely, reading between the lines to get an idea of what the authors of the text had been told to convey in Dubs's obituary. "His Excellence Adolph Dubs was murdered by enemies of the Afghan people. With regrets and grief, we received the news that yesterday, around 12:30 p.m., as a result of a shootout that was provoked by several terrorists—enemies of the Afghan people—His Excellency Adolph Dubs, the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United States of America in Kabul, was killed."

"Okay," thought Khotyaev, "the ambassador had been killed, according to the text, shot 'as a result of a shoot-out provoked by several terrorists.' So, who killed the ambassador? The terrorists or the security organs' operatives? Whose bullets killed him? It doesn't clarify this important point in the text, though it is essential. Further: 'At about 9 a.m., when His Excellency was en route from his residence to his work place, his car was stopped not far from the American Cultural Center. Four terrorists dressed as transport police captured the ambassador and forced the driver to take them to Hotel Kabul. Armed terrorists forced the ambassador to enter the hotel with them, where they subsequently kept him in one of the rooms.'

"'At about 9 a.m...'" The terrorists chose the right time," thought Vladimir. "It was rush hour in the city, and those who are responsible for security in the streets and in offices

are not as alert. People are more alert in the dark. Daylight usually has a calming effect on the psyche. Further: 'The car was stopped not far from the American Cultural Center.' Strange place for a kidnapping," he thought. "Lots of Americans and other foreigners are around that area in the morning, coming to work, parking their cars. What if they had noticed how the Afghan transport policemen had stopped the ambassadorial vehicle flying the American flag and jumped into the car? Passers-by might have noticed and called attention to what was happening. A stationary police post is located near the Cultural Center. Somebody could start shooting. In that case, the terrorists might not have been able to escape. Perhaps there are reasons why they were not afraid of a potential scandal, or maybe they relied on impertinence, on the element of surprise?

The firestorm lasted not longer than fifteen seconds.

It seemed as though the terrorists had been taken by surprise. One lay on his back with his feet towards the door. It seemed as though the bullets had carried him two yards backwards. He was wheezing and convulsing. Another terrorist was sitting on the carpet, leaning against the sofa, covering his belly with his hands. He was wounded, but alive. His eyes were still and glassy, and he was silently whispering a prayer. Tarun, without hesitation, shot them both in the head. The third terrorist lay prone on the floor, jerking in death throes. His boot was hitting the leg of a chair, making noises. Not far from him, to the right of the entrance to the bathroom, crumpled in the corner and breathing heavily, was Ambassador Adolph Dubs. A puddle of blood was spreading under him. Tarun noticed how his blood approached and merged with the blood of the dying terrorist.

American doctors who later conducted Dubs's autopsy determined that ten bullets from automatic weapons and revolvers entered his body. Two bullets entered his chest,

and three more entered his head. Residue from gunpowder on his clothes revealed that the shots were fired from a very close distance. But who shot him? All of the Americans who were present at the hotel stated that they didn't hear any shooting in the room, which means that the ambassador was shot during the attack. It seemed that he was, most probably, shot intentionally.

Officers gathered all of the weapons that were lying near the bodies. They picked up the ambassador's undamaged glasses. They opened an attaché case that was lying next to Dubs. It contained a towel, toothbrush, and other toiletries that a person might take with him when leaving for a long trip.

The news about the death of the American ambassador spread across the city immediately. At first it was rumored, then broadcasted in the afternoon news on Kabul radio and in the evening news on Afghan television. The next day, all Afghan newspapers printed official information about the incident.

When the KGB analyst Vladimir Khotyaev arrived to work in the morning, he looked at the morning newspaper *Anis*. At first he stared very attentively at the photographs of Dubs, as well as the ones of the murdered terrorists, taking in every detail. Then he looked through the article about what had happened in Hotel Kabul. The newspapers also published Dubs's biography. Reading it, Khotyaev noticed the name of the German city, unclearly spelled in Persian letters, where Dubs had worked earlier in his life. Vladimir went downstairs to the library, where he started to search through the atlas for the German city where Dubs had lived. He tried different versions of the name: Golmbach, Kolbach, Kolmbach. He didn't find anything resembling the name that had been printed in the

newspaper. He settled on the name Golbach. He decided they could not have meant Hamburg.

“Further: ‘Four terrorists...’ Here! The author of the official version wanted to imply that all four terrorists were together from the beginning to the end—why is this necessary? It is clear. It allows them to not have to explain why the negotiator representing the terrorists, who was not in Room 117 during the rescue operation, was killed. We, and many others, know that he, safe and sound, turned himself in to Afghan security right away to inform the authorities of the terrorists’ demands and conditions for freeing the ambassador. Yet he also was killed—for what? Common sense and law dictate that he should have been investigated and put on trial. Fine, supposedly he was arrested and interrogated. What if during the interrogation or trial he had said something that nobody could anticipate? That was why he most probably was killed—to silence him.

“Okay, further: ‘Captured the ambassador and forced the driver to take them to Hotel Kabul.’ Strange. Why did Dubs allow the driver to stop the car in the first place? Why did he open the car door? I am not an ambassador and even I, having a red diplomatic license plate, would not obey such an order from the transport policemen. This is highly peculiar....

“‘Hotel Kabul...’ It’s not the most convenient place for keeping the captured hostage long term. On that day, hotel security was strengthened considerably due to an official foreign delegation’s arrival. Right across from Room 117, thirty meters away, there is a balcony of a bank from which the hotel rooms can be clearly seen and shot at. It would have been more convenient and secure for the terrorists not to lock themselves in the hotel room, but to stay in the car. That would allow them greater mobility. They could arrive

where they needed, together with the ambassador, pick up their friend Badruddin Bahes, continue on, drop the ambassador off, and switch their car.

“The professional security organs did their best to safely extricate the ambassador from the claws of the terrorists. However, the terrorists did not allow that to happen.’ After all, who would admit that something was not done properly, or had been miscalculated?

“The terrorists demanded someone by the name of Badruddin Bahes, a person who is not currently in Afghanistan, and whose whereabouts are unknown, to be released and brought to them. Despite the ensuing negotiations, the terrorists continued to insist on their demand. However, it turned out to be unfeasible.’ Interesting why both sides had to play dumb. Tarun certainly knew that the person whose release the terrorists had demanded was not in Afghanistan. Why didn’t he ask the terrorists, ‘Tell me dear friends, where should I search for your Badruddin Bahes, and what would be the best way for me to bring him to you?’ Let’s suppose that Tarun was simply stalling for time. But what about the terrorists? Why did they assume such a formal attitude toward their own demands? Why didn’t they keep asking the authorities how they were going about meeting their conditions?

“At about 12:30 p.m., the terrorists began to threaten to kill the ambassador if their demands were not met within ten minutes.’ It sounds as if they slept for three hours and suddenly woke up. It’s interesting, how one can fulfill a demand in ten minutes, which could not be fulfilled in three hours. It’s just not serious. However, this lack of seriousness doesn’t match up with the drama of the moment. The lives of the ambassador and the terrorists were at stake. How can one not be serious in such a situation?

“The security operatives, having received a specific threat, had to take measures to free the ambassador before the ten minutes expired. As a result, the terrorists shot and wounded the ambassador.’ It all looks like the truth, except for the part where the terrorists ‘shot’ the ambassador. Our operatives are saying that the policemen were the only ones shooting. However, one can understand the cause of these sorts of lies. Afghans certainly could not write in the official report, ‘forgive us, our dear American friends. Our guys screwed up and killed everybody, victim and captors alike.’”

After Khotyaev was done with the preliminary analysis of the official report, he turned to the ambassador’s biography for a close reading.

“Born in August 1920 in Illinois, USA. Graduated from college in 1942. Served in the U.S. Navy as an officer from 1942 until 1946. Began working at the U.S. State Department in 1950. From 1950 until 1952, worked as a civil servant in the city of Golbach (?) in the Federal Republic of Germany. From 1952 until 1954, worked at the economic section of the U.S. embassy in Monrovia (Liberia). From 1954 until 1957, worked at the political section of the U.S. embassy in Ottawa (Canada). From 1958 until 1961, worked at the Department of International Relations at the U.S. State Department. From 1961 until 1963, headed the political section of the U.S. embassy in Moscow. From 1963 until 1964, worked at a college. From 1964 until 1968, worked at the political section of the U.S. embassy in Belgrade. From 1969 to 1971, headed the Department of the USSR at the U.S. State Department. From 1971 until 1972, attended courses on foreign policy. From 1972 to 1974, served as a minister-counselor at the U.S. embassy in the USSR. From 1975 until 1978, served as a deputy director of the Department of the Near East and South Asia. On July 12, 1978, was

appointed as the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United States of America to Kabul.

The biography seemed brief, indeed perhaps too brief for a 58-year-old diplomat, thought Vladimir. But why would the Americans provide the Afghans with a more detailed biography? This was sufficient. What seemed unusual was the disparate nature of the regions where the ambassador had been posted. Is this suspicious? It could be, if one suspected that Dubs worked for the CIA. If not, then the resume seemed to be normal, since that appeared to be the way things were done at the U.S. State Department.

The period of Dubs's career around 1973 piqued the analyst's interest. He read in some British journals that Dubs had spent time in Chile, and was even involved as an American handler of the Pinochet plot against the lawful Chilean president, Salvador Allende. According to this official biography of Dubs, that never happened. It states that starting in 1972, he was in the Soviet Union, being watched by us.

While reviewing the material in the newspaper articles, Khotyaev made notes in his notebook. That was his necessary routine, as it helped him analyze materials from open sources.

"So," Vladimir was summarizing, "according to the information that Osadchiy had shared during the morning meeting, Adolph Dubs was seen in the same Hotel Kabul in the company of people who looked very similar to the terrorists on the morning of February 13, shortly before his capture. What could the ambassador of the United States have in common with these murky persons? Why, when going to the office, did he put toiletries in his briefcase, as if he were going on a lengthy trip? Why did he so easily permit strangers to

get inside his car? How can his calmness and confidence in a favorable outcome of the kidnapping affair be explained?

“There are questions for his colleagues, as well. Why did the CIA resident display such criminal indifference to the incident? Why did our people, who watched what was happening at the hotel, report that the Americans were acting strangely, as if they had something to hide?

“Finally, how can the unnecessary cruelty towards the terrorists be explained? The wounded were executed and their representative, who turned himself in, was quietly eliminated. Could he have been somebody else entirely, that negotiator? It’s likely that Tarun, either acting on his own or fulfilling someone’s order, had rushed to sweep any evidence of foul play under the rug. Lots of questions were emerging. There will be a lot to think about.”

On Thursdays, in advance of weekends, Starostin typically didn’t make appointments with agents. The reasons were twofold. For one, Starostin thought that after having worked all week, the agents would rather spend time with their friends and relatives than with an intelligence operative. Rest was sacred, and Starostin didn’t want to bother people by interrupting it. Second, he noticed that the anticipation of the arrival of the weekend reduced the “creative potential” of the agents, and they tended to get easily distracted and avoided thinking about more serious matters.

So as not to waste time on those days, Starostin would normally meet with foreigners who would be useful for his work but who were not themselves agents. For

those meetings, he would invite people to have dinner either at his home or at a cozy restaurant.

On Thursday, February 15, Starostin decided to see the Anarchist. In the morning, from a telephone booth, he called the hotel room where the American was staying. Introducing himself as Jimmy Carter, Valery said that it would be a good idea to visit a “good old teacher.” By that, Starostin hinted that he planned to bring along a bottle of Teacher’s whiskey.

At 6:50 p.m., Starostin arrived at the area where the meeting was scheduled to take place. He parked his car by a nearby movie theater and walked through a park to the alley where he was to meet the Anarchist. Although the temperature had dropped by the evening, the air already carried hints of a fragrant early spring in Kabul.

A tall figure emerged from the opposite side of the alley. The Anarchist was dressed in a dark green jacket, bell-bottom jeans, rubber boots, and his customary fedora. There was nothing unusual in his gait or his untidy appearance. The two greeted each other and, smiling, entered a small restaurant. Starostin reached into a plastic bag for the whiskey and agreed on a corkage fee with the waiter. They ordered little food, but made sure to sample the *oshak* that was the trademark dish of that particular restaurant.

Starostin expressed his condolences to the Anarchist in regards to the U.S. ambassador’s death. Then, recalling the sophisticated English words that he had looked up in advance, he began to talk about terrorism. It was the greatest evil of the time, and caused grief in all countries, regardless of their socio-political order, including the Soviet Union and the rest of the world community...but the Anarchist didn’t allow him to finish the phrase.

“Wipe your tears,” he said in a mocking tone. “Mr. Dubs was your enemy, and when an enemy dies, it is never bad news.”

“Well, he wasn’t an enemy,” countered Starostin. “He was a political adversary, and an opponent.” As a human being, he truly was not without empathy for the ambassador.

“If Dubs was your close friend, I would understand your feelings. But you will agree that you are expressing your condolences not because old Uncle Dubs died, but because protocol requires you to express your condolences for the death of Ambassador Dubs. An official figure, the representative of the United States, has been murdered. That is the scandal. He became a victim and a hostage of his official position. Nobody would be interested in him as a human being. Was he a human being? Who knows? Do you know? Was he ever anything but a bureaucratic robot? Was he ever anything but a pawn discarded by a huge political machine? Sure, he occupied the position of ambassador of the United States of America. He was playing his social and political role. He was a chess pawn who was lost or sacrificed as part of a sophisticated game, an international chess competition that is taking place in Kabul,” said the Anarchist.

“A pawn that was sacrificed? Discarded?” Starostin wanted the Anarchist to elaborate on his choice of words.

“Yes, that’s the case. He could be discarded, or sacrificed. He was nothing but a pawn on the chess board, like a dime given as a tip. Exactly like those who are his superiors, all the way up the ladder to the commander-in-chief. I suppose the president would look more like a dollar than a dime.”

The Anarchist’s bearded face grimaced to demonstrate his skeptical view of either the U.S. president or American currency. “All of them are actors who are reciting roles

memorized for life. All of them are slaves of certain rules, and of the society that lives by those rules. They are all small parts of a machine that has evolved over generations. They never act as they want, and they can hardly do anything that is not conditioned by the rules of the game. They never make their own decisions. Everything has been arranged. All of the decisions have been made long ago. People like Dubs accept their positions not to live, but to serve. Their life is the constant fulfillment of moral or social or work responsibilities—responsibility of service more than anything. They are never more than performers, good or bad, but nonetheless performers, or the victims of the roles that are handed out according to a script.”

Having finished his soliloquy, the Anarchist fell silent. He seemed to be thinking about something. The food was served. After his first glass of whisky, chewing another *oshak*, and watching Starostin refilling his glass, he continued the serious conversation.

“Sometimes I think of horrific scenes from a certain documentary. It’s not from a Hitchcock film. It’s a chronicle of the Third Reich. Several dozen SS officers are herding thousands of people into gas chambers. In a few minutes they will all be dead. What is most horrible is not that they will all soon be dead, but how calmly and obediently they are walking into certain death, keeping their place in the queue so precisely. It is as if someone might try to cut in line, or others would object. Have you seen such scenes?”

Starostin nodded.

“Why didn’t they rebel?” continued the American. “Why didn’t they make one last desperate attempt to save themselves? Why didn’t they collectively attack the guards? They had nothing to lose! What happened? I think it occurred because their mentality as a group

differs from the way they think as individuals. When together, they are ruled by instincts that are different than individual instincts.”

“What do you know about the terrorists who killed Dubs?” asked Starostin directly.

“You stated the question incorrectly. The terrorists who killed Dubs do not exist. You know as well as I do that the ambassador was killed by policemen—disgusting, dumb, evil, uneducated Afghan policemen. Or, perhaps the opposite—very smart, intelligent policemen, who managed to outwit us, intelligent Americans, and you, intelligent Russians.” The Anarchist deliberately repeated the word “intelligent” a number of times, as if teasing his interlocutor. “And it is all because they turned out to be freer than us. They didn’t play by the rules that we know.”

“What do you mean? Are you trying to say that this was all some game?”

“Maybe I am. Do you know what ‘covert action’ means?”

Starostin pretended to hesitate, trying to conceal his knowledge of intelligence terminology.

“These are secret operations,” said the Anarchist in Russian, loud and clear.

“Are you implying that this was a covert operation of the special services?” asked Starostin. “The U.S. special services or Afghan special services?”

“Why not,” continued the Anarchist in English. “Why not consider what happened to be a failed covert operation, or a covert operation with unexpectedly high costs? Why not consider this incident as an act of a huge spectacle played out by certain forces in Afghanistan?”

“And the purpose of this play?” asked Starostin, adopting the theatrical metaphor.

“What was the script of the drama? Who was the producer? Why was it necessary to put the ambassador’s life at risk? What kind of terrorists were they? Why was the terrorist who voluntarily turned himself in to the authorities also murdered? What will the next act of the play bring?” The Anarchist was enumerating the questions, trying to imitate Starostin. “I don’t know. It’s difficult to say. I keep thinking about it, and when I think instead of drinking whisky, I get a headache. I fear, my dear curious friend, that I will never be able to share this horrible secret with you.”

The Anarchist downed his next glass of whisky and poured himself another. He remained silent for a minute, observing the candle flickering on the table, and touched the edge of the candle top with his thin, shaking finger. Then, grinning, he continued.

“Yesterday, right after I learned about the death of Mr. Dubs, I went to our embassy. The atmosphere there was very tense. Nobody paid any attention to me. Some were busy; some simply didn’t want to speak with me. They seemed to be hiding from each other. I spoke a little bit with Malinowsky. You know him. He works in the Political Section. He didn’t seem to me to be terribly sad, but he was very angry.”

“Angry at whom?”

“At the Afghans. He couldn’t believe that the police rather than security operatives were in charge of rescuing the ambassador. Marik Warren was the most talkative. He is a consul—you know him too.”

“What did he say?”

“Specifically?”

“Yes.”

“He told me to pick up my cleats from the trunk of his car and to stop asking him questions. Besides, he said that he was in charge of preparing the ambassador’s body to be sent to the United States. He also said that Dubs was murdered not by terrorists, but deliberately by Afghan policemen. By the order of Amin or Taraki.”

“But why?”

“He didn’t say anything about it. I don’t think he knows. In general, I think he doesn’t have all of the information.”

“Who knows everything?”

“Possibly Turko, but I don’t play American football with him.”

“Did you see him at the embassy?”

“No. I would never be received by him—he is too intelligent for me.”

Starostin needed a tangible result. He really wanted to write a report that would be suitable to send to the Center after the meeting. That’s why he decided to summarize everything that the Anarchist had said in regards to the murder of Adolph Dubs.

“So, based on the results of conversations with Malinowsky, Marik, and other embassy staff, you believe that the killing of the ambassador was the result of a failed secret operation prepared by some country’s special services? Is that the case?”

“Oh, those smart *shaluny* (‘rascals’)” exclaimed the Anarchist theatrically in Russian.

Having finished their dinner about forty minutes before the curfew, the two went outside. The Anarchist took a taxi to his hotel. Starostin, inhaling the clear, frosty air, slowly walked to where his car was parked. The stars shined overhead. The endless, stormy life of the sky continued. He saw a bright shooting star split the sky.

Sad and superstitious, Valery thought, "Perhaps someone has died this very minute. No, the Anarchist cannot be right. Even civil servants like Dubs, or like me, are not just pawns on the chessboard. No matter how controlled one is, we each have our own star, and that certainly means something. Adolph Dubs also had his own star. Perhaps he simply forgot about it for a while."

The day after Dubs's death, Colonel Alexander Kliushnikov found himself in trouble. The Western media claimed that it was he, the adviser to the Afghan Ministry of the Interior, who was in charge of the rescue operation, and therefore responsible for the spectacular failure. But that wasn't the end of it. Deputy Secretary of State Warren Christopher sent a severe note to the Soviet ambassador to the United States, Dobrynin. The note claimed that the American government was outraged by the role of the Soviet advisers, who worked closely with the Kabul police, in the murder of the ambassador. Kliushnikov's supervisors in Moscow were alarmed.

Nobody cared particularly about the colonel's position as scapegoat. On February 16, he was temporarily removed from his post and placed under house arrest on the territory of the Soviet embassy in Kabul. An order was issued stripping Kliushnikov of the rank of colonel of police, and his termination was prepared in the Ministry of the Interior in Moscow. All that was left was a formal investigation. A high-level bureaucrat from the Soviet Foreign Ministry was dispatched to Afghanistan from Moscow to conduct the investigation.

Soon after arriving and settling in Puzanov's office, he summoned Kliushnikov for a conversation. Trying very hard to control himself, the recently demoted colonel began

describing what had transpired in Hotel Kabul. The Moscow bureaucrat listened to the colonel's account of Tarun's decision to disengage him from the operation ("A direct order that had been issued in a most offensive manner") skeptically.

"Who can confirm this claim?" he asked Kliushnikov.

"I have proof," responded the colonel quietly, "and I will be happy to give it to you at a later point in time."

He then described the final moments of the operation, when the Kabul police raided the room where the ambassador was being held. According to the colonel's account, a Soviet adviser was indeed participating in the operation at that stage, though it was not the colonel himself, but a major from the Ninth Directorate, an adviser on issues related to the security of the DRA leadership. The major was dressed in a similar black raincoat and was similar in height to Kliushnikov, which accounted for the subsequent confusion.

During the raid, Kutepov was on the balcony of the adjacent room and gave signals to the snipers waiting across the street in the bank. It was he, according to Kliushnikov, who later prohibited staff members of the American embassy from entering the room where Dubs's body was located.

Having finished his story, Kliushnikov handed over a tape cassette to the investigator from Moscow.

"Here is my proof," he said.

They listened to the cassette that had recorded the colonel's angry monologue in the hall after Tarun had ordered the Soviet advisers "not to meddle in the domestic affairs of Afghanistan." It became clear from the recording that Kliushnikov was cut out of the operation and was in strong disagreement with the proposed plan. The tape was given to

the colonel by a correspondent from a Czechoslovakian newspaper, who had made a recording on February 14. That tape saved Alexander Kliushnikov. His house arrest was rescinded within three hours. In a day, Deputy Minister of the Interior General Yeliso called the colonel and informed him that the Ministry of the Interior didn't have any further questions for him.

Later, Kliushnikov found out that the incident involving Dubs's capture was discussed at the Politburo. After that session, the KGB chairman called Kryuchkov and ordered him to prepare a letter to the Central Committee immediately, with instructions to subordinate the office of the representative of the Soviet Ministry of the Interior in Kabul to that of the KGB representative's Kabul office. Andropov had taken advantage of the incident to gain another victory in his long, ongoing struggle with Minister of the Interior Schelokov.

Additionally, taking the current situation in Afghanistan into account, the KGB decided to send operatives from its secret group "A" to guard the Soviet ambassador and the senior military advisers. Group "A" was later to become known as the anti-terrorist group "Alpha." This move further strengthened the KGB's position in Afghanistan.

Kabul is an open city. Life there is very simple and unhurried. A *chowkidar* watchman sits by the gate, observing—for lack of anything else to do—the happenings on his city block. Here goes old man Babajan in his eyeglasses and new galoshes. He is walking to the mosque for his evening prayer. Here a bureaucrat from the Ministry of Finance, Sayed Ahmad, is driving his old Volkswagen home. Here goes the Hazara prankster, Mohammad Ali Tagi, from household to household, peddling firewood to foreigners. Here goes a pack of stray dogs, circling around a house where some Poles live.

“I wonder who this person is? I haven’t seen his face before,” the *chowkidar* is thinking. Almost all faces in Kabul are familiar. Even if one doesn’t recognize the person specifically, one will take notice and draw certain conclusions, particularly of foreigners. Foreigners dress differently, walk differently, speak differently, move too quickly, don’t know what to buy where, what costs what, or how to bargain with vendors.

From the point of view of intelligence work, the issue of not being recognized is one of the most important elements. Where one can meet with a person so that nobody will know and tell others that X and Y are somehow connected. In an out-of-the-way restaurant, in a park without benches, in a dirty side street, in the darkness of a movie house...hardly. The optimum variant was to meet at a safe house. That is what Soviet intelligence operatives did in those years.

On the evening of February 18, Starostin was planning to have a regular meeting with his agent Artem. He had reported his plan to meet with him to Osadchiy earlier that day. Osadchiy had asked Starostin to, “find out what Artem knows about the people who murdered Dubs. Who were they?” Nobody had identified them yet, which was hard to believe. In Afghanistan, they could not identify people who participate in political actions?

“What’s known about the Dubs affair from our other sources?” asked Starostin.

“You should familiarize yourself with the materials that we sent to the Center. It mostly covers the technical aspects of the rescue operation. What we know doesn’t clarify what happened, however. It only raises more questions. We still can’t see the whole picture. There is no logic behind people’s actions. As they say, there is no motive behind this crime. Most importantly, the political reasons for what happened are unclear. Do you understand?”

“I will discuss this topic with Artem,” Starostin agreed.

It turned out to be a difficult day for Starostin. He was tense, not so much because of his anticipated meeting with the agent, but because of other events.

At that time, detachments of the People’s Army of China, in total about 600,000 troops, entered Vietnam. The distance from Afghanistan to Vietnam seemed enormous. However, finding out reactions to the new world developments was then an important responsibility for Soviet diplomats and intelligence operatives. Valery had to pay a visit to the Vietnamese embassy to meet with his friend, Minister-Counselor Comrade Ko.

After the meeting, in order to avoid mistakes with Far Eastern names and terms, Valery consulted an encyclopedia as he prepared a cable for the Center.

During his conversation with the Vietnamese diplomat, the topic of Dubs’s death arose. Ko knew only what he had read in the newspapers, and had nothing new to contribute. He was clearly eager for his Soviet friend to share any tidbits of the event with him. Starostin decided not to disappoint his colleague, and told Comrade Ko about the details of the botched rescue operation. Ko nodded tactfully, not prying further with any questions. He seemed grateful for what he could gather from Starostin. After Starostin finished speaking, the Vietnamese diplomat began to speak about the Americans. He said something like, “no part of the world is safe from their evil actions. This is why they are hated everywhere. This is why people are prepared to sacrifice themselves to stop the Americans. The Vietnamese are against terrorism, but above all else, we are against the foreign policy of the United States—a policy of terrorism, which gives rise to more terrorism.”

Starostin was not surprised by what he had heard. He was surprised, however, that the normally calm, smiling, and reserved Comrade Ko saw fit to share such thoughts. Ko's eyes widened and his voice lowered, trembling. He could hardly conceal his disdain for the United States.

Evening came. Artem strode into the safe house, looked around, and settled into his familiar armchair. He smiled politely. He was a young, tall, physically fit Afghan. When he spoke, his body language seemed to reflect the words that he pronounced.

Since the beginning of Amin's repressions, Artem had fluctuated between growing and shaving his moustache, explaining the reason behind this new ritual in terms vaguely related to his security. This time, his moustache had been shaved. After a brief discussion of some operative issues, Artem produced some papers from his coat pocket. He proudly placed the papers on the coffee table in front of Starostin. "Here are materials related to *Ikhvans**, as you requested. Here is the material about some of their organizations. This one is about Mr. Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. This one is about Burhanuddin Rabbani. This one is about Sibghatullah Mojaddedi's arrival in Pakistan from Sweden, and his meetings with other *Ikhvan* leaders. Here are materials about the actions that they are organizing on Pakistan's territories in Kandahar and Herat. This is some information about the *Ikhvan* contacts in the Afghan armed forces and police."

Starostin looked through the papers that Artem had given him and asked Artem to clarify certain points. The agent poured some tea for himself and helped himself to a pastry. While drinking the tea, he watched Starostin begin to absorb the materials that he had

* "*Ikhvanami*" ("*Ikhvan-ol Moslemin*"), or "Muslim brothers": the term for members of Islamic fundamentalist organizations that began to appear in Pakistan. These individuals fought against the adoption of a Western lifestyle, as well as against socialist ideas. They were forced to leave Afghanistan after the destruction of the organization "Muslim Youth" and the execution of its leaders, as ordered by Daoud.

given him. Having finished looking through the papers, Starostin identified a few issues for the agent to research before their next meeting. They agreed when and how the agent would address Starostin's requests, and decided on a time and place for their next meeting.

When Starostin raised the issue of the terrorist act, Artem calmly shared his findings: "In the official report, the only terrorist demand that was listed was the return of Badruddin Bahes. Don't you think this is strange? How could this demand ever be fulfilled? If the terrorists were indeed so close to Bahes that they were prepared to die for his liberation, they must certainly have known that he had been dead for a long time. I have little to do with Bahes, Tahir Badakhshi, and Setam-e Milli, but even I have known for a long time that Bahes was killed in prison last summer."

"So how could they not have known?" asked Starostin, wishing to receive a confirmation of his hypothesis.

"It's because these people had absolutely nothing to do with Badruddin Bahes. They used his name only to highlight some political affiliation. The cover by the name of Setam-e Milli was very convenient to them. Almost nobody knows anything about the makeup of this organization, particularly after a recent reshuffling within its ranks. Very little is known about Badruddin Bahes. Have I told you that I used to know Bahes well? I was his friend."

"No."

"We were classmates at Kabul University. He was a member of the Student Council. He represented the department of theology on the council. Gulbuddin Hekmatyar represented the engineering department. I represented the law department. At first,

Badruddin Bahes was close to Muslim Youth ideologically. He was considered to be a mullah. Later, he met Tahir Badakhshi and joined Setam-e Milli.”

“Do you know the terrorists?” asked Starostin, placing a newspaper with a photo of four naked corpses in front of Artem.

Artem glanced at the photo, which he had surely already seen, and said confidently, “No. This is strange, but I have never seen them before. If these men had demonstrated any noticeable political activity, we would surely have crossed paths. It’s not just me—I’ve asked other people about them, including natives of Badakhshan. Nobody knows them. Isn’t it strange?”

Artem paused to give Starostin an opportunity to internalize what he had heard, and to ask any questions. Since there were no follow-up questions, he continued: “The terrorists had a different demand. That other demand had real political meaning. They wanted Afghan and foreign journalists, representatives of television channels, and Comrade Hafizullah Amin to come to the hotel.” Artem pronounced the word “comrade,” preceding Amin’s name, with apparent sarcasm and even hostility. “The terrorists said that they wanted to ask Amin several questions in the presence of the American ambassador. They had no grievances with respect to the ambassador himself, or the United States.”

“How do you know that?” Starostin asked.

“Qadir told me. Remember, I described him to you earlier.”

“Was he there?”

“Yes, he was there, next to Tarun, until the very end.”

“Strange, but this demand of the terrorists doesn’t appear particularly serious either.”

“For you and me perhaps, but not for Amin.”

“So, what does it mean?”

“I think that the terrorists wanted to remind Comrade Amin about something.”

“Did they really think that Hafizullah Amin, the second most powerful man in the state, would be prepared to come to Hotel Kabul to meet with them and to answer their questions?”

“Certainly not. They hardly were thinking anything. They were merely doing what they were ordered to do. These people were fulfilling an order from the Americans. They did not think that they would be killed. Neither they nor the Americans could imagine that Comrade Amin would attempt a counter attack. The Americans forgot that Amin is a Pashtun, and he would rather die than be threatened. It was Amin’s order to kill everybody in the room. This is how he got his revenge on the Americans for their attempt to blackmail him.”

“What did the Americans want to remind Amin about?”

“You certainly know that Comrade Amin, when studying in America, was the head of an Afghan expatriate community. Do you think that anyone could become the head of a foreign community in such a highly policed country as America without approval and collaboration of the local special services? Impossible.”

“Based on that, are you trying to say that Amin has connections to the CIA or some other U.S. special services?”

“There are other reasons to suspect Amin of being a traitor. Read what he wrote before 1965. His articles were printed in different newspapers and journals. Read them attentively and you will see clearly a very narrow-minded worldview of a petit-bourgeois

nationalist and anti-Soviet. However, as is well known, by late 1964 our political leaders with revolutionary ambitions agreed to establish the PDPA. All of the sudden, Comrade Amin turned into a 'convinced communist and passionate revolutionary.' How could his ideological views and political preferences be transformed so quickly? Consider that by then he was a mature man. Since that period, Amin has become Taraki's 'loyal pupil and follower.' Doesn't this strike you as odd? Look at the history of the schism in the PDPA, at any episode involving it. Who was the initiator of all the squabbles and fights? Who was the provocateur? It was Amin!"

"But these are all indirect arguments."

"Certainly. Neither I, nor my comrades, are able to obtain documents that would confirm ties between Amin and the Americans. Even you, with all of your connections, cannot do it. Most probably, such documents simply do not exist. However, even among the Khalqis it is rumored that Amin is a CIA agent."

"How, then, did he manage to infiltrate the PDPA leadership?"

"He was constantly put forward by Comrade Taraki. Amin and Taraki met when our current general secretary was the press secretary of the Afghan embassy in Washington and Amin was the head of the Afghan community there. There exists a bizarre connection between the two that nobody quite understands. And most probably, their closeness is rooted not in their political beliefs, but in something else."

Artem looked at Starostin as if he was trying to recall something important. Then, as if taking an important step, he said, "Perhaps you know that Taraki, when he was six or seven years old, was adopted by an English woman who lived with her husband in British India. He grew up in an English family, but in his language and spirit, he is as Afghan as he

is English. When he was growing up, his ‘English parents’ sent him to study at a ‘college for foreign interpreters,’ where Indians who were dedicated to the British were educated. After graduating from college, they were given jobs in the British colonial administration. Taraki received Diplomat Number 37 when he graduated from the college. I am not implying that Taraki is an English intelligence officer, although some of my Parchami colleagues are convinced of it. However, I am convinced that there is a special connection between Taraki and Amin, which is not rooted in their political views, but in something else. I just don’t know what it is.”

“And how would you explain the reason for the tragedy that occurred in Hotel Kabul?”

“I think that Comrade Hafizullah Amin, having reached a top political post, imagined himself to be an overly independent political figure. Based on that, he began to act willfully, ignoring the interests and opinions of his former handlers at the CIA. When different attempts to put him in his place failed, the Americans decided to take drastic measures, and launched the scenario involving the ambassador and the terrorists. However, their plan failed. At first Amin was scared, and then outraged. As a result, he ordered all of them destroyed—the terrorists and the ambassador. I just can’t find any other explanation.”

The room fell silent. Valery was contemplating Artem’s version of events. As a Soviet diplomat and a person professionally involved in politics, he had to deny such “provocative insinuations” by an agent who was slandering the leaders of a friendly, almost brotherly, country. However, as an intelligence operative, Starostin had to follow the golden rule—never adopt a negative attitude toward one’s source of information. Starostin doodled

while he ruminated, then stared absent-mindedly at the tea leaves at the bottom of his cup. There was a long pause. Artem checked his watch.

“It’s time for me to go. My wife and I are going to visit my brother tonight. She doesn’t know where I am. She must be anxious.”

Nur Muhammad Taraki and Hafizullah Amin adored giving interviews. For them, this was the most satisfying form of sweet, desirable self-expression. It seemed as though for many years they had dreamed of being heard, but only their most loyal allies and some Soviet comrades had been prepared to listen. It was likely that most of the people around them also considered themselves to be significant persons, and as such, were more prepared to speak than to listen. And now, finally, the general secretary and his “loyal pupil” received an unlimited opportunity to speak and speak, knowing that their views would be published, listened to, commented on, and analyzed. They appreciated that their words were received with interest and respect by both Afghan and world communities. It was curious to watch how pleased they were while displaying themselves to media representatives, how they enjoyed the attention of journalists, and how they loved to listen to themselves while being the center of attention. They obviously enjoyed hearing their own voices, confidently delivering their original, smart responses to difficult questions.

Looking at them in such moments, Starostin recalled with some skepticism what Artem had told him once about the petit-bourgeois: “The petit-bourgeois are people who always want to be seen, no matter what. This is why they want to be grooms at weddings and dead men at funerals.”

On February 19, Hafizullah Amin gave an interview to Western journalists. The events at Hotel Kabul were the focus of the interview. The next day, the text of the interview was published in all Kabuli newspapers:

Question from a correspondent of *The Washington Post*: Do you think that the death of the ambassador of the United States of America will have an impact on the relationship between the United States and Afghanistan?

Answer: Is the purpose of your question to find out whether the death of the U.S. ambassador will impact the friendly relations of Afghanistan and the United States, and what can the United States do in response to his death?

Well, the United States of America is a great world power. I am confident that nobody can influence the beliefs of the leaders of that country. I do not know how the government of the United States perceived these events. However, speaking on behalf of the government of Afghanistan, I can assure you that we, being led by the principles of friendship between our two states, undertook all possible measures to free his Excellency, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Adolph Dubs. We participated in the ceremony of shipping the coffin with his body back to his motherland. We expressed our feelings of friendship towards the United States in our messages and during the ceremony of sending off the coffin. We suppose that all of this should positively influence the relations between our countries.

Question from a correspondent of *The Observer*: At what stage is the investigation into the death of Ambassador Dubs? Have there been any conclusive results?

A: We failed to capture the terrorists connected to the act. However, it has been established that they are linked to a notorious man, Badruddin Bahes. This man can be characterized as an adventurist whose political views combine extreme leftist ideology with short-sighted nationalism.

Question from a correspondent of the *Associated Press*: Beg your pardon, but some of the tourists noticed that security operatives detained one of the terrorists in the corridor of Hotel Kabul. Is this terrorist being investigated?

A: Security operatives mistakenly detained several people. It was discovered later that there were no terrorists among them, and all of them were subsequently released.

Question from a correspondent of *The Washington Post*: Don't you think that the above-mentioned terrorists had ties with some overseas forces?

A: I don't want to name any states specifically. However, some forces from abroad are attempting to intervene in our internal affairs.

Question from a correspondent of *The Financial Times*: Some of the diplomats have claimed that when the U.S. ambassador was in terrorist captivity, you were nowhere to be found. They interpret this as evidence of your indifference to the incident.

A: The locations of my offices are well known. Everybody knows that I am either in the People's Palace, in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, or in the Ministry of Defense. I don't know why it would be so difficult to find me. Let's assume that I was out of the office. Anyone who needed me could address my assistant, or the head of the Chancellery of the Revolutionary Council, Comrade Faqir. He would pass along any inquiries directly to our great leader.

Question from a correspondent of *The Observer*: The U.S. State Department has stated that during the events of February 14, there were some Soviet specialists present at the site of the operation. Do you have any comment?

A: Hotel Kabul is one of the oldest hotels in Afghanistan. It is the second largest hotel after the Intercontinental. A great number of foreign citizens, including Soviet citizens, reside at Hotel Kabul. Therefore the presence of Soviet citizens in the hotel on that day should not raise any questions.

Question from a correspondent of *The Observer*: Were any of the Soviet instructors present there to provide assistance?

A: Your words sadden me. For some reason, it seems anything that we do on our own is underestimated in some countries. It is perceived with suspicion and doubt. We carried out the April Revolution in a manner that until it actually occurred, no one in the world knew about its preparation. Even those countries that spend millions of dollars on espionage in Afghanistan had no clue. When young Afghans achieved the victory of the revolution, some circles abroad said that the Soviet Union must have been involved.

We did everything possible to save Mr. Dubs. However, again our efforts are unfortunately linked with the assistance of the Soviet Union. This saddens us.

Question from a correspondent of *The Observer*: Perhaps I misunderstood your response to my question. Do you mean to say that there was not a single foreign adviser on the scene of the incident?

A: There was not a sole foreign adviser, Soviet or otherwise, to provide us with any assistance.

Question from a correspondent of *The Associated Press*: What is your reaction to the American note of protest?

A: We consider this protest totally unfounded. Guided by principles of humanism and friendship with the United States of America, we took every possible measure to save Mr. Dubs's life. I don't see any action or inaction that would demonstrate otherwise.

Question from a correspondent of *The Washington Post*: That person, whom the terrorists demanded to be released—do you have him?

A: No, nor do we know where he is. He was imprisoned during Daoud's regime but escaped from prison in the early days of the revolution.

Question from a correspondent of *Reuters*: Did you find out who the terrorists were, and if they had any links to a foreign country?

A: Terrorists, as a rule, use codenames. This is why we have yet to uncover their true identities and affiliations.

Question from *The Associated Press*: Couldn't you determine their origins by their accents?

A: There were four of them, and we could not determine which ones were speaking. We thought that at least one was from Badakhshan.

Question from *Reuters*: What weapons did the terrorists use?

A: They had handguns, one automatic rifle without markings, and a hand grenade of unknown origin. They used handguns and the automatic rifle.

Question from *The Associated Press*: Were those weapons manufactured in Afghanistan?

A: We do not manufacture weapons in Afghanistan.

Question from *The Washington Post*: In cases like this, it is customary to try to stall the process of negotiating with terrorists. The staff members of the American embassy advised your operatives to do just that. Why weren't any measures taken to stall the negotiations?

A: I hope you listened to me attentively. We did everything possible to buy time. As a result, we managed to prolong the negotiations for three and a half hours, but even after the deadline given by the terrorists had expired, they agreed to prolong it for another ten minutes. They declared repeatedly that they would not wait any longer. This is why our attempts to stall for time did not yield desirable results. We took every measure available to save Mr. Dubs's life until the final minutes.

Question from *The Associated Press*: It seems to me that if you had told the terrorists that you accepted their demands, but the person in question was in a remote part of the country, they would have agreed to postpone the murder of the ambassador.

A: We concealed from the terrorists the fact that we did not have this person. We told them many times that he was on his way and would arrive soon. The Americans, who were present at the scene, witnessed this. However, the terrorists did not agree to wait or to prolong their initial deadline.

Here I would like to touch upon one more issue. Unfortunately, Mr. Dubs's car was stopped where cars are not permitted to stop. It would have been best if he had not decided to stop his car there. The terrorist who was dressed in the Transport Police uniform proclaimed his intention to search the car. However, it was an ambassadorial vehicle under protection of diplomatic immunity. The ambassador should not have permitted his car to be searched. Moreover, it had a diplomatic license plate number as well as the American

flag on it. The U.S. ambassador was in it, so nobody had the right to search the vehicle. According to the driver, the ambassador's bodyguards informed him repeatedly that his car was being followed.

Our security services offered to provide an escort of competent Tsarandoi operatives months ago. Unfortunately, the ambassador did not accept our offer.

Having read Amin's interview several times, analyst Vladimir Khotyaev set aside the newspaper, highlighted with a yellow marker, and began to reflect.

Amin was not a simple man, he thought. He spoke clearly and confidently, and talked his way out of uncomfortable situations. Vladimir pulled out records of conversations between Starostin, Artem, and the Anarchist, as well as reports of the security officer Bakhturin and other sources. He placed a notebook with numbered pages in front of him. He wrote the title of a future document on a blank page: "Political Analysis of the Motives Behind the Death of the American Ambassador Adolph Dubs." He began to draft his analysis of some of the essential questions:

1. Why, if the ambassador had been warned in advance that he was being followed, did he turn down the offer of a police escort, or not make use of U.S. Marines from the embassy for protection?
2. Why did the ambassador obey the transport officer by stopping the vehicle? Was he confused? Scared? Was it planned that way? Why did he allow the terrorists to enter the car? Why didn't he make a scene? Was he threatened by a weapon? Did he expect this meeting to happen? It's interesting what the driver had to say. Tsarandoi operatives mentioned to Bakhturin that they had already interrogated the driver.

The security officer immediately asked Tarun to share the results of this investigation with him. The head of Tsarandoi reluctantly obliged*.

3. What does the attaché case of the ambassador that was found in the hotel room signify? Why would the ambassador pack toiletries in his attaché case instead of papers and documents? Was he preparing to spend more time in the hotel than he did?
4. Why was the ambassador so calm when speaking through the door, as if nothing was out of the ordinary? Was he such a courageous man? Did he not realize the gravity of the situation? Or was he convinced that nothing was going to happen to him?
5. Why did not a single American diplomat or staff member of the embassy speak to journalists to try to clarify the incident and provide their own interpretation and evaluation of the events? The ceremony of sending off the coffin with Dubs's body was conducted as though the American embassy deliberately attempted to avoid drawing attention to the event. They claimed that Mrs. Dubs had requested that they not make a big deal of it. Is she the one to determine such issues?
6. The participation of U.S. Marines and the security officer in this incident was minimal. Why was the CIA resident not present at Hotel Kabul or at the American embassy during the incident?

* All subsequent attempts by Soviet representatives to see the results of the investigation, or to learn the truth from the Afghans, were repeatedly rejected. In January 1980, after Amin was overthrown and a new regime came to power, Bakhturin asked the head of security services if the archives contained an audio tape with the recording of the interrogation of the driver. He said, "We have nothing related to Dubs's murder. No trace whatsoever."

7. Who were the terrorists? It seems as if they were hired hands. Why, then, can nobody identify them? Artem was rightfully surprised—they described themselves as friends of Badruddin Bahes, yet had not known that he was deceased. Amin also pretends that he doesn't know about Bahes's death, although it was probably he who ordered his execution.
8. Why were all of the terrorists murdered? Fine—let's give Amin the benefit of the doubt and assume that there was no terrorist who turned himself in to relay the demands. However, when Tarun entered the room after the raid, two of the terrorists were merely wounded. Why did he kill them? Could it be simply explained by the heat of the moment?
9. Why was the Tsarandoi rather than the AGSA tasked to be in charge of the operation? Is this because the security service is headed by Sarwari, who is loyal to Taraki and close to our advisers, while Tsarandoi is headed by Amin's friend Tarun? The incident with the ambassador is a very delicate affair. It could only be trusted to someone who was a close confidant.
10. Where was Amin during the time when the ambassador was held at the hotel? Why were the Americans unable to contact him? It's impossible to think that the hotel room raid could have taken place without his sanction. Tarun would never have made such a decision on his own. It means that he maintained contact with Amin during the standoff. Perhaps Amin knew in advance what could happen. Wasn't the ambassador's abduction Amin's plan to begin with? If so, what was his motive?
11. How seriously can one consider the Anarchist's suggestion that this was a covert CIA operation? If I were to look at it from the American point of view, the gain would be

worth it. To have an agent in Amin's position means not only to receive access to important information, but also the possibility of pulling the strings of political processes in Afghanistan and beyond. One shouldn't discount the effect on the public of witnessing how American officials are treated in pro-communist Afghanistan. However, it all seems too noisy, too bloody to be "a covert operation." At the same time, it's impossible to completely discard this version of events. Amin's reaction to such a move can be explained. It seems as though the Anarchist is right in many respects. Artem said many of the same things."

Having written this outline, Khotyaev put his journal aside. He was in a bad mood. There were too many questions. If one could agree with the version of a covert American operation that failed due to an unexpectedly strong reaction from Amin, it would be possible to answer each of the questions. All of the pieces begin to coalesce around a single strand of logic, with the exception of the last episode. How was the plan supposed to turn out according to the American scenario? They would hardly have consciously "sacrificed" the ambassador. It was also clear that Amin would not come to the Kabul Hotel under any circumstances. So, what could he do then? Transfer someone disguised as Bahes to the terrorists, thereby signaling his acquiescence? It is possible that there were other finales prepared in advance for Amin's choosing.

Vladimir shuddered from disgust. No matter who was pulling the strings, the circumstances of the operation seemed so perverse, so cruel, almost satanic. "If I write about all of this in my report, what would Osadchiy's response be? How would it be

perceived at the Center? It would surely be scandalous. There seems no way out, besides not writing anything to begin with.”

However, if the emphasis of the analysis was not placed on Amin’s alleged collaboration with the Americans, the Center would find the report easier to accept. It would be perceived as some sort of pulp fiction, like cheap entertainment after a lunch break. If one insinuated that Amin was a CIA agent, though, there would surely be a scandal. Not just a scandal, but a major scandal. The second-ranking official in a friendly state is an American spy! Our diplomats, KGB officers, and party advisers have all been working closely with him. I should probably talk to the resident, and wait to write my report, decided Vladimir. He closed his notebook and went for a cigarette.

As strange as it appears, the incident was soon forgotten. For some reason, the Americans decided not to make a lot of noise about it, and limited their protest to a formal note. Why wasn’t there an uproar in the Western media? Was it only because of the new high-profile events unraveling in the world, including the anti-shah revolution in Iran? Or were the Americans simply eager to sweep the disaster under the rug?

The Diplomatic Mission of the United States in Kabul remained without an ambassador for many years. The number of American diplomats was reduced significantly. Amstutz became the chargé d’affaires. He was soon given the highest award of the U.S. State Department.

About a week after Dubs’s murder, Bakhturin was at a reception at one of the Western embassies. Charlie, the American security officer, approached him. He claimed that he had nothing to do with the accusations addressed by the U.S. State Department to

the Soviet advisers. "It's all politics," he awkwardly attempted to explain. "The guys in Washington are playing their games."

"No offense," Bakhturin reassured him. "Let's have a drink. Tell me, did this story have an impact on you personally?"

Charlie issued a sad sigh. "I am being demoted and transferred to Bolivia."

Chapter 5:

Rebellion in Herat – First Blood

By spring of 1979, the number of Soviet specialists working in Afghanistan had surpassed two thousand. Their expert contributions took a variety of forms. Citrus fruit and olives were grown at the modern agricultural complexes that were established in the suburbs of Jalalabad. Teachers were brought in to work at Kabul Polytechnic Institute and the Automotive Technical School. Soviet specialists developed gas deposits in the north of the country and established a mineral fertilizer production plant in Mazar-e-Sharif. Others worked as doctors, university faculty, and advisers to state and party organizations.

Despite common sentiment, it is unfair to say that all of the advisers who had arrived in Afghanistan were dummies and copycats who forced Afghans to do everything according to the Soviet blueprint. The advisers were different, and the way they performed their duties depended on their education, intelligence, business experience, and moral qualities.

Some Soviets perceived the assignment in Afghanistan as a sort of punishment from God, and spent most of their time in their villas or apartments, venturing out occasionally to shop at the bazaar. They had very little interest in the revolution, societal reforms, or the Afghan people. They were afraid of everything—unsanitary food, Islamic fanaticism, the weather, being cheated at markets, provocations from Afghan special services, even being reported by other Soviets. They imagined danger lurking around every corner. Their contracts ranged from three months to two years, and they returned to the Soviet Union with great relief when their contracts expired, feeling heroic and fortunate to have

survived.

Other, more entrepreneurial types took advantage of their tours in Afghanistan to enrich themselves through dealings in the black market. These dealers would buy scores of shearling coats to sell at home and use the profits to buy a highly desirable Zhiguli. Goods such as cars, tape recorders, jeans, lingerie, high-quality fabrics, semi-precious stones, and electronic watches that were difficult to obtain in the USSR became items of speculation.

However, in truth most Soviet advisers were hard working, honest, and diligent. They could hardly be blamed for having treated their assignments according to the Soviet blueprint. What other blueprint could they apply? Many were second- or third-generation Soviet citizens who were aware of only Soviet approaches to life, be it a party, *Komsomol*, trade union, working, or military life. They tried to convince the peasants to create something similar to collective farms not because they had evil intentions, but because they didn't know any other way to organize agricultural production. They established "Lenin's rooms" in military barracks because every Soviet military detachment had such a room, filled with propaganda and images of Soviet leaders. They proudly reported their progress to their bosses in Moscow, as they had in the *Komsomol* or trade union organizations where they worked back home. It was impossible for the advisers to imagine the existence of any party or political organization outside of the PDPA because they had been raised within the single-party structure of "democratic centralism." This meant a rigid vertical power structure. It was understood that any deviation from this principle would be punished mercilessly.

Many of the Soviet specialists sincerely believed in the ideals of the April Revolution: freedom, equality, and brotherhood. Back in the Soviet Union, revolutionary

struggle had become a historical legacy, the subject of books, memoirs, and mythology. They recognized those ideals as vital to their own cultural history and accepted that a revolutionary struggle was taking place in Afghanistan, directly outside their door. The battle of good versus evil that they regarded as a real and integral aspect of their identity took shape with renewed force in Afghanistan. Long live freedom! Away with exploitation!

With few exceptions, Afghans today remember those Soviet advisers in a favorable light. Afghans appreciated their courage and altruism, and sensed in their Soviet friends a sincere desire to help. Bad incidents were forgiven and the positive contributions are remembered to this day.

The greatest number of Soviet advisers was allocated to the Armed Forces of Afghanistan. Behind every Afghan general, colonel, and major were Soviet generals, colonels, and majors. Soviet military advisers worked in every military unit, headquarters, school, and academy.

Meanwhile, the political influence of the head of the Soviet military advisory mission, General Gorelov, grew exponentially. Lev Nikolayevich was becoming more and more prominent in Afghan affairs.

He openly sympathized with Amin and considered him, not without merit, the real ruler of the country. Amin recognized this fact. By then Amin had perfected his system of monitoring Soviet specialists, particularly those who held the most power. At one point, Amin asked Gorelov to give him weekly lessons in military theory. Gorelov obliged, and during long sessions introduced the Afghan leader to strategy, tactics, weaponry, ammunition, military technology, and details of military law. Gorelov's admiration of the energetic and curious Afghan politician, who stood out among other Afghan ministers who

did not bother to learn, continued to grow as a result of these sessions.

Amin often asked Generals Gorelov and Zaplatin, with an increasing sense of insult, for the reasons that their Soviet comrades in Moscow remained sympathetic to the Parchamis instead of rejecting them outright, or, better yet, handing them over to Afghanistan's security services in order that they be "tried." On one occasion he broke into a diatribe in an attempt to explain the irreconcilable divide between the two factions to his Soviet friends.

"Why, in your opinion, have the two factions done nothing but quarrel since establishing the PDPA?" Amin asked the generals.

"Different views regarding tactics and strategy," Zaplatin replied cautiously.

"Khalqis come from the lowest strata of society, while Parchamis represent the mid- and top-level bourgeoisie and feudal circles," Gorelov observed less diplomatically. "In my opinion, this is part of the larger issue of class divisions."

"All of this is correct," said Amin, "but now allow me to name the main reason. I hope you will share this with your leadership and open the eyes of our comrades who still blindly trust Karmal. The split in the party is a result of imperialist and feudal reaction. Parchamism was conceived artificially in the depths of our special services, the secret police, and military counterintelligence. Karmal and his allies are agents who were recruited during the monarchical regime. I'm sure that their true bosses work far from Kabul, either in the United States or in Bonn."

The generals exchanged meaningful glances. Lev Nikolayevich remembered well that a high-level KGB official mentioned in passing at the *banya* that Karmal, Taraki, and Amin himself had all worked very closely with the KGB in the time leading up to the April

Revolution.

“I understand that you may find this hard to believe,” continued Amin, “but if you follow the history of our party closely, you will see that it was the Parchamis who did everything to destroy the revolutionary movement. Karmal himself repeatedly appealed for cooperation with the reactionary royal regime. He suggested that we ‘tone down our red tones and convince the king that we are not communists.’ Can you imagine that? What could this be but a covert deal with the monarchy?”

“I am going to refer to a fact that is well known to the leaders of our party, but perhaps will surprise our Soviet comrades. Karmal was an informer to Mohammad Daoud for many years, up until April of last year. To Daoud—the tyrant, the hired hand of the imperialists! In order to reward Karmal for his service, Daoud’s security guys turned a blind eye to the Parchamis, while the president appointed some of them as ministers in his cabinet.”

Amin paused here, relishing the generals’ reaction, before moving to his final point.

“After the anti-monarchical coup, Daoud, for some reason, suddenly grew disinterested in his former informer, Karmal. Karmal, wishing to ingratiate himself, outlined a plan to arrest and eliminate the leadership of the Khalq faction and submitted it to the president. It was only Allah’s will and the support of the people that helped us to avoid being hunted down and killed.”

Both advisers looked dispirited. They had repeatedly been told before that Parchamis were rotten and unreliable, but now, having heard the new facts, they understood that there was no chance for reconciliation with Karmal and his allies. Amin, a shrewd psychologist, recognized the change in the mood of his advisers. He took advantage

of the opportunity to develop the success of his smear campaign. He had become increasingly familiar with the characters of his Soviet friends. For example, he knew that Zaplatin was a family man with traditional values, someone with a moralistic worldview. Turning to Zaplatin, Amin continued: "Take, as an example, Karmal's affair with Anahita Ratebzad. Do you know who her husband was? It was none other than Dr. Kiramuddin, the king's personal physician! And here is Karmal, dragging this sinful woman into the Central Committee!"

Zaplatin clasped his hands as if sharing the indignation of his host, who solemnly continued: "We have always stood firmly by our class positions and based our support in the proletariat. Parchamis constantly talked about some union with the intelligentsia, national bourgeoisie, even landlords! Clearly, they didn't study Lenin very closely. What is the result? It was the Khalqis who triumphed in the great April Revolution. The Khalqis were the vanguard of the revolutionary struggle. Name one Parchami who displayed any distinction on that day. Raffi, the commander of the Fourth Armored Brigade, sat in his office quietly while his junior officers risked their lives fighting to liberate the Ark Palace. Major Zia, a covert Parchami, was in charge of Daoud's Guard, and personally shot our Khalqi comrades. Others simply hid in their burrows. No, they did not need this revolution.

"Now, everybody knows the true hero of the April Revolution!" stated Amin proudly, puffing his chest. "When Comrade Taraki recommended my candidacy for membership in the Central Committee thirteen years ago, who spoke out against me? Karmal! He and his friends have done everything in their power to stop me. Just a month before the revolution, these people again demanded my expulsion from the Central Committee and revocation of my leadership of the military wing of the party. What is the conclusion? They were anti-

revolutionary, anti-party, and against the democratic reforms. And where are Karmal and his cronies now? Nowhere to be found! And look at me, sitting here in front of you, number two in the state, the secretary of the Central Committee, minister, and vice premier. The top brass in the Soviet Union, the leaders of the International Communist Movement, welcome me with open arms. The whole world knows me!

“Don’t believe the fairy tales about Karmal as the ‘great theoretician of the revolutionary movement in Afghanistan.’ He may have written many articles over the last few years, but if you read those articles attentively, you will see a revolting revisionist ideologist, bourgeois opportunist, and provocateur. Tell this to your leaders in Moscow and let them shed their misunderstanding once and for all.”

Gorelov and Zaplatin duly reported their positive impressions of “the second man of the DRA” to their bosses. They expressed their admiration for his outstanding personal qualities and business skills. Interestingly, Amin himself never fully trusted the head of the Soviet military advisory mission. A self-described “true revolutionary,” he could not forgive Gorelov for having been close to M. Daoud and having toasted to the king’s health. Almost all distinguished Afghans who were associated with the former regime had been killed, imprisoned, or had fled the country during the last year—that was the merciless logic of the revolutionary struggle led by Amin. Amin learned the lessons of the Great October Revolution from books by American authors, which he had read with great pleasure during his studies in the United States. That was why General Gorelov and Ambassador Puzanov—both Brezhnev-era “revisionists”—had no place in Amin’s revolutionary plans for the new life in Afghanistan.

Lev Nikolayevich, however, had no inkling of Amin’s enmity and continued to

dutifully fulfill his responsibilities in Afghanistan. He was a former paratrooper and commander of a paratrooper division, who wanted to establish a corps resembling the Soviet special forces in Afghanistan. With that goal in mind, about three hundred physically fit young men were recruited from across Afghanistan. Gorelov himself supervised the training that Soviet officers provided to those cadets. The general organized their special training to include maneuvers such as rappelling from hovering helicopters.

General Gorelov made use of the special forces group that he had organized very soon. The team was dispatched to fight in the middle of March 1979, when an uprising began in the west of the country, in the city of Herat.

Herat was considered by many to be the most beautiful city in Afghanistan. Located near the border with Iran and Turkmenistan, it was renowned for its talented artisans, entrepreneurial merchants, and exquisite poets and musicians. Nature lent itself to the blossoming of these talents. Nowhere in the world can one find such beautiful pine forests as in Herat. Tourists came from all around to enjoy the minarets of Musalla and the blue frescoes of the Jami Mosque, one of the most beautiful in the East. Tourists admired the medieval fortress located on a hill in the center of the city, shopped for fabrics, carpets, and metal works, and watched cockfights.

Herat was for Afghanistan what St. Petersburg is for Russia. The city itself was a monument filled with light and harmony.

Soviet advisers were eagerly agreeing to be stationed in Herat. According to Afghan standards, it was a very civilized area, boasting a modern three-story hotel (air-conditioned, with a restaurant and a swimming pool), movie theaters, museums,

architectural monuments, and other sights to see. A highway connected Herat to Kushka, the southernmost Soviet city. It took around ninety minutes to reach the Soviet Union by this highway. Another important factor was that Herat was considered calm and secure, far away from the “hotbed of evil” that was Pakistan, and far from Afghanistan’s turbulent tribal region. Local residents were considered to be good-natured, hospitable, and engaged in traditional crafts. Soviet military advisers assigned to Herat’s Seventeenth Infantry Division, civil experts, and Czechoslovakian, Bulgarian, and Indian specialists all enjoyed a good life in Herat in the spring of 1979. Almost all Soviet officers lived in Herat with their families.

The military advisers’ service was not particularly strenuous. There were no active military actions anywhere near the region. A strong party organization had existed in the Seventeenth Division since pre-revolutionary times; it consisted not only of officers, but also sergeants and even soldiers.

It is still unclear what sparked the sudden rebellion in Herat.

It is possible that the liberal attitudes of local revolutionaries offended the religious sensibilities of the local Muslim population. For example, the new authorities wanted women to remove their *paranjas* and girls to attend schools alongside boys. They wanted people to worship not Allah, but Nur Mohammad Taraki, whose portrait was smattered across the city. Perhaps the awkward attempts to enforce the agrarian reform here, with the goal of improving the lives of the area’s poorest and most exploited residents, played a role. Perhaps it was the anti-Shah revolution that had taken place a month prior in Iran. Herat held close ties with Iran, both spiritual and commercial. Shia Muslims lived in Herat and Iran. The border between Iran and Herat was non-existent, and residents freely

traveled back and forth. Ayatollah Khomeini's supporters triumphantly declared an Islamic Revolution and the rule of Islam in all spheres of life in Iran that February. Perhaps that wave reached Herat as well?

Whatever the cause, on March 12, 1979, crowds of agitated peasants entered Herat from different directions. City-dwellers joined the peasants in the streets, and that mass of people, armed with sticks and stones and shouting "Allah Akbar," poured into the center of the city. The party committee and all of the local organs of power were ransacked. PDPA activists were torn to pieces by the mob, and their houses were burned down. Herat, normally so peaceful and quiet, had become a raging inferno overnight. The military's attempts to pacify the mob by firing rounds overhead from armored vehicles that rolled along the streets had the reverse effect. The crowd grew more agitated, and appeals to storm the military base itself and seize the arsenal of weapons were heard across the city.

On March 14, the senior military adviser to the commander of the division, Colonel Stanislav Katichev, requested assistance from Kabul. General Gorelov ordered Katichev to open artillery fire on the rebels and promised to assist in "keeping the situation under control." Soldiers from the artillery unit began to position their weapons to fire into the angry crowds.

By that time, the Soviet colony in Herat had assumed its first losses. Yuri Bogdanov, a wool merchant, was brutally murdered in his home. His wife was miraculously saved by her Afghan neighbors, who hid her battered, broken body from the raging crowd. Major Nikolai Biziukov was brutally murdered when rebels intercepted his jeep en route to the Seventeenth Division.

The violence that had overtaken Herat was completely unexpected. Before, it had

been assumed that the Soviets in Afghanistan had nothing to fear, that the “Afghan people” loved them and would protect them always and everywhere. Suddenly, this monstrous wave of medieval-style murders shattered these long-standing beliefs. Civilian specialists and families of the military advisers were evacuated to the Herat airdrome and flown to Kabul. Until the arrival of the Aeroflot flight from Moscow, the specialists and their wives and children were put in the so-called “marble hall” of the embassy, normally reserved for special holiday receptions. Many Soviets left behind all of their documents and other belongings during the evacuation. Many were dressed in robes and shorts.

Soon it became clear that there was more to come. The uprising continued to gather momentum when mutiny overtook the Seventeenth Infantry Division. Even in the division, which was considered to be one of the most reliable and loyal to the PDPA, the influence of the mullahs had proven stronger than the soldiers’ dedication to the new Afghan regime. After the artillery units fired upon the crowd approaching the military base, the cannons were turned around and began to fire upon the barracks and the base itself. Two days later, the detachments of almost the entire division had either sided with the rebels or simply deserted.

By March 15, Herat had fallen under the rebels’ control. Those who survived—members of the party, the commanders loyal to the regime, and the Soviet advisers—retreated to the airdrome, which was located ten kilometers away from the city.

The following five days were of great importance for the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan. Government circles were consumed with panic. If Herat, once considered to be peaceful and loyal, could fall so easily to the first sign of aggression from an unarmed crowd, what could be expected in other, more volatile regions, ravaged by the armed

counter-revolutionaries? Would this uprising become a signal for others to begin a powerful armed rebellion? Then the counter-revolution could snowball straight to Kabul, growing in power by the day and threatening to bury the fledgling authorities, along with their Soviet advisers, planes, tanks, ideologies, and promises.

In a state of dismay, Taraki asked General Gorelov for urgent military assistance. More precisely, he needed the engagement of Soviet paratroopers.

Amin ordered aviation to be launched and to bomb Herat, the crown jewel of Afghanistan, into rubble. The Soviet advisers had a very difficult time convincing him to change his mind and call off the strike, though they eventually succeeded.

Bogdanov went to see Sarwari in his office. Sarwari met him, pistol in hand, as if expecting a rebel assault at any moment. "The Herat Infantry Division does not exist anymore," said Sarwari in a doomed, shaking voice. "A chain reaction of fear and panic may begin in the army. If the situation continues to develop this way, Kabul may share Herat's destiny in five days."

"What are you planning to do?" asked Bogdanov. He had never seen Sarwari in such an alarmed state.

"We will leave for the mountains and begin everything anew. We will regroup and fall on the country from above like an avalanche," Sarwari said.

"Yes, of course," thought Bogdanov, "you will run and hide. But where will we go? Who will hide our women and children?"

"You should calmly analyze the situation," pleaded Bogdanov. "As far as I know, your leadership has not done a thing to help Herat. Have any of your leaders even gone there?"

"No," replied Sarwari hopelessly. It seemed that he had not even considered that.

“All of our leaders are waiting for the Soviet Union to help us.”

Government officials, members of the Central Committee of the PDPA, and bureaucrats at the People’s Palace, which housed Taraki’s residence, were at a loss. Gorelov and Zaplatin had a difficult time bringing the leaders of the Ministry of Defense to their senses. They formed an operative group headed by the artillery commander, Colonel Inzerghol, and launched a squadron of Il-28 bombers from the Shindand Aviation Base, located to the south of Herat. They began to form a military detachment designed to be deployed to quell the uprising.

The rebellion in the Herat Infantry Division gave a serious scare not only to the Afghan leaders, but also to many Soviet representatives in Kabul. Their anxiety reached Moscow and registered with members of the Politburo. For several days in a row, including Saturday and Sunday, with a frequency unheard of during times of peace, Politburo members met to discuss the problem. Transcripts from those meetings illustrate the intensity of the challenges facing the Kremlin leaders’ search for a solution.

Chairman of the KGB Andropov arrived to see Foreign Minister Gromyko at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Saturday, March 17. The two spent a long time in Gromyko’s office. They called Marshal Ustinov several times during their meeting. Andrei Andreyevich asked his assistant to call several of his deputies and heads of Middle Eastern sections to work. Then Gromyko and Andropov went to the Kremlin to attend a Politburo meeting. As Gromyko was departing, he ordered the diplomats who had been called to the ministry not to leave before his return.

Of the key Politburo members, only Brezhnev, Suslov, and Chernenko did not attend

the meeting of March 17. Brezhnev was in Zavidovo, where he liked to hunt. Leonid Ilyich was aging rapidly and suffered from a variety of illnesses. He typically left for the country residence by noon on Friday. Chernenko had accompanied Brezhnev to Zavidovo. Suslov was on vacation. Kirilenko, secretary of the Central Committee, explained that Leonid Ilyich would arrive tomorrow to participate in the discussion, and that the general secretary had tasked them to convene and ponder the situation in the meantime. Members of the Politburo nodded their white heads in agreement and stared at papers that had been laid out on the table before them.

Kirilenko, who conducted Politburo meetings in Brezhnev's absence, suggested that they first listen to a briefing by Gromyko. There were no objections. The minister of foreign affairs began to describe the developments in Afghanistan in a reserved, unengaged tone.

"According to the reports that we have received from Afghanistan, including both encrypted cables and telephone conversations with the head of the group of our military advisers, Comrade Gorelov, and temporary chargé d'affaires, Comrade Alexeyev, the situation has become quite grave. The center of the unrest is in the city of Herat, located near the Iranian border in western Afghanistan. We have received reports that the infantry division that was deployed in Herat has all but dissolved. An artillery and an infantry brigade have revolted and sided with the rebels. Gangs of terrorists and saboteurs from Iranian territory are conducting illegal activities and have assumed control of Herat. They have joined forces with Afghan counter-revolutionaries, who consist mostly of religious figures and fanatical religious devotees. It is difficult to estimate the number of rebels, but our comrades say that they number in the thousands. Thousands," emphasized Gromyko, allowing a pause for the gravity of the situation to register. "This morning at 11 o'clock I

spoke with Amin,” Gromyko added. “He calmly and confidently assured me that the situation is not as complicated as it may seem, and that it is under the control of the Afghan armed forces.”

“So, according to Amin, the leadership of Afghanistan doesn’t feel any anxiety?” Kirilenko asked.

“That seems to be the case,” confirmed Gromyko flatly. “Amin told me that the situation, in general, is normal. He claims that all of the governors are loyal to the lawful government. But our comrades are telling a different story. They say that the situation in Herat and a number of other places is alarming. I asked Amin what actions he considers necessary for us to take. Amin firmly denied any threat to the regime. At the end of the conversation, he asked me to give his best regards to the members of the Politburo, and to Leonid Ilyich Brezhnev personally.

“But approximately two or three hours later, we received word of growing unrest in Herat from our comrades. New masses of rebels, trained in Pakistan and Iran, were reported to be preparing to enter Afghan territory. Approximately half an hour later, we learned that Comrade Taraki had summoned Gorelov and Alexeyev for a meeting. He appealed for help from the Soviet Union, including military equipment, ammunition, and food. Everything is listed in the documents that you have in front of you. Taraki also mentioned in passing that they might need our assistance on the ground and in the air. It means that they want us to send our troops, both ground and aviation.”

Having uttered this last phrase, which caused everyone in the room to look up anxiously, the minister of foreign affairs felt compelled to add a comment: “I believe that when thinking about providing assistance to this country, we should consider the fact that

under no circumstances can we lose Afghanistan. We have been living in peace as good neighbors for sixty years. If we lose Afghanistan now, it would mean a serious blow to our politics.”

The Politburo members grew quiet. They began to direct their attention to the minister of defense. Ustinov, his face ridden with tension, confirmed that the leadership of Afghanistan was indeed concerned by the situation. The minister had spoken with General Gorelov several times and had a good sense of the situation. It seemed that the chief military adviser had done everything in his power to gain control of the situation, and of the demoralized Afghan servicemen. He launched the Il-28 bombers to Herat and ordered the artillery units to fire upon the rebellious mob. But the situation was growing worse by the hour. Yesterday the minister of defense, in a state of irritation, ordered Gorelov to arm and mobilize the working class. The adviser attempted to object, saying, “I am not a politician, I am a military man,” but Ustinov’s reply was uncompromisingly harsh, and left the general with little choice. One can only imagine what Gorelov thought about Ustinov at that moment, knowing all too well that all the ideological platitudes about the Afghan working class were nothing more than empty rhetoric.

“Tomorrow morning, operative units will be sent from Kabul to Herat to fight the rebels,” Ustinov told the quiet participants of the meeting. “We recommended that Comrade Taraki send several detachments to the region, but he said that it was not feasible because of the volatile situation in other regions of the country. To make a long story short, they are expecting a widespread assault on the ground and in the air.”

“And they expect us to strike the rebels?” asked Andropov incredulously.

“Here, dear comrades, a key question arises. Whom will our troops fight, should we

decide to send them to Afghanistan?" inquired Kirilenko. "We have heard that religious people have joined the rebel forces. They are Muslims—the ordinary people of Afghanistan. How do we propose to fight against the Afghan people?"

"According to our data, about three thousand rebels are being dispatched from Pakistan to Afghanistan. Most of them are religious fanatics," clarified the chairman of the KGB. "The issue is how actively the Afghan population will support them."

"The balance of power between the rebels and government supporters is unclear now," agreed Gromyko. "The events in Herat developed quite tumultuously. More than a thousand people have been killed there. But even there, the situation remains unclear."

"I think that this draft resolution that is front of us now needs to be corrected," said Kosygin, decisively entering the conversation. "To begin with, we should not wait until April to supply armaments. They should be provided, as per their demands, starting immediately. I would also suggest the following measures be implemented. Taraki should be informed that we are raising the price for gas that we import from Afghanistan, from 15 to 25 rubles per 1,000 cubic meters. This will give our Afghan friends the opportunity to cover the expenses related to the acquisition of weapons. In my opinion, Afghans should be given these weapons free of charge."

Members of the Politburo murmured their approval, as they saw no point in being stingy.

"Further," the chairman of the government continued, "the draft of the resolution says that we plan to give them 75,000 tons of bread. I think we should reconsider this number as well, and provide Afghanistan with 100,000 tons. We must signal our unwavering moral support for the Afghan people. We ought to fight for Afghanistan."

“Let’s ask Alexei Nikolayevich to introduce these changes to the draft resolution of the Council of Ministers of the USSR, taking into consideration everything we have discussed here,” suggested Kirilenko. “Tomorrow he will present the revised document.”

Kosygin agreed. “Fine. I will have everything done tomorrow morning. However, I want to raise one issue. Whatever you say, Taraki and Amin are hiding the true state of affairs from us. We still do not know what is happening in Afghanistan. They seem to be good people, but they are keeping many things secret from us. It is difficult to understand the real reason for such behavior. Andrei Andreyevich,” Kosygin turned to Gromyko. “I think we need to resolve the issue with the ambassador. The current ambassador has no real authority in Kabul and does not do what he should do. Besides, I consider it necessary to deploy an additional group of qualified military specialists to Afghanistan. Further, it seems to me that we need to adopt a more comprehensive political resolution. Perhaps our colleagues in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Defense, the KGB, and the International Department of the Central Committee should prepare a draft of such a resolution. We can expect that Iran, China, Pakistan, and certainly Carter will position themselves against Afghanistan and do everything in their power to interfere with its lawful government. This is where our political support will be needed.”

Kosygin paused before moving to the most important issue, the one that others had avoided mentioning until now.

“I think that the Afghan government should be discouraged from asking us for military intervention. Whom will we have to fight against in Afghanistan? They are all Muslims. They are people of one faith, a faith so strong that it can become the platform of unification for them all. It is imperative that we tell Taraki and Amin directly about the

mistakes that they have made. Even today, they continue to execute dissidents. Their campaign of terror has extended past the elimination of Parcham political leaders to include the mid-level members of Parcham.”

Kosygin seemed to have prepared well for this meeting. He had studied the KGB’s and GRU’s foreign intelligence cables and counterintelligence materials provided by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Central Committee. His colleagues in the Politburo appreciated his preparedness, but dreaded the prospect of choosing a side on the issue of whether to send in troops. Kosygin had voiced his opinion. Ustinov was next to take the floor. Ustinov was well versed in bureaucratic politics and became a *narkom*, as Kosygin had under Stalin. He did not openly state his position, opting instead for an indirect approach.

“We have developed two scenarios for military action. The first is that within 24 hours we send the 105th Paratrooper Division to Afghanistan, send a motor rifle detachment to Kabul, and simultaneously bring the 108th and the Fifth Divisions closer to the border. In order for this to take place, as was correctly stated earlier, it is necessary to prepare a political resolution.”

Kirilenko rushed to support the minister of defense. “Comrade Ustinov is raising the issue correctly. We need to act against the rebel forces. At the same time, if we are considering sending in our troops, we can use this to pressure Taraki. We cannot bring in Soviet troops without an appropriate request to us from the Afghan government. Taraki needs to know about it.”

“But we also have a second variant,” continued Ustinov more confidently. “It is also fully developed. The second variant is to send in two divisions.”

“As for negotiations with Taraki, it seems to me that it would be best for Kosygin to speak with him,” suggested Andropov, diplomatically moving away from discussing the main topic.

The Politburo members voiced their support for Andropov’s motion. “I agree that we should develop a political document,” continued the KGB chairman in a quiet voice. “But we should keep in mind that we will surely be labeled as aggressors. Yet,” he raised his eyes to his colleagues, “under no circumstances can we lose Afghanistan.”

Kosygin looked down. The bags under his eyes seemed to have swollen even more. So the candidate to the Politburo, Ponomarev, also supported the idea of dispatching ground troops, albeit somewhat indirectly. Kosygin sensed that he had to join the common line of thinking, but he also wished to trump the minister of defense, whom he disliked. He disliked Ustinov for his hawkish approach to foreign policy, for his endless requests for additional defense funds at the expense of the country’s economy, for his coziness with the general secretary and history of resolving issues behind the scenes, without any preliminary discussion at the Council of Ministers or at the Politburo. Kosygin was irritated by the way Ustinov looked, down to the way he wore his military uniform. He knew that many military officials from Ustinov’s entourage also did not embrace him as the minister and gossiped behind his back, referring to him by an offensive nickname.

“The question arises—how would we appear in the face of international public opinion?” asked Kosygin. “If we decide to send the troops in, we need a sound reason to do so.” He paused. “Perhaps one of our distinguished comrades can travel to Afghanistan to clarify the situation on the ground? Perhaps Comrade Ustinov might go?” He paused again. “Or perhaps Comrade Ogarkov,” he added.

It was a brilliant ploy. Everybody present, besides the marshal, received this suggestion favorably. The participants of the meeting realized that the one to travel to Kabul would eventually become the point person, responsible for all further developments. The minister of defense was less than excited by his proposed candidacy. Kosygin had caught him off guard with his dangerous suggestion.

Ustinov awkwardly attempted to change the subject: "It seems to me that we should talk about the political steps that we have not yet exhausted. We should use the capacity of the Afghan army to a greater degree. I don't think it's a good idea for me to go to Afghanistan. Perhaps it would be better for some member of the government to travel there," he suggested. He fumbled with his glasses, nervously wiping them with a handkerchief.

Kosygin saw his chance to further inconvenience his old adversary. "No, Dmitry Fedorovich, you should be the one to go to Afghanistan," he insisted. "The issue is that we are sending the Afghans enormous quantities of weapons, and we need to follow up to ensure that they are being used appropriately. God forbid our arms fall into the hands of the rebels. Besides, we have over five hundred military advisers in Afghanistan. It is necessary to meet with them and find out what is happening in the armed forces."

"Even if one of us does go to Afghanistan, it will be impossible to survey the situation in just a few days," mumbled the anxious minister of defense.

"We should inform Leonid Ilyich in detail about the essence of the decisions that we have come to," masterfully intervened Andropov, an old and faithful friend of the minister of defense. "What do you think, Andrei?"

Gromyko immediately sensed the purpose behind Andropov's intervention.

“Certainly,” he began with his Belorussian accent, “today the situation is unclear for many of us. One thing is clear, which I have already mentioned. We cannot afford to give Afghanistan away to our enemies. We need to think about how we can achieve that objective. Perhaps bringing troops in will not be necessary,” he reasoned.

Sensing a shift in the mood of his colleagues, Kosygin decided to take a step towards them.

“We are united in this opinion. Afghanistan must not be given away. We should utilize all of our political means to help stabilize the Afghan leadership, to provide the assistance that we have committed to, and to leave the option of military engagement as a final measure.”

“Let us summarize,” suggested Kirilenko, and in ten points, formulated all of the suggestions that had been voiced at the Politburo meeting. “If you don’t object, I will now try to get in touch with Konstantin Ustinovich Chernenko to relay our suggestions to Leonid Ilyich.”

Kirilenko walked to the adjacent communications room. Having returned after a few minutes, he reported, “Comrade Chernenko believes that our suggestions are valid, and will inform Leonid Ilyich of our findings. Let’s finish for the day.”

In the evening, having returned to the ministry in Smolenskaya Square, Gromyko called his staff to convene for a meeting. As those who were present at that meeting recall, the minister was in a bad mood. Gromyko decided not to inform his colleagues about the details of the Politburo discussion. Instead, he began issuing orders. He asked his staff to urgently prepare a note to Pakistan that warned against intervening in the domestic affairs of neighboring countries. He also asked them to consider the arguments that would be

necessary to justify possible military intervention in Afghanistan.

“This should be prepared in the format of a memorandum for the Central Committee by tomorrow morning,” stated Gromyko harshly, looking above his colleagues’ heads.

The subordinates, who were accustomed to Gromyko’s severe character, understood that it was better to not ask questions. However, his first deputy, Korniyenko, mustered the courage to ask if it was really true that the Politburo had decided to intervene militarily.

“We have yet to reach such a decision. However, if the situation requires, we are prepared to intervene,” responded the minister slowly. “Under no circumstances can we lose Afghanistan,” he repeated. “You must understand that if today we leave Afghanistan, tomorrow we will have to defend our borders from Muslim hordes somewhere in Tajikistan or Uzbekistan.”

The next day, the same Politburo members reconvened. The chairman of the government reported about his conversations with Taraki.

“Per our agreement yesterday, I spoke twice with Comrade Taraki,” Kosygin began his detailed report. “He informed me that the situation in Herat is very complicated. His view is that if the Soviet Union does not assist now, they will be unable to maintain control of the city. If Herat falls, they will lose everything. I asked him, ‘If you have a standing army of 100,000 in Afghanistan now, why not form several divisions to deploy in Herat?’ He explained to me that by the time they form those divisions, there would be no garrison loyal to the government left in Herat. Instead, they are asking us to send tanks and armored vehicles to support them. Then I asked if they had enough tank drivers to operate those

tanks. 'No,' he said. 'That is why we are asking you to send the Tajiks who serve in your tank divisions to become our tank crews. Just give them Afghan military uniforms.' My response was that we would be unable to conceal this, and the whole world would know that Soviet tank crews were fighting in Afghanistan.

"Then I asked, 'Comrade Taraki, isn't it possible to form detachments from the residents of Kabul to send to provinces where the situation is dangerous, equip them, and arm them?' He responded that there would be nobody to train them. 'How can this be?' I asked, 'when so many Afghans received military training in the Soviet Union, and so many professional military cadres from the past regime switched their loyalty to the people's government? How is it that there is nobody who can train your people to fight? Who is then supporting you?' And do you know what Taraki says to me? Without blinking an eye, Taraki says that there is almost nobody supporting them. And then he sings the same tune, saying that 'if Herat falls, the revolution is under a direct threat. Your support is needed.'"

"There are nine thousand people in the Seventeenth Division," replied Kirilenko. "Are they all inactive? Or have they all sided with the rebels?"

"According to Taraki, half of the division has switched sides. Those who remain are unreliable—they are unlikely to support the government vigorously, if at all."

"Dmitry Fedorovich, what is your view?" Kirilenko asked Ustinov.

"When I spoke with Amin, he also said that the fate of the revolution is fully in the hands of the Soviet Union," the minister of defense replied.

"So their only hope is our tanks and armored vehicles?"

"Most probably, yes," agreed Kosygin. "But before we make any decisions, we need to weigh all possible consequences. This is very serious business."

Unexpectedly, Andropov moved to support Kosygin. Something must have happened overnight for Yuri Vladimirovich, who had abstained the day before from saying anything of substance, to voice an opinion that shifted the vector of the discussion 180 degrees. His change of heart had a tremendous impact on the proceedings. Perhaps Andropov had a conversation with Brezhnev himself the night before, and the two had come to a consensus. It is also possible that on Sunday morning, Gromyko, Andropov, and Ustinov had an impromptu meeting and very frankly discussed the situation once again.

“Comrades, I have come to the following conclusion,” said Andropov softly. “We should very, very seriously consider exactly for what cause we would be bringing our troops into Afghanistan. It is absolutely clear to all of us that this country is not prepared to solve its problems in a socialist way. Religion is oppressive there. Illiteracy is rampant. The economy is backward, so on and so forth. Consider Lenin’s theory about a revolutionary situation. Can one even talk about a revolutionary situation in Afghanistan? Such a situation simply does not exist there. We could uphold their revolution only with our bayonets, and this is impermissible for us. We cannot expose ourselves to this risk.”

As if he was waiting for just this turn of events, the minister of foreign affairs took the floor.

“I fully support Yura’s suggestion to exclude the option of military intervention. By entering Afghanistan, our army will become the aggressor. Against whom would our armed forces fight? They would fight against the Afghan people! The international détente and arms control that we have achieved through our tremendous efforts, all of it would be nullified. All Non-Aligned Movement countries would turn their backs on us. This would be a nice gift to China. Any plans for Leonid Ilyich to meet with Carter would be discarded.

Giscard d'Estaing's visit in March would be under threat. And what would we gain? We also need to bear in mind that we cannot justify military intervention from the point of view of international law. According to the UN Charter, any country can ask us for military assistance, and we may provide such assistance, but," Gromyko raised his finger with authority, "only in the case that the request is initiated by a country that is subject to foreign aggression. Afghanistan was not subjected to any aggression. These are their domestic affairs."

It was surprising that not twenty-four hours had elapsed since Andrei Andreyevich had, in this very Politburo meeting room, tried to convince his colleagues no less certainly that "under no circumstances can we lose Afghanistan." Now, he appealed for them to turn their backs on the Afghans in pursuit of more significant gains. Gromyko was known for his ability to change his position depending on the circumstances of the situation. He was also known to sometimes convincingly defend a position that directly opposed his previous one. So, what had prompted the change? What happened during the past night? Kirilenko, who was confused by Andropov and Gromyko's interventions, attempted to join in the new tune. He began: "The situation in Afghanistan seems to have shifted for the better. Accordingly, our discussion of it is evolving differently. All of us agree that there is no basis for military intervention."

Ustinov demonstratively grimaced when he heard this. The KGB chairman moved unceremoniously to correct the secretary of the Central Committee.

"The situation in Afghanistan has not become any better. By now it is not one detachment that has switched sides, but an entire division. As we've seen from today's conversation between Alexei Nikolayevich and Taraki, the Afghan people do not support

this government. But can our troops be of help in this case? No. In this case, tanks and armored vehicles cannot be the solution. I think we need to tell Comrade Taraki this.”

“Perhaps we should invite him here and inform him that we will increase our assistance but will not bring in troops,” suggested Kosygin. “We will not bring in troops because they will have to fight the Afghan people. That would entail only losses for us, without gains.”

Kirilenko attempted to spearhead the discussion again. “We gave them everything, and for what? What has come out of it? Nothing good transpired for them as a result. They have executed innocent people. To justify this, they point to us and say that we also executed people under Lenin. Such good Marxists! I think we shall have to report our point of view to Leonid Ilyich, and invite Comrade Taraki to Moscow to inform him of the outcome of these discussions.”

“If we begin the military intervention and begin killing Afghans, we will surely be convicted of aggression. There will be no other way around it,” came Chernenko’s timid, asthmatic voice. Chernenko had just returned from Zavidovo late at night, before the meeting.

“I think we should ask for Leonid Ilyich’s input immediately, and send an airplane to Kabul for Taraki,” proposed Kosygin. “In regards to our suggestions yesterday for providing assistance, our position has not changed, except for ruling out military intervention.”

“Yes, that option should be excluded,” the minister of defense confirmed.

When the relaxed and refreshed general secretary appeared in the Central Committee on Monday, March 19, Chernenko invited all of the participants of the previous day’s meeting, plus Head of the General Staff Ogarkov, to a new meeting. Brezhnev, who

with great pleasure shared stories of his hunting adventures in Zavidovo with his colleagues, as was customary for Mondays, had to change the subject to Afghan affairs. So that his present colleagues would harbor no doubt of his competence, he assured them that he had been monitoring the developments in the neighboring country with the utmost attention. Then Leonid Ilyich approved the proposals from the weekend's Politburo sessions and agreed that "now is not the time to get sucked into this war." He offered Gromyko, Ustinov, Andropov, and Kosygin the opportunity to voice their opinions once again, at which point they could conclude the current phase of organizing the Soviet Union's emergency response.

Gromyko basically repeated what he had said the day before, adding the argument that "the hand of the United States" was undoubtedly orchestrating these events.

Kosygin reported on his latest communications with Taraki. The head of Afghanistan had repeated his pleas for help in the face of imminent collapse. "I asked him, 'Are there workers in Herat?' His response was that there were only about two thousand workers there," said Kosygin. According to the Afghan leader, once Herat falls, all of those who are dissatisfied with the new authorities will unite and attack Kabul, which would herald the end of his government. This is why he has asked for our troops on the ground." Kosygin suggested issuing a serious warning to Pakistan and Iran about non-interference in the domestic affairs of Afghanistan, and then again, in Brezhnev's presence this time, raised the issue of replacing the Soviet ambassador in Kabul.

The minister of defense told of his last conversation with Amin, who had also insisted on dispatching Soviet military force. Ustinov, however, mentioned that the situation in Herat had somewhat improved for the moment. He reported that two Soviet

military divisions had been deployed in the Turkestan military district and one in the Central Asian military district, which meant that three detachments were within three hours of reaching Afghanistan. But the marshal said that this information was meant simply to emphasize their readiness. He asked for permission to conduct tactical maneuvers at the border, and stated in conclusion that, like his comrades, he did not support the idea of military intervention.

Andropov also repeated his position from yesterday, and subjected the Afghan leaders to sharp criticism. He accused them of failing to control the situation, having too few resources to support their regime, failing to engage in ideological work with their population, and continuing crackdowns. Andropov suggested replacing the primary Communist Party adviser, Veselov, with somebody with a higher degree of authority, possibly from the Central Committee. Secretary of the Central Committee Kapitonov objected to this last point. "Veselov is a good specialist. He worked as an inspector in the Central Committee apparatus and was the second secretary of the Bashkir Regional Party Committee. He is a young and energetic person."

The general secretary seemed pleased with the discussion. Brezhnev liked when his closest allies were not arguing with each other, and when the Politburo was unified. He was not fond of lengthy meetings. In this instance, they managed to make balanced decisions within one hour's work.

"I think we should approve the measures that have been formulated during the last several days," concluded Brezhnev. "We have decided to invite Comrade Taraki to the Soviet Union tomorrow, on March 20. Kosygin, Gromyko, and Ustinov will conduct talks with him, then I will receive him personally."

Vladimir Kozin, a thirty-year-old student of the Diplomatic Academy, was not surprised when he was told to arrive at the International Department of the Central Committee on Tuesday morning. His task was to work with high-level Afghan guests. It was the second time that Kozin was asked to interpret from Pashto at the important talks in the Kremlin. On March 20, Kozin found himself in the pavilion of the government airport Vnukovo-2, where Nur Mohammad Taraki was due to arrive from Kabul. Because this was an unofficial visit, in essence a secret one, only Kosygin was there to meet the Afghan leader.

While waiting for the airplane to arrive, Kosygin studied some documents in preparation for his meeting with Taraki. On top of the pile of papers was Taraki's biography, which had been prepared per Kosygin's request. The biography consisted of a dry list of dates, positions, and books that had been written by Taraki, which made it difficult to better understand the man with whom Kosygin was due to begin serious talks. So Kosygin asked the interpreter to join him.

"You worked in Afghanistan. Tell me about Taraki," said Kosygin.

"He was born in 1917," Kozin began readily. "He graduated..."

"No, no, no," Kosygin interrupted him. "I don't need dates and diplomas. I want to know what sort of person he is. Tell me about personal characteristics that will help me understand the essence of his nature."

Vladimir was embarrassed. "I understand, Alexei Nikolayevich. Allow me to start again. Nur Mohammad Taraki was born in the year of the October Revolution, in a Pashtun peasant family. His father was a herder. He was destined to repeat the life of his father, to

be illiterate his whole life, and to make his living by selling small contraband. But Taraki got lucky. His father decided that at least one person in that large family was to receive an education and have a different life. He picked Nur Mohammad, who was sent to study in a grade school in the Gazni province. Then he worked in Kandahar and Bombay. He learned English and Urdu in India, where he also was first exposed to the ideas of the national liberation struggle, as well as Marxism.

“He then returned to Kabul, studied in college, began working as a bureaucrat in the Ministry of Economics, and from there moved to the Ministry of Information and Printed Media. Although he was a nobody not long ago, he was appointed deputy director of “Bakhtar,” the main information agency in Afghanistan. He wrote and published several literary pieces that made his name well known. Taraki became one of the leaders of the movement “Awakened Youth.” He authored a number of prominent articles defending the democratic transformation of society and the improvement in the quality of life of Afghan people.”

“So he has been involved in revolutionary activities since post-war times?” Kosygin asked to clarify.

“That appears to be the case,” confirmed Kozin. “But he was never seriously punished or persecuted, or even arrested, unlike Babrak Karmal, for instance. Even in 1952, when the government delivered a powerful blow to the budding opposition movement, Taraki managed to avoid serious punishment, and moreover, was soon sent to Washington to work as a press attaché of the embassy of Afghanistan. Half a year later, as a result of an anti-monarchy and anti-Daoud article that he published in the American media, his career as a diplomat was over. He appealed without success for political asylum in the

United States, after which he returned to Afghanistan.

“Then for ten whole years, until 1963, Taraki did odd jobs, interpreting for Americans in Kabul, writing books and articles, and continuing to try to understand the intricacies of Marxism-Leninism. Taking advantage of some liberalization introduced by Mohammad Yusuf’s government, he fully dedicated himself to revolutionary activities. He organized young people who opposed the regime into Marxist groups and conceived of the idea of creating a real leftist party to challenge the monarchy. He was elected first secretary of the PDPA, as its founder, in 1965. A year later, though, differences in views regarding revolutionary activities brought him to a break-up with another ideological leader, Babrak Karmal.”

“Not so fast,” Kosygin interrupted. “Let’s discuss this in more detail. Do we have time?” he turned to his assistant.

“The airplane will land in ten minutes,” his assistant responded.

“Good. Tell me, Comrade interpreter, what was the essence of their disagreements? Everybody is saying Khalq, Parcham, but nobody can explain to me why they fight one another with such hostility.”

“I will do my best, Alexei Nikolayevich,” offered Kozin hesitantly. “However, this is a very delicate and complex topic, and I will have to omit many details because we have so little time. Both Taraki and Karmal have agreed that Afghanistan should be a democratic state, free of the monarchy and feudal restrictions, but they regarded the means of reaching that goal very differently. Taraki, as many other creative and impulsive personalities, believed in reaching this goal through force. He, it seems to me, regarded revolutionary measures such as an armed uprising, red terror, and the forced realization of socio-

economic reforms as the solutions. It is not an accident that from his first steps as the leader of the PDPA he invested a great deal of time in creating underground, covert groups in the armed forces, the ones that played a decisive role in the armed uprising of April 27, 1978.

“The initial rivalry with Babrak Karmal evolved into open hostility that occurred simultaneously in several areas. They jealously monitored the relative political statuses of their factions. For example, Taraki could not forgive Karmal for the fact that President Daoud, after having overthrown the king, handed several ministerial appointments to Parchamis and their supporters. Karmal, on the other hand, desired a majority share of the allocated Soviet assistance and was jealous of Taraki’s trips to the USSR, which, before the April Revolution, Taraki did under the auspices of the Union of Soviet Writers. Taraki also did not trust Karmal because of his origins from a prominent family, the status of which had made him close to the king and Daoud. Karmal, in turn, always labeled his political rival as an overt Pashtun nationalist.

“So there are many reasons for animosity between the two—many more than causes to cease the rivalry. But I want to emphasize that this is my personal take on the situation,” Kozin said. “Because you’re asking me to be as open as possible, and I understand that our conversation is confidential, I would like to add the following. Although most regard Taraki as the leader of the PDPA and admire his contribution to the party right after its inception, many of his supporters have noticed that, as new challenges began to arise after the triumph of the April Revolution, Taraki did not act as a strong and energetic leader. He has neither the skills nor the experience necessary for the conditions of fighting various counter-revolutionary forces. He doesn’t have a clear idea of how to

realize the needed socio-economic reforms. He has failed to stifle intrigues within the party leadership. Besides, we are told that he has a propensity to drink, has a weakness for empty praise, and avoids the behind-the-scenes hard work that his position requires, preferring purely representative functions instead. With this in mind, you can understand how Comrade Amin has gained such political clout.”

“The plane has arrived, Alexei Nikolayevich,” said Kosygin’s assistant tactfully.

Taraki emerged from the airplane alone. The Soviet premier, the Afghan general secretary, and the interpreter boarded a car bound for the Kremlin. Kosygin notified Taraki that Leonid Ilyich Brezhnev would meet with him later that night. In the car, Alexei Nikolayevich began to share his concerns about the situation in Afghanistan with Taraki.

“You do not control, as you used to, a considerable portion of the country’s territory. The rebels are attacking on all fronts.”

“This is true,” conceded Taraki bitterly. “But backing our enemies are the reactionary forces of the world—the United States, Pakistan, Iran, and China. We are in a difficult situation.”

“I agree, but it seems to us that you are making mistakes in your domestic politics. Your activities have angered your people and strengthened the hand of the enemies of the revolution.”

Taraki was silent. He understood that the forthcoming conversations would be difficult. He quickly surmised that he had not been brought to Moscow to be informed of the acceptance of his requests for military intervention. So he decided to dodge the discussion and preserve his arguments until the proper moment.

When approaching Moscow’s city center, Kosygin decided to lift the mood of the

conversation. "I would like to inform you, Comrade Taraki, that the rebellion in Herat has been suppressed," Kosygin offered.

"How do you know?" Taraki was stirred up.

The premier winked to the interpreter. "From the newspapers."

"That's good news, very good news," Taraki said, missing the joke.

Kozin, while waiting for the plane to arrive from Kabul, had seen out of the corner of his eye a secret cable from General Gorelov among Kosygin's documents. The text read, "Herat uprising suppressed."

The Kremlin was ready to receive their Afghan guest. Kosygin, Gromyko, Ustinov, and Ponomarev sat on one side of the table. On the other side sat Taraki and Kozin. Also present was Stanislav Gavrillov, an official of the Foreign Ministry who was there to transcribe the talks. The meeting was too secretive to invite a professional stenographer.

Kosygin explained that at first they were going to give the floor to Taraki, but then decided to begin with outlining the Soviet position regarding the situation. After the perfunctory assurances of friendship, Kosygin began, "There are different ways to resolve the problems that you are facing, but the best way is the one that would uphold the authority of your government among the people without ruining the relationships between Afghanistan and its neighbors or damaging the DRA's international reputation." To illustrate his point, Kosygin cited Vietnam as a country that had survived a difficult war with the United States and at the time was fighting Chinese aggression on its own.

"There are sufficient forces in your country to deter counter-revolutionary attacks," Kosygin continued in an even voice. "For example, let us look at Herat. When you became serious about dealing with it, you gained control over the situation. We have just received a

message this morning that the military base where the rebellious segment of the Seventeenth Infantry Division deployed was captured after bombing raids by a battalion of paratroopers, supported by tanks that had arrived from Kandahar.

“We will provide you with assistance by all possible means. However, our military intervention would immediately agitate the international community and would bring sharply negative consequences in a number of areas. Our common enemies are sitting and waiting for Soviet troops to enter Afghan territory. One cannot but see that our troops would have to fight not only the external aggressor, but also some segment of the Afghan people. People do not forgive such transgressions.”

Kosygin pronounced these arguments smoothly, only occasionally glancing at the papers that were arrayed before him. It was not difficult to translate his message into Pashto. The premier made necessary pauses for the interpreter and patiently waited as Kozin relayed his words to the guest. Pashto is a difficult language for interpretation. Since the predicate is found at the end of the sentence, it is difficult to translate until the entire phrase has been uttered. Words then must be configured as figures in a game of chess.

Having finished the last sentence, the interpreter looked at Taraki, noticing how his usually kind eyes were tensed and fiery. It did not seem as though the good news from Herat had convinced him that he had to give up the idea of inviting the Soviet troops.

“We came to the conclusion,” continued Kosygin, “that at this stage, the most effective support for you would be exerting our political influence on the countries neighboring Afghanistan and providing you with significant and multi-faceted assistance. These are the considerations that we wish to relay to you in an open and friendly way,” the chairman of the Soviet government finished, leaning against the back of his chair with a

look of satisfaction. He motioned, inviting his Afghan guest to speak.

From his first words, it became clear that Taraki had also been well prepared for this conversation. "I will also speak openly, as your friend," he said, looking at Kosygin. "We in Afghanistan agree that these problems should first be resolved by political means, with military actions employed as a secondary measure. For my part, I would like to emphasize that the relations between our two countries are not the ordinary inter-state relations. They are founded on the basis of class theory and commonality of ideology and politics. In our country, as in yours, power belongs to the working class and the peasants."

"So, this is where he is taking it—" thought Kozin, "speculating on proletariat solidarity. I don't know about the Soviet Union, but certainly in Afghanistan there exists no working class, and the power there cannot belong to peasants. Is it possible that our leaders would take the bait of such open demagoguery?"

"The revolution caused a hostile reaction on the part of our class enemies," Taraki continued. He then attacked Pakistan, Iran, and the United States, whom he held responsible for the troubles that his country was facing. "It would be unnecessary to dwell on the issue of why the Pakistanis, Iranians, Americans, and Chinese are conducting covert activities against us. I would only like to emphasize that we have been and remain your friends. We studied and continue to study Lenin.

"I would like to touch upon the issue of the needs of the Afghan army. We would like to receive armored helicopters, an additional number of armored vehicles and BMPs, as well as modern means of communication."

"These must be Mi-24 helicopters equipped with bulletproof armor plates," clarified Ustinov. "We have agreed to supply six of these helicopters in June-July and six more by the

end of the year.”

“It would be good if they came with pilots,” Taraki changed his tone.

The marshal objected. “You need to train your pilots. Your officers study here; we can expedite their graduation.”

“Perhaps we should borrow helicopter pilots from Hanoi, or some other country—for example, Cuba?” Taraki would not give up.

“Four hundred Afghan officers are studying here in the Soviet Union. You have the list of their names. Select those you need and we will expedite their graduation,” Kosygin responded harshly.

The guest did not even consider surrendering his demands. “If we cannot find pilots in Afghanistan,” he said thoughtfully, “then we will look for them in other countries. The world is big. We need loyal people. There are too many ‘Muslim brothers’ and Maoists with pro-Chinese sentiments among the Afghans who study in the USSR.”

“One hundred and ninety Afghan officers, among whom there are sixteen pilots and thirteen helicopter pilots, are due to graduate this year in the Soviet Union,” Ustinov struggled to suppress his irritation. “We can give you a list of graduates according to their training through General Gorelov. Then you can select the people you need.”

Kosygin further described in detail the military and economic assistance that the Soviet Union was prepared to provide the Afghans in the near future. He read through an inventory of different types of military vehicles, helicopters, and anti-aircraft units. He reminded Taraki of the decision to allocate 100,000 tons of wheat, whereupon the Afghan leader asked for an additional 300,000 tons, as well as forbearance for repaying the credits. Kosygin reluctantly agreed to postpone the credit repayment. Marshal Ustinov noticed that

in connection with the additional military supplies, the need to send another group of military specialists and advisers would arise.

“If that’s what you believe, then we will certainly receive them,” responded Taraki with displeasure. “Still, wouldn’t you allow us to use pilots and tank drivers from other socialist countries?”

“I don’t understand why you are insisting on this,” replied Kosygin, obviously irritated. “Socialist countries would hardly do this. Soliciting people to drive your tanks and shoot at your citizens is a very acute political issue.”

Following the plan for the talks that had been developed in advance, Kosygin proceeded to lecture Taraki about conducting more careful policies regarding the cadres. “One should attempt to understand every person well and without labeling them as enemies,” Kosygin reprimanded the Afghan leader, bearing in mind the continuing persecutions.

Taraki pretended not to understand what Kosygin was talking about. “The events in Herat have showed us that ‘Muslim brothers’ have infiltrated our environment. We never label those who are truly with us.”

The Soviet premier elected not to pursue this discussion. The guest made another attempt at bargaining. He asked what the Soviet Union would do were Afghan territory attacked from outside, but Kosygin, who was an experienced politician, deflected the move easily.

“It would be a completely different situation,” he said. “We are doing everything possible to prevent such an invasion from taking place.”

“Members of our Politburo know about my trip to Moscow. Upon my return home, I

will have to report to them the results of these talks. Shall I tell them that the Soviet Union will provide the DRA with only political support and some other assistance?”

“That’s correct,” confirmed Kosygin. “Political support as well as enormous military and other assistance. This is the decision of our Politburo. Leonid Ilyich Brezhnev will tell you about it when he meets with you in ten minutes.”

Foreign Ministry Adviser Gavrilov, who was writing the transcript of the conversation, praised Kozin. “Good for you,” he said. “You’ve done an excellent job interpreting.”

Gavrilov was the right hand of the head of the Afghanistan Department in the ministry. He had worked in Kabul for many years and had interpreted meetings with the king, as well as Daoud. Because of this, his praise meant a lot.

“But,” he warned Kozin, “your main test is still ahead of you. I have been asked to finalize this transcript, so you will have to both interpret and take notes for Taraki’s conversation with the general secretary. I wish you luck.”

Leonid Ilyich received the Afghan guest in his Kremlin office. Taraki came alone. Taking into account the particular sensitivity of the situation and potential complications during the talks, not even the Afghan ambassador was invited. However, no tense moments occurred during that meeting. Taraki acted with great dignity but avoided discussions with Brezhnev, while Kosygin, Ustinov, Gromyko, and Ponomaryov mostly remained silent in Brezhnev’s presence, as was the practice at the time.

The Soviet leader dutifully read aloud a memorandum that his assistants had prepared. The memorandum included a number of recommendations that were formulated

based on the Bolshevik experience. For instance, it was recommended that the Afghans pay special attention to creating a unified national front, and create committees consisting of impoverished peasants from rural areas. The goal of such committees was to organize “deterrents to feudal lords and capitalist landlords.” It was recommended to broaden the scope of political propaganda and seal the borders with Pakistan and Iran. The memorandum also explained why Soviet military intervention made no sense.

Taraki, in his response, having correctly surmised the tone of the conversation, gave a convenient lie, saying that the unified national front “was de facto created in the format of party, *komsomol*, and trade union organizations.” He again complained about the meddling of external enemies. He rejected the idea of sealing the borders (“it would create unhappiness among Afghani and Pakistani Pashtuns and Beluji and would bring significant damage to the prestige of the current authorities”). To conclude his short speech, the guest formally thanked “dear Leonid Ilyich” for the opportunity to exchange opinions.

They then parted. Taraki went to his embassy to celebrate the holiday of Navruz, the Afghan New Year, which arrives on the day of the spring equinox, March 21. Brezhnev, who was supported by his assistant with great care, walked toward the exit. Kozin was left to transcribe the conversation. Brezhnev’s assistant, Samoteikin, arranged a place for him in the adjacent room and supplied him with a notebook. A silent waitress arrived with tea, pretzels, and sandwiches. Vladimir, trying to remember every word that had been spoken, began to write down the conversation.

The item “Regarding the situation in Afghanistan” was again listed first on the agenda for the Politburo meeting on March 22. Brezhnev emphasized again that his position and all the actions related to it were absolutely correct. He shared the details of his

talks with Taraki with his colleagues. According to him, the Afghan leader had arrived in Moscow in a “somewhat agitated state of mind, but relaxed gradually over the course of the conversation, and by the end of it acted calmly and sensibly.”

“As I was told, Comrade Taraki was very pleased and left Moscow in a good mood.” Leonid Ilyich sounded clearly satisfied with how things had gone. “Perhaps the comrades who also participated in the discussions can add to what I have said.”

“I saw Comrade Taraki off at the airport,” began Kosygin enthusiastically. “He expressed his deep gratitude to the Politburo and Leonid Ilyich for a kind reception and goodwill towards Afghanistan. It is now the New Year according to the Afghan calendar. Taraki celebrated it here. He did not expect that so many issues would be resolved in such a brief time.”

It is most likely that the uprising in Herat was spontaneous, not controlled or coordinated. Otherwise it is difficult to explain why the city that had been captured with such extraordinary speed was so easily given back.

On March 16, a reinforced company of paratroopers, or to be more precise, of those whom Gorelov had personally recruited for paratrooper training, was sent to Herat. Several tank crews that consisted of PDPA members accompanied them. There were tanks in the Seventeenth Division; however, all members of the tank crews had deserted when the rebellion began. The commander of that company was Major Shahnavaz Tanai, the same person who had dispatched Captain Imamuddin with an ultimatum to Mohammad Daoud during the April Revolution. He was the one who would later become the minister of defense under Najibullah, who would launch his “anti-Parcham” rebellion in 1990, and who

would flee to Pakistan after the defeat of that rebellion.

Tanai's company, as well as the soldiers and officers from the Seventeenth Division who had remained loyal to the regime, about three hundred persons in all, stayed at the Herat airdrome waiting for orders.

At the same time, officers who joined the rebels discussed their next steps in their garrison fortress. Ismael, the senior captain in charge of the anti-aircraft artillery unit, stood out from his company. He was a courageous and capable officer. During the battle for Herat, he had personally shot down a fighter jet that was aiming at rebel positions. For many years, destiny would lead Officers Tanai and Ismael to opposing sides. Ismael, after the suppression of the rebellion, went underground to lead a group of mujahadeen, before eventually becoming the most prominent field commander in western Afghanistan. The name *Turan* ("Captain") Ismael-Khan would be etched into the history books for his role in the mujahadeen's fight against the Soviet Union*.

Senior Military Adviser Colonel Katichev, taking advantage of the arrival of reinforcements, was the first to order an attack on rebel positions. After having conducted and verified the results of a reconnaissance operation, he sent five tanks with reliable crews to the rear of the Seventeenth Division. The tanks opened fire upon the rebel artillery positions. When the cannons began to turn towards the tanks, the division's positions were attacked by Tanai's paratroopers. Afghans fight very well from ambushes, but tend to be considerably less effective in open battles. Tanai led his fighters into the military base without particular difficulty and immediately took control of the situation. As it had five days ago, the infantry obediently surrendered, this time to the representatives of

* After the overthrow of Najibullah's regime in 1992, Ismael-Khan was named governor of Herat. He was thrown into prison under the Taliban, but managed to escape. He is now a minister in the Afghan government.

the lawful authority.

The punishment of the deserters was swift and merciless. The paratroopers shot nearly three hundred soldiers and officers immediately. The remaining military personnel dispersed into neighboring villages or returned to the barracks, having agreed to continue their service. Katichev wrote to Gorelov in the morning of March 20: "The rebellion in Herat has been suppressed."

The province of Herat remained one of the most dangerous and problematic until Soviet troops left Afghanistan. For years, prolonged battles did not cease in the city and its surroundings. What was once an oasis turned into a fiery hell.

The modern Herat Hotel where the Soviet advisers resided, the one that had been built according to Western standards, became a real fortress. Its windows were filled with sandbags, machine guns were placed on the roof, and an armored vehicle guarded the entrance. From then on, Soviet advisers moved across the city only during daylight. The arrival of darkness heralded the transfer of power to those who the Soviets called *dushmany*.

If the Herat uprising had been successful, Sarwari's dark prophecy of a "chain reaction" across Afghanistan may have been realized. In a sense, that process had already begun. That spring, armed uprisings in the provinces of Nangarhar, Baglan, Farakh, and others began, but all were of disparate nature and each was suppressed with extraordinary cruelty. For example, Mohammad Yaqub arrived to suppress the rebellion in the Jalalabad garrison. When he saw the arrested rebels and their supporters, Yaqub personally began to execute them. His assistants were handing him fresh ammunition and exchanged submachine guns as barrels overheated from relentless usage. Amin praised the head of the

General Staff for his ruthless execution of over two hundred people at once.

Taraki returned to Kabul from Moscow on March 25. In a day, a Supreme Defense Council was created in Afghanistan, with Taraki as its chairman.

Having returned to Afghanistan, Taraki discovered with great surprise that the desired unity among the Khalqis was no more. The heroes of the revolution, Watanjar and Gulabzoi, publically accused Amin at a meeting of the Revolutionary Council of having an inappropriate attitude towards the armed forces. They accused him of deploying troops against peaceful citizens, although such matters were under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of the Interior. The “educational measures” that had been undertaken by the Soviet leaders demanded that Taraki address this situation. He dared to remove his favorite pupil Amin from supervising the armed forces. It was recommended that Amin focus on economic and domestic political issues instead. Watanjar was appointed as minister of defense, and Mazdouryar, another opponent of Amin’s, became the minister of the interior.

However, Hafizullah Amin was compensated handsomely, as Taraki transferred prime ministerial duties to his “beloved pupil.” These changes in the highest echelons of power were accompanied by the adoption of a number of legal amendments regarding the Revolutionary Council and the government. The position of prime minister was eliminated and replaced by the post of “first minister.” Other amendments turned the chairman of the Revolutionary Council into the head of state and subordinated members of his cabinet to him.

Taraki had formally strengthened his position, and it could even appear to external observers that he had conclusively outperformed Amin in the struggle for absolute power. However, subsequent events revealed that in reality the situation was very different.

On March 17, in view of the worsening situation, a group of KGB operatives headed by Lt. General B.S. Ivanov was sent to Kabul. General Ivanov was the first deputy of Kryuchkov in PGU. He was in charge of political intelligence. His position corresponded to that of Frank Carlucci, the second man in the CIA, who would later become a national security adviser and secretary of defense in the Reagan Administration. Boris Semyonovich was considered to be a prominent expert in U.S. and European affairs. He served two long terms in the United States as a KGB resident. He worked in the official Soviet delegations during negotiations with Presidents Nixon, Ford, and Carter. It was Ivanov who developed and implemented the exchange of the Chilean communist Luis Corvalan. He participated in Operation "Dunai" (Danube), the regime-changing Soviet invasion in Czechoslovakia. General Ivanov was also the one who created "special economic intelligence" and briefly headed the most secretive department of PGU, Department Thirteen. But perhaps Boris Semyonovich's most important achievement was the fact that by the late 1970s, he had become one of the most trusted colleagues of the chairman of the KGB. Ivanov was able to contact Andropov, as well as some other members of the Politburo, directly, bypassing his immediate superior, Kryuchkov.

Perhaps that was the most important factor when the decision was made regarding the appointment of the person in charge of all KGB activities in Afghanistan, who would inform the political leadership of the Soviet Union about the real situation in the country. Andropov needed a man in Kabul whom he could fully trust, a man who could rise above the petty rivalries of the Soviet colony, and who had a high degree of authority among diplomats, politicians, and military officials. Andropov needed a man who could make

crucial decisions in complex situations without wasting any time coordinating his moves with the Center. For these reasons, the expert on the United States, Ivanov, was appointed over Medyanik, another deputy head at PGU, who was then in charge of Middle Eastern operations.

Needless to say, that appointment caught Vladimir Alexandrovich Kryuchkov by surprise. He would now have to take into consideration that the KGB chairman would be comparing information arriving from Kabul from the KGB Residency (Vilior Osadchiy) and the KGB Representative Office (Leonid Bogdanov) with the information received directly from Andropov's personal representative. On the other hand, the head of PGU had reasons to be grateful for such an unexpected turn of events. General Ivanov was too independent, too highly respected, and too professional to be working as a regular deputy head of PGU. Kryuchkov constantly sensed mistrust of his actions on the part of Ivanov, who was a much better qualified professional than his superior. A man like Ivanov, with such deep and powerful connections "at the very top," would be better kept as far away from Kryuchkov's agency as possible. It was a stroke of luck that the Politburo decided to send Ivanov to Afghanistan*. Kryuchkov had to thank providence for such an unexpected gift.

B.S. (this is how subordinates usually referred to Ivanov) received his appointment in Kabul calmly; he considered it an important party and work assignment, the goal of which was to "protect the interests of the Soviet Union in one of the tactical areas most crucial for its foreign policy objectives." However, as he left for Afghanistan the general realized that he would never return to his former post. Perhaps he was even glad to be

* It is interesting that in the writing of this book, we discovered a telling detail that was very characteristic of Ivanov. Unlike the majority of his colleagues, who wrote memoirs and gave interviews to Russian and foreign journalists generously in the nineties, not once did Ivanov act or speak publically.

deployed to Kabul, as it was an opportunity for him to change his routine and dedicate himself to new challenges. Ivanov's wife had died recently, and the general had a difficult time adjusting to that loss.

B.S. arrived in Kabul quietly and incognito, as a man of his profession should. Osadchiy and Bogdanov met the representative of the Center at the airport. Boris Semyonovich settled into a two-room apartment on the territory of the ambassador's residence. He was assigned the modest office of the deputy resident in charge of counterintelligence that was located on the second floor of the embassy. The first two meetings that Ivanov held were with the KGB representative and the KGB resident. He listened to detailed reports about the political situation in the country. He was especially interested in the mechanism that opponents of the regime used most frequently to organize anti-government actions. Ivanov inquired about his colleagues' opinions regarding the use of intelligence capabilities to undermine counter-revolutionary forces from within. He asked for the characteristics of the Afghan leaders, their worldviews, and business and personal qualities. He asked Bogdanov and Osadchiy to describe the situation in their respective operative groups. They agreed that both colonels and their deputies would report to him all of the latest information, which would be formatted as official reports. However, Ivanov wanted to ensure that if any operative received important or urgent information, it would be forwarded directly to him immediately, regardless of the time of day or his whereabouts.

Boris Semyonovich understood well that his arrival in Afghanistan would impact Bogdanov's ambitions to become the senior KGB man in Afghanistan and subjugate Osadchiy and his group to Bogdanov himself. That was why Ivanov was deliberately tactful

and respectful when he met with the KGB representative. As to Osadchiy, he never doubted the resident's loyalty.

On March 19, General Ivanov met with Taraki and Amin. As had been decided in Moscow, Boris Semyonovich immediately introduced himself as the personal representative of the chairman of the KGB, who had arrived in Afghanistan to consult top DRA leadership on security-related issues.

Having listened to their guest, Taraki smiled and nodded in agreement, as if he had personally asked for the KGB general to be sent to Afghanistan. Amin, however, had difficulty hiding his irritation. He was obviously thinking, "we are pleading for them to send troops and instead they bring us another adviser with brotherly greetings from their Politburo members." However, the Afghan second-in-command restrained himself from venting his frustration.

"You've arrived at a very difficult time for us," said Amin with a radiant smile. "The situation in Herat is such that if we don't receive military aid from the Soviet Union now, the rebels will capture the province and continue to advance into the country."

Ivanov, who was very perceptive, felt that the Afghan minister was most displeased. "I think that during Comrade Taraki's visit to Moscow tomorrow, our leaders will clarify their specific position about providing help to combat the counter-revolution. This is why I ask you to allow me to avoid discussing this issue during today's meeting," said Ivanov.

Taraki, smiling kindly, nodded his consent. Amin also harnessed his emotions, and his countenance conveyed exaggerated pleasure.

"I love the Soviet Union so much—I deeply respect your leaders. And, frankly speaking, I would very much like to go to Moscow together with Comrade Taraki," said

Amin with his charming American-style smile, showing both rows of perfectly even teeth.

“Alas,” responded Ivanov, regarding Amin with strict disinterest, “having invited Comrade Taraki to an unofficial visit, the Soviet leaders think that with such an unstable situation in the country, you, Comrade Amin, should stay here and lead the fight against the rebels.”

Amin’s smile faded. Ivanov hadn’t taken the bait, and left him with little to object to.

It should be mentioned that most people found little reason to object to Ivanov. He always spoke quietly and intelligently, calmly and kindly. He articulated his thoughts clearly and spoke perfect Russian. Sometimes one would get the impression that they were listening to a star philologist, not a KGB operative. When speaking through an interpreter, he tended to use short, grammatically simple phrases to facilitate the process of interpretation. The secret of his style was in his ability to quickly capture and analyze information, place it in the context of a bigger picture, and make impeccably logical conclusions.

Amin strongly disliked Ivanov. Perhaps it happened because the Afghan leader suddenly realized that the man who had arrived in Kabul was not captivated by his excessive energy and charm. That was the “weapon” that Amin always expertly applied in his communication with Soviet comrades. Amin noticed immediately how Ambassador Puzanov’s eyes lit up when listening to Amin’s assurances that Afghanistan would soon become a socialist country. He could successfully ingratiate himself to party and military advisers. Many high-level guests from Moscow, after their conversations with the Afghan second-in-command, left believing that Amin was a reliable and loyal friend of the Soviets, and the man who was destined to lead Afghanistan to a bright socialist future. But for some

reason Ivanov did not fall prey to such influence. Andropov's representative was obviously not impressed by Amin. In fact, Ivanov scared Amin. At that very first meeting, Amin sensed in the general a smart psychologist who lent little weight to words, but was able to peer into one's soul. Amin felt as though Ivanov was looking right through him.

Ivanov also didn't like Amin. As an experienced intelligence operative, he immediately suspected lack of sincerity in Amin. He saw right through Amin's rhetorical tactics. At that very first meeting, a sense of mutual dislike emerged that would continue to strengthen with time.

Ivanov valued in KGB operatives loyalty and competence more than anything else. It was impossible for anybody to trick him by presenting some fabricated outcome rather than true results. Both Bogdanov and Osadchiy knew that very well. Each of them would have liked to present their subordinates in the best light possible, showing off the best qualities of their operatives. However, it was more difficult for Bogdanov because his office had been organized more recently. They did not have a sufficient number of specialists on Afghanistan in the Center, and often sent operatives who didn't know the language or local customs. This is why it was Bogdanov himself, or his deputy Chuchukin, or a communications officer who would report to Ivanov most of the time.

Ivanov knew most of the senior operatives in the resident's group and the KGB Representative Office. He knew Vladimir Chuchukin from their joint work in the United States, when B.S. was the resident there.

Osadchiy, having received an interesting report about a meeting with an agent or other important information from his operatives, would call the general and ask him to receive his operative. Ivanov always listened to KGB operatives intently, never judging

them based on age or rank. He never rushed them in their presentations. At the end of the conversation, he always gave instructions for the best way to process the information and implement subsequent actions. Working in this manner, Ivanov met personally with most of the KGB operatives in Kabul during his term there, and also managed to comprehend the complexities of the situation in Afghanistan that were of such concern to Moscow.

Soon after Ivanov's arrival in Kabul, after receptions in his honor organized by the ambassador, Bogdanov, and other Soviet representatives had come to an end, Osadchiy invited the general to his home. Besides Ivanov, Osadchiy invited two operatives and two "clean" colleagues, a diplomat and a journalist, each accompanied by a wife. The dinner went well, and everybody felt surprisingly comfortable around the newly arrived colleague from Moscow. After this dinner, other colleagues began to invite Ivanov for visits. They learned that B.S. was a very convivial person who relished interesting conversations and good humor. It goes without saying that during such events, nobody ever raised issues relating to work or Ivanov's assignment in Kabul. Ivanov spoke about himself very rarely. Once, he explained his affinity for carrot and radish salad prepared with sunflower oil. He mentioned that this dish was very popular in Leningrad, where he had been born.

Many wives of Kabul operatives were concerned that such an attractive, respectable widower lived alone. Once, the wife of a KGB officer, Tamara Bakhturina, brought her girlfriend, a single, forty-year-old woman named Raisa Petrovna, who worked as a dentist in the medical center at the embassy, to one of their dinners with Ivanov. Two years later, the two were married.

Two days after the suppression of the uprising in Herat, Osadchiy invited Orlov-

Morozov, Khotyayev, and Starostin to his office. When they entered his office, he locked the door to prevent any interruptions. Freshly brewed tea with sugar was served on a side table. That signaled a substantive conversation.

“So, comrades, we did what we could during the uprising. Our performance cannot be qualified as either excellent or poor,” started Osadchiy. “We were quite efficient with relaying up-to-date information to the Center and keeping them informed about such-and-such military detachments defecting, or an outraged crowd attacking this and that. That was made possible due to information flow from the counterintelligence network and their trusted contacts in the Soviet colony. Such information is undoubtedly necessary; when there is a fire in the house, one needs to know which side of the house to approach to douse the flame. However, all the analyses arrived in hindsight of events that had already taken place. Bogdanov, Gorelov’s people, and party advisers all sent matching accounts of happenings on the ground, but that represents the limit to what they can do. They have other tasks. We should work to provide analytical perspectives on what will happen, rather than what has already happened. We must present a prognosis for events that are poised to happen in the country. We are the *political* intelligence!”

Having finished his last phrase, Osadchiy glanced at his colleagues and smiled. Orlov-Morozov continued looking upon his boss with a calm gaze that revealed little feeling. Starostin seemed to be counting the raisins in the crystal vase located right in front of him. Khotyayev, the only one who perceived Osadchiy’s words as reproachful, grew agitated and responded: “Vilior Gavrilovich, we have prepared prognoses before. Just two months ago, we predicted a rebellion in Herat.”

“I saw no such prediction,” objected a surprised Osadchiy.

“You personally signed the note that we sent to the Center. It didn’t mention Herat specifically, but described possible scenarios that could occur in Kabul or any other Afghan city. Such a scenario was fully confirmed by the developments in Herat. We sent that note to the Center via mail, and most likely, our colleagues in Moscow paid no attention to it.

“Fine, then let’s send such documents by telegraph,” suggested Osadchiy.

Khotyaev was not done. “And you think they will be treated any differently if they’re sent by telegraph?”

“Well, these messages will be read by at least Kryuchkov and Medyanik,” replied the resident.

“Vilior Gavrilovich, I understand that the question of how to send documents, whether by mail or by telegraph, is very important,” began Orlov-Morozov quietly.

“However, it seems to me that the content of these documents is much more important. I am referring to the sort of prognoses we will present to the leadership. A lot of optimistic information is being sent to Moscow using all of our channels—the kind of information that suggests that the revolution is growing in strength, that our Afghan friends are achieving success in revolutionary reforms, that they are expanding their social base. However, we know this not to be the case. We know that the situation in the country is very dangerous. How will our analyses be perceived against a generally optimistic background? Would they be listened to in earnest by the leadership?”

“It all depends on what we write and how we present this information,” remarked Osadchiy. “You, Valery, tell us your prognosis regarding the future of the April Revolution.”

Starostin ceased counting the raisins in the crystal vase and responded, “The most pessimistic.” He then began to expand on his view. “You know, I was an excellent student of

Marxist-Leninist theory at the time. I know that class struggle and other such things exist. Please don't misunderstand me; I am not trying to decry Marxism-Leninism here. I am not crazy. But I think that the universal laws of the theory do not apply in Afghanistan. They work in a way that I cannot understand. Taraki and Amin talk about the inevitable victory of the working class. Tell me, where is the working class in Afghanistan? Is the working class those who work at the Jangalak auto repair enterprise? Those who work in a state publishing house? Our party advisers write about the worker-peasant characteristics of the revolution in their reports to Moscow. Professor Dvoryankov is very well aware of the multiple strata of Afghan society and its unique complexities. However, even he still concludes that the working class and peasantry, under the leadership of the Khalqis, will prevail. On the surface, in light of theoretical stipulations, it all sounds great. However, when I approach this claim critically, and recall the Afghan villages that I have visited or specific Kabul traders and shop-owners whom I know personally, I cannot understand how the revolutionary reforms promised by Taraki would ever take hold in this country. I think that Decree Numbers Six and Eight, unless they are deliberate provocations meant to destabilize the DRA, are the bitter fruit of ignorance and stupidity in regards to Afghanistan. I am convinced that within a few months, considering that all social processes in Afghanistan are moving very slowly, a war of the Afghan people against the Khalqis will begin. One might add that many Parchamis feel similarly. If you remember, Vilior Gavrilovich, I gave you a report touching upon all this in the early fall."

Osadchiy nodded gloomily. Orlov-Morozov's expression remained without emotion. Khotyaev monitored his bosses' reactions attentively.

"Your analysis of the developing situation in Afghanistan, Valera, is not sufficiently

grounded. There is too much reliance on intuition in it, and too much pessimism. But,” said Osadchiy after a long pause, “it certainly has a right to exist and to be heard. If any of our most trusted sources share your perspective, let us make this opinion known at the very top, in the Center.”

Starostin understood the last phrase to mean: “Provide your prognosis about the evolution of the political situation in Afghanistan, but don’t proclaim yourself the author. Refer instead to established and trusted agents.”

Orlov-Morozov grew concerned. “I hope we will not be expelled for making such a prognosis. The need for the existence of the Kabul KGB Residency was already discussed in the Center. Some think that AGSA will soon be able to transfer the necessary information to Moscow, rendering our unit redundant.”

Everybody noticed how Starostin giggled when he heard the deputy resident’s words.

“What’s wrong?” Osadchiy asked the young operative strictly.

“Do you know what I was thinking about just now? I was thinking that meetings such as ours already took place ten thousand years ago. As I was listening to Alexander Victorovich, I thought of an episode from the poem *Shakh-nameh**. I will describe to you the essence of the episode. Prophets of the future come to the evil Czar Zokhak, who has a reputation for executing messengers bearing bad news. They must interpret his dream, but they are scared to death, since if they reveal the mystery of the dream, they will surely lose their lives. However, if they hide the truth out of fear, then they will still be executed for

* *Shakh-nameh* (“a group of czars): an epic poem written in the tenth century by the great Persian poet Ferdowsi. This poem describes a time that is referred to as a deep, ancient time even in the sacred group of Zoroastrian *aveste* (the tenth to sixth centuries B.C.).

violating their sacred duty.”

Osadchiy burst into laughter. Orlov-Morozov joined in. Volodya patted Valery on the shoulder. They heated more tea, and switched the discussion to wisdom from ancient literature. “You remember the Ecclesiastes: ‘what has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun,’” Osadchiy rounded out their tour through the depths of human wisdom before returning to the topic at hand. “I agree with the pessimistic view that you’ve formulated, Valera. I also think Afghanistan is on the verge of war. It won’t be a civil war, with representatives of one social class fighting representatives of another class. It won’t be a war where the exploited fight against their oppressors. This will be a war of the majority of the people against the ruling regime. As the event in Herat demonstrated, Khalqis will find it increasingly difficult to find sufficient support in the armed forces and police. I think that our task now is to provide information that would not shock the Moscow leadership, but that would carefully bring them to understand the absurdity of Taraki and Amin’s chimerical designs, as well as the stupidity of the analyses from some of our party advisers. In connection with this, we should prepare a detailed analytical paper that would provide a foundation for this sort of prognosis in the near future. It should not be classified Top Secret. The goal is to get as many people to read it as possible. Let’s educate our leadership before presenting them with an argument. What topic do you think we should select for this document?”

“Taking into consideration that the Muslim clergy was the primary driving force in the Herat uprising, I think we should address the influence of fundamental Islam and the Muslim clergy on the development of the situation in Afghanistan,” suggested Khotyaev.

“Do we have enough information about that?” asked Orlov-Morozov cautiously.

“I think we can use open-source information for such an analysis instead of relying solely on our operatives. And Valery, I think, wouldn’t mind sharing some of the archival materials that he has collected for his dissertation,” replied Khotyaev.

Several days later, Orlov-Morozov sat in his office reading a document submitted by Khotyaev titled “Regarding the Influence of Muslim Clergy on the Evolution of the Political Situation in Afghanistan.” Khotyaev himself sat on the side of Orlov-Morozov’s desk chain-smoking cheap cigarettes and waiting for the deputy resident’s opinion about his work.

“As the recent rebellion in Herat demonstrated,” the deputy resident read, “the enemies of the new regime intend to use slogans in their propaganda activities about defending Islam from the atheistic, pro-communist forces that have taken power. In their organizational activities, the Afghan counter-revolutionaries intend to engage the support and broad influence of the Muslim clergy (according to the Iranian model).”

“You should edit this a bit, Valera. And also dedicate a paragraph to discussing how the Iranian ayatollahs took advantage of their status in the country to advance the Islamic Revolution.”

Khotyaev nodded in agreement.

“Islam is a religion that is ingrained from birth and followed blindly by broad sections of Afghan people, peasants in particular,” Orlov-Morozov continued. “This religion brings people up according to the idea of a universal Muslim brotherhood. The principal of accepting the predetermination of everything that happens in life becomes an ideology that eliminates social controversies in the minds of the people. This religion is constantly impressing upon Afghans the superiority of the good Muslim relative to representatives of other religions, particularly atheists, the idea of justice and fairness in the Muslim

community, and the sinfulness of secular principles of government that exist in other, mostly European countries.

“The low education and cultural level of the population (more than ninety percent of Afghan citizens are illiterate), limited communication between provincial residents and the more educated strata of society, and the fact that Islam has been the country’s official religion (while atheistic propaganda has been prohibited) since the emergence of the Afghan state, all contributed to widespread adoption of the Muslim faith and strengthened the influence of the clergy. Throughout centuries, Islamic beliefs closely intertwined with the national traditions of the Afghan people and formed a sort of filter, which either allows or denies the entrance of new ideas presented to Afghan society from outside.

“More than ninety-eight percent of the Afghan population is Muslim. According to Afghan statistics, eighty percent are Sunni and eighteen are Shia. The Muslim clergy in the country consists of about 250,000 clerics. One of the most important features of the Afghan Muslim clergy is its multi-class structure. The Muslim clergy exists across all classes and social strata of Afghan culture, and is represented by people of those classes and social groups.

“The clergy’s influence upon the national bourgeoisie is considerable. Many Afghan entrepreneurs emerged from this religious environment, or are religious extremists themselves—for example, such prominent traders as Hak-Murad and Kari Yaman, among others. Some clerics, who receive their initial profits from religious activities, invest their capital in different business enterprises, which ties them closely to the Afghan and foreign bourgeoisie.

“The so-called ‘official spiritual leaders,’ those who work for the state (members of

the Directorate of Religious Affairs at the Council of Ministers, clerics who work at the Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Information and Culture, and faculty at the department of theology at Kabul University) are closely connected with state bureaucrats. That group may be more inclined to collaborate with the new regime than other clerics. However, one should bear in mind that while collaborating with the Khalqis, they can simultaneously serve the needs of the prominent religious figures who are enemies of the DRA.

“Clerics work in the army and the police. Leaders of Pashtun tribes and village landlords are either closely connected to the clergy or are members of the clergy themselves. Finally, the influence of the lower rank of Muslim clergy, such as village mullahs, is extremely high among the masses. Those clerics lead daily prayers and read Friday prayers in mosques. A mullah is present when an Afghan is born and while an Afghan grows up. He performs the circumcision ritual and then educates the young man in school. When it is time to marry, the mullah leads the marriage ceremonies. When an Afghan peasant falls ill, he is treated by this same mullah, who serves as folk healer, ‘*tabib*’. As a rule, the mullah is the only literate person in the village. In order to read or write a letter or a business document, or to file a complaint with the authorities, most Afghans are forced to go to mullahs. The mullah is the most available person to conduct a trial and fulfill the role of a judge if required.

“There is a rule in practically all regions of Afghanistan, according to which the town’s leaders take turns inviting the mullahs to their homes for daily meals (similar to the feeding of herdsmen in Russian villages). This helps the mullahs understand the personal lives of their parish members well, so that they can ensure adequate religious loyalty from every member.

“Unfortunately, this is not always taken into consideration by PDPA activists or the special services of the DRA, which are eager to establish control over the propaganda activities of the Muslim clergy. Usually party activists or AGSA agents go to a mosque to hear a sermon in order to uncover the anti-government activities of a particular cleric. Such activities would never bear any results, because mullahs hesitate to conduct anti-government propaganda in the presence of many people. They do it with greater success through personalized communication with each believer, particularly when visiting the homes of the members of their parish.

“As in any clerical structure, the Muslim clergy has a hierarchy, although it is less rigid than that of the Christian clergy. This hierarchy is formed less in connection to the social position of the cleric than by his authority. The cleric’s authority is composed of such factors as his origin (the pedigree and history of his family, proximity of his ancestors to the Prophet’s family and the great saints), high theological education, and goodness of character. Because of this, hardly any of the so-called “official clerics” who enjoy high positions in the main centers of religious affairs, at the Council of Ministers and other state structures, can be considered *‘mardzhe taklid’*: the model for clergymen to imitate. This factor should be of particular interest to advisers to the PDPA, particularly to those who prepare political proposals for the DRA leadership, because many of them falsely believe that the authority of a Muslim clergyman corresponds to the position that he holds in the state apparatus.

“Heads of ancient Sufi orders have the highest authority among the Afghan Sunni clerics. There is no limit to the adoration of the holy man by his followers. His every word is perceived by his adherents as the word of God. Any order that is issued by him must be

fulfilled no matter what, even if one is told to sacrifice his life.

“The head of the Sufi order Naqshbandi, Sibghatullah Mojaddedi, is one of the most influential *hazrat*. He has at least four thousand pupils (*‘murids’*) among the Afghan clergymen of middle and lower ranks. Sayyid Ahmad Gailani, the head of the Sufi order Qadiriyya, has no fewer than fifteen thousand followers. Among them, there are several influential Pashtun leaders in the provinces of Nangarhar and Kandahar, who are each supported by hundreds of thousands of loyal followers. One of the most uncompromising enemies of the new regime, Miagul Tagabi, has up to fifteen hundred followers in the province of Laghman. The core of the counter-revolution that is active on DRA territory consists of these followers who are fanatically loyal to their spiritual leaders. Terrorists who are prepared to sacrifice their lives or organize terrorist acts against the leaders of the new regime and Soviet citizens can be readily recruited from this environment.

“The community of Afghan Shia, consisting of three to four million people, is even closer and tighter-knit than the clans of Sufi *hazrats*. This community consists mostly of Hazara, who for centuries have been the most oppressed ethnic group in Afghanistan. Under the two-fold pressure of national and religious discrimination, this community managed to form a special social group over many centuries. The Shia Hazara community of Afghanistan, in its internal structure, has implemented the principles of Khomeini’s theory, expressed by the slogan ‘From each member, according to his abilities, to each member, according to his piety.’

“The Ismaili sect of Shia (assassins) in Afghanistan, led by clergymen from the Kiyani clan, is the most obscure and mysterious in Afghanistan.”

“Well,” whispered Orlov-Morozov pensively to himself, “our brilliant advisers are

attempting to build socialism in such a society.”

“Once, during a conversation with our colleague, one of the religious authorities tried to warn us, and through us the leaders of the new regime, against committing short-sighted and poorly-considered actions,” Orlov-Morozov continued reading. “He said, ‘In this country one can do everything. One cannot do only three things: challenge the faith, honor, and personal property of Afghans.’

“However, the government of Taraki and Amin transgressed against every item that the religious authority had warned about.

“Decree Number Six of the new government canceled the debt owed to moneylenders and landlords by peasants. It thereby inflicted considerable damage to economic ties in Afghan villages that had taken centuries to develop. It prevented some Pashtun tribes from receiving, as a tribute from peasants, part of their income. Decree Number Eight, ‘On Land Reform,’ destabilized the situation in villages and tribal areas. Those decrees were provocations that caused the inevitable failure of important actions proclaimed by the new revolutionary authority. Besides, the new decrees favored landowners and moneylenders more than ordinary peasants, who lost loans, donations, and implements of labor that they had previously been receiving from moneylenders and landlords.’

“Improve your style here,” said Orlov-Morozov, making notes in the margins, before continuing to read:

“It is only natural that the current situation in Afghan villages and tribal areas affected the interests of the Muslim clergy. The mullahs who are unhappy about the new authorities are influencing the anti-government mood among the people.

“Last spring, anti-government actions in Pamir and some Pashtun tribes intensified. Khalqis responded to those actions with cruel crackdowns and military actions, including aerial bombardment and destruction of entire villages with half-ton bombs. At the same time, measures that Gailani labeled as ‘challenging the honor of Afghan people’ were undertaken. In accordance with Decree Number Seven, party activists who were sent to the provinces from Kabul began the forced education of women in villages, and demanded that they refuse to wear traditional Muslim attire. Muslim women did not appreciate such demands. Their resistance was strongly supported by their husbands, fathers, and brothers.

“Pashtun tribes were prohibited from congregating in their traditional *Jirga*. Some attempts at conducting *Jirga* were interrupted by executions and aerial bombardment. Abdullah, Hafizullah Amin’s older brother, the power-obsessed maniac who had been put in charge of security for the Northern provinces, ordered the drowning of innocent Hazara in ponds near Kunduz, in front of the city’s residents. Those Hazara were killed simply because Abdullah Amin felt some chauvinistic hatred towards them. (One should mention that the execution of people and slaughtering of animals by drowning, as well as suffocation, is considered to be the gravest sin according to Muslim tradition because during such a murder, blood, believed by Muslims to contain an individual’s soul, is not released from the body.) There were cases of party activists, as well as special services and army officers, raping women in provinces and in Kabul. All of these cases caused widespread indignation among Muslims. The Muslim clergy uses such atrocities in its propaganda as convincing evidence of the ‘anti-human’ and ‘anti-Islam’ nature of the new authorities.

“In an attempt to halt anti-government activities by the Afghan Muslim clergy, the Taraki-Amin government began a cruel campaign of repressions against prominent Afghan clergymen in the winter of 1978 and 1979. The large majority of the Mojaddedi clan was physically eliminated (about seventy people). However, at a time when secondary members of that spiritual clan were being executed, the head of the order was giving sermons to Muslims in a mosque in Copenhagen. Was that a mistake on the part of the Khalqis, or had it been an intentional act, with the goal of destabilizing the situation in Afghanistan?”

“The head of the Hazara community, Sarvar Vaez, and his relatives, as well as other Shia authorities, were captured and killed. At the same time, Vaez’s son, Vaez-Zadeh, was in Iran, in Mashhad, where he studied Islamic theology under the leadership of the Iranian ayatollah Shariatmadari. He would later emerge as the main leader of the Herat uprising.

“The government’s repressions against the Muslim clergy resulted in confrontation between the new authorities and religious circles within the country. The clergymen who escaped Afghanistan, particularly those who lost their family members as a result of these crackdowns, began counter-revolutionary activities, in which they involved broad masses of refugees who had suffered at the hands of Khalqis. At the same time, the Muslim clergymen who remained in Afghanistan used their vast connections to conduct anti-government activities on the territory of the DRA.

“Sibghatullah Mojaddedi arrived in Peshawar from Copenhagen in January 1979. On February 7, 1979, he declared jihad against the new Afghan regime. Other major Afghan Sunni and Shia spiritual leaders supported the appeal for jihad. All major counter-revolutionary forces in the country joined the clergymen, as well as a great number of

Muslim workers who had suffered as a result of the crackdowns conducted by the Taraki-Amin regime.

“As the events in Herat demonstrated, during such uprisings, a sudden rise of religious fanaticism among vast masses of the population occurs. This fanaticism is then channeled by counter-revolutionary forces into anti-government and anti-Soviet actions. Such actions include not only open protests, but also acts of sabotage, treachery, and deceit. Some Afghans who were sympathizers with the revolutionary regime and the Soviet people until the crisis could, under the influence of religious psychosis, commit such actions, which were not representative of who they really were.

“As follows from the above, the Muslim clergy is one of the most important driving forces that defined the development of the modern situation in Afghanistan. In connection with this, we propose the following:

1. Soviet specialists and advisers should always consider the potential reaction of Muslim clergy to the actions of the Afghan authorities.
2. The KGB Representative Office should use every opportunity to appeal to Afghan authorities to cease any unjustified persecutions of the representatives of the Muslim clergy.
3. The work with representatives of the so-called ‘official clergy’ should be intensified. Mass media should be used in Afghanistan and other Muslim countries to increase the ‘official clergy’s’ authority among the believers in Afghanistan.
4. Visits by the top Soviet Muslim clergymen to Afghanistan should be organized in the near future. They should meet with members of the Afghan clergy and deliver sermons in Afghan mosques.

5. Confidential contacts with S. A. Gailani with the purpose of encouraging him to return to Afghanistan to establish cooperation with the new regime of the DRA should be continued through the connections of KGB operatives.”

“Yes, Volodya, this document is quite interesting. However, you should work to improve the style and logic of the narrative in certain parts,” said Orlov-Morozov. “The recommendations that are listed in the end should probably be sent in a separate cable. It won’t be necessary for those reading this document to know that we have approaches to Gailani.”

“Fine, Alexander Victorovich, I understand,” responded Khotyaev, picking up the papers off the desk.

Moscow was increasingly sucked into the whirlwind that was created by the April Revolution. Their involvement was past the point of no return. Politicians, military and intelligence officers, diplomats, economists, representatives of different civilian agencies—hundreds of organizations were engaged in the process. The Soviet Union, where everything was in deficit, generously supplied Afghanistan with food, fuel, ammunition, military equipment, mineral fertilizers, agricultural machinery, cars, and instructional materials. It paid hundreds of specialists to work in Afghanistan. Not a week passed without Afghan affairs being discussed at the meetings of the Politburo or the Secretariat in the Central Committee of the CPSU.

On April 1, ten days after the suppression of the Herat uprising, Gromyko, Andropov, Ustinov, and Ponomaryov, the foursome in charge of Soviet activities in Afghanistan,

submitted their analysis to the Central Committee. The eleven-page document was an attempt to understand current events and determine a program of action for the nearest future.

According to the unwritten rule at the time, the document started with an ideological preamble: "In the conditions of an intense class struggle, the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan, which represents the interests of the working class, finds itself on one side. On the other side are the forces that represent the interests of feudal landlords, the bourgeoisie, and the most reactionary part of the clergy." This introduction was followed by a list of reasons that the situation had sharply deteriorated. Among them were complex inter-ethnic and tribal controversies, religious fanaticism, extreme nationalism, economic hardships, and the consolidation of all counter-revolutionary forces. The authors of the document admitted that a program of broad social and economic transformation was in the very beginning of its implementation, and that most of the population had not yet sensed the advantages of the new order and therefore did not appreciate its progressive character.

Because this document was classified as Top Secret, and was addressed to very few people, the Politburo members who signed it did not hide the weakness of the new Afghan authorities. Among those weaknesses were a lack of local support and unwillingness to conduct a dialogue with the clergy and opposition tribal leaders. However, having remarked that the PDPA hadn't yet transformed into a mass political organization, the authors of the document noticed that "the avant-garde workers and poorest peasants are being admitted into its membership very slowly." The party remained not only small, but also seriously weakened as a result of a power struggle between the Khalq and Parcham

factions. The document mentioned that many prominent Khalqis had been killed, removed from party work, or expelled from the army and state organs. Many found themselves abroad as political emigrants.

The document placed major emphasis on the theme of crackdowns and abuse of power: “Many commanders, seeing that their colleagues are arrested and disappear, lack confidence and fear their own arrests. This was proven by the events of Herat, where not only a considerable part of the population but also some army detachments defected to the side of the rebels, per the initiative of their commanders.”

The authors of the document stated with disappointment that they had brought cases of abuse of power and evidence of mistakes and excesses to the attention of DRA leaders more than once. However, they found that the Afghan leaders “demonstrated insufficient political flexibility and lack of experience and were not prepared to take this advice into consideration.”

This was followed by the most important part of the document, which dealt with the Afghan leaders’ request for Soviet military intervention: “Our decision not to send Soviet military detachments to Herat was absolutely correct. This line of thinking should be maintained in case of new anti-government actions in Afghanistan, the possibility of which cannot be excluded in the foreseeable future.”

The following immediate measures to stabilize the domestic situation in the DRA were proposed:

- To raise the military capability of the Afghan army and the effectiveness of its security organs, and to increase additional supplies of weapons and equipment.

- Issues related to economic assistance to Afghanistan, “particularly those that would assist in strengthening the position of the revolutionary democratic regime, should be resolved quickly.”
- The political base of the revolutionary regime should be expanded: “The leaders of the DRA should be encouraged to consider the importance of continuing to realize the planned social and economic transformations, including land reform. They should work thoughtfully, without abusing their authority or making rash decisions...Peasants should realize that they received land precisely due to the April Revolution, and if they do not defend the revolutionary power, they face the loss of their land.”
- The unity of leadership and regular party members should be strengthened, along with an increase in their numbers.
- Work should be conducted among the Muslim clergy “in order to divide and undermine the influence of reactionary Muslim leaders among the masses.”
- Maintaining a certain legal order that is based on a revolutionary law framework is necessary, as well as a more balanced approach to applying punitive measures.
- Measures should be taken against interference in the domestic affairs of Afghanistan by other countries.

This document was discussed during the Politburo meeting of April 12. Its contents were taken into consideration.

But Afghan leaders, ignoring common sense, continued to bombard the Kremlin

with their requests for direct involvement by the Soviet armed forces in military actions against the rebels. In early April, Amin requested it at a meeting with General Epishev, the head of the Political Directorate of the armed forces, who had been sent to Kabul as the head of the military delegation. That was not the only moment in negotiations that surprised Epishev. Having returned to Moscow, he reported to the Central Committee of the CPSU, "It was not only Amin's desire to receive support from Soviet military specialists that caused my concern during the confidential meeting with him. According to Amin, leaders of the DRA have friends in Pakistan who are conducting covert activities to undermine its state system, and desire international assistance on the part of the Afghan army. In connection with this, H. Amin expressed his wish that the Soviet military advisers be instructed accordingly. Amin was told in response that Soviet military specialists could not be given such instructions. The idea of getting access to the sea appears to be stirring up the minds of the Afghan leaders."

General Epishev was in a state of shock during his trip to Afghanistan. It hadn't been a month since Taraki personally received detailed instructions regarding Soviet participation in Afghan affairs from Brezhnev during his trip to Moscow. Alas, they still continued to sing the same song.

On April 14, Amin asked Gorelov to relay his request to Moscow to provide Afghanistan with fifteen to twenty military helicopters with Soviet crews. In response to this request from Amin, Gorelov received instructions to meet the prime minister of the DRA and tell him the following: "The Afghan leadership was already told that the direct involvement of Soviet military detachments in counter-revolutionary activities in the DRA is not expedient, because it would be used by the enemies of the Afghan revolution and

external hostile forces to falsify the nature of Soviet assistance to Afghanistan, and to conduct anti-government and anti-Soviet propaganda among the Afghan population. Please emphasize that during March and April of this year, the DRA has already been provided with twenty-five military helicopters...Please convince H. Amin that the military helicopters with Afghan crews are capable...of the tasks required to suppress any counterrevolutionary actions.”

Through thick and thin, Amin with renewed enthusiasm continued to put more pressure on the Soviet advisers, who in response proposed a sort of compromise. The compromise was to create a large military training center in Afghanistan modeled after such a center built in Cuba. The key to the compromise was that the Cuban center had been built around a Soviet motor rifle brigade that had deployed to the island. Ambassador Puzanov, Chief Military Adviser Gorelov, and KGB Representative Ivanov signed the cable addressed to Moscow that proposed “studying the possibility” of organizing such a center.

One should admit that Afghan leaders had serious causes for anxiety in the spring and summer of 1979. Despite large-scale measures to strengthen the army, police, and security services, and provide broad economic assistance, the situation in the country was becoming not better, but worse. Chief Party Adviser Veselov, who also had not neglected the “class-based approach,” reported this to the Central Committee: “The foundation of the counter-revolution consists of feudal lords and prominent landlords, moneylenders, reactionary clergy, Maoists, and other groups united into a front for national liberation that is financed and supported by the USA, Saudi Arabia, and China.”

This ideological cliché about “feudal lords, reactionary clergy, and Maoists” would for many years dominate the discussion in documents explaining the successes of the

armed opposition.

Further into his memorandum to the Central Committee, Veselov openly admitted that the PDPA “in spite of many declarations by its leaders to the contrary, remains an organization of quite a small group of representatives of Afghan society. Currently, it has not more than 15,000 members.” Veselov proposed urgently increasing the numbers of the DRA Armed Forces to 200,000 people.

General Drozdetskii, the head of the human resources management headquarters in the Soviet Interior Ministry, who had just returned from a short trip to Afghanistan, depicted an even gloomier picture of the internal situation: “Appearances of bandits happen in practically every province. In ten of them, including Kabul province, the rebels control most of the territory. They surrounded more than fifty cities and settlements. Some groups of bandits consist of up to 10,000 people. They are armed with weapons of Soviet origin, including light artillery, 82mm mortars, and so on. Officers of the Afghan army are leading some gangs. Two out of the three highways that connect Kabul to the rest of the republic are under rebel control. Some provinces are under full control of the rebels. The situation in Afghanistan is extremely difficult, and more complications should be expected.”

In May, the Politburo tasked *Gosplan* and the Ministry of Foreign Trade to urgently send 1,500 cars to Afghanistan. The decision was made to expand the “international assistance” and give Afghanistan special military equipment valued at fifty three million rubles, including one hundred fifty artillery weapons and mortars, ninety armored vehicles, 48,000 guns and rifles, about one thousand grenade launchers, six hundred eighty aviation bombs, one hundred incendiary devices, and one hundred sixty bomb cassettes. The Afghans also requested chemical weapons, but the Soviet response to that request was

vague: "To provide gas bombs filled with non-toxic poisonous substances does not appear feasible."

Puzanov was tasked by the Center to visit Taraki to inform him that Moscow shared the concerns of the Afghan leadership about intensifying reactionary activities. However, as to the requests of the Afghan side regarding the supply of helicopters and transport airplanes manned by Soviet crews, as well as the possibility of deploying paratroopers in Kabul, this issue had already been discussed with Comrade Taraki during his visit to Moscow in March of this year.

In March and April of 1979, the Soviet leadership firmly maintained its position that no military detachments would be sent to Afghanistan. Then the month of May arrived. Senior officers of GRU of the General Staff, Vasily Kolesnik and Oleg Shvetz arrived in the Uzbek city Chirchik on a secret mission. They were ordered to form a separate detachment consisting of 538 people, the very same "Muslim" battalion that would play an important role in the events of December 1979.

At that time, neither Colonel Kolesnik nor Major Halbaiev, who was appointed the commander of the Muslim battalion, nor their superiors in the headquarters of the Turkestan military district, nor even the generals from the central apparatus of GRU had any idea of the purpose of that project. Only with time did those who had been informed begin to figure out that the goal would be military action on the territory of a neighboring state. Almost the entirety of the detachment consisted of Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Turkmen from the Soviet Central Asian republics. The servicemen in the battalion received a special uniform that was practically identical to that of the Afghan military. The battalion focused its training on capturing important strategic sites: airports, headquarters, and government

residencies. Halbaiev, the commander of the detachment, was briefly dispatched to Kabul to conduct reconnaissance.

So it seems that as early as spring, the mood in Moscow began to shift towards allowing for the possibility of using Soviet military force in Afghanistan.

Or was it the personal initiative of the minister of defense, the expression of his far-sightedness, "just in case"?

Chapter 6

The Gang of Four

After Boris Ivanov, who had never before had anything to do with the affairs of the Orient, another high-level official from Moscow was sent to Kabul. The new appointee had no expertise on Afghanistan or any relevant issues. Vasily Stepanovich Safronchuk worked as a deputy head of the Second Department of European affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the USSR. Professionally, he dealt mostly with Great Britain. But Gromyko, who invited Safronchuk for a meeting, explained to his guest that the Afghan government requested a foreign policy expert who was familiar with international organizations and fluent in English.

“You have been to Kabul before, have you not?” asked the minister.

“Yes, I’ve been there twice on very brief visits,” responded Safronchuk. “I traveled there once during Daoud’s rule and once again last year. Both times I visited my Afghan friends to consult with them in regards to the sessions of the United Nations General Assembly. But frankly speaking, I never had to delve deeply into the problems of the region.”

“That’s okay,” said Gromyko. “Nothing wrong with that. Tell me, which Afghan leaders did you meet last year?”

“I met with Comrade Amin, the minister of foreign affairs”

“And what was your impression?”

Safronchuk, who was an experienced diplomat, hesitated as he considered his response. But he seemed to find a suitable answer: “Within the scope of the issues that we

discussed, Comrade Amin appeared to be a competent and energetic leader.”

“That’s good,” said the minister with satisfaction. “You may consider our offer. However, we would like your response by tomorrow. The Afghan side insists that we act upon their request as soon as possible. By the way, you will receive the rank of diplomatic adviser, with direct access to me when addressing important issues.”

Later, Safronchuk understood why the foreign minister had selected him in particular. When he arrived in Kabul, Ambassador Puzanov let it slip that it was Hafizullah Amin’s wish. Amin had liked the Soviet diplomat when he visited Kabul in August 1978. He was impressed by Safronchuk’s erudition, his manners, and his fluency in English. Amin himself, after studying in the United States, spoke English well, but he didn’t know Russian at all.

Preparing for the trip, Vasily Stepanovich remembered details from his first meeting with the Afghan minister of foreign affairs. At the time they were discussing issues related to the forthcoming session of the UN General Assembly and the positions of the USSR and the DRA. On most issues, the two countries’ positions were aligned. However, Safronchuk noticed that in some areas, Afghanistan’s position was closer to that of the Non-Aligned Movement, of which it was a member. That appeared quite natural to Safronchuk; however, Amin, to his surprise, disagreed.

“I don’t consider it to be natural,” he protested. “Afghanistan entered on the path of building socialism, and politically it is now closer to the socialist countries than to the Non-Aligned Movement.”

Afterwards, the minister scolded his deputy, the professional diplomat Shah Mohammad Dost, who, in Amin’s opinion, did not give these core changes in Afghan foreign

policy adequate consideration.

“But we remain members of the Non-Aligned Movement,” Dost objected mildly, “and our revolution proclaimed national democratic goals.”

Demonstratively ignoring his deputy, Amin waved his hand.

“Don’t pay attention to him, Comrade Safronchuk. My deputy just recently became a party member. He doesn’t have sufficient Marxist stamina and doesn’t appreciate the essence of the April Revolution, but we will teach him.”

Ambassador Puzanov prodded Safronchuk in his rib and whispered to him to not even consider raising objections with the Afghan foreign minister.

In late May of 1979, Safronchuk arrived in Afghanistan for the third time, now as diplomatic adviser and personal representative of the Politburo member Gromyko.

Safronchuk was a very personable, confident man, who very quickly made friends both within and outside the Soviet colony. He appeared to be very different from Puzanov, who was always stuffy and buttoned up, a perfect example of the Soviet *nomenklatura*. Vasily Stepanovich had an ability to crack fresh jokes, even at serious meetings. At every reception he was surrounded by diplomats, bureaucrats, and journalists, who were very eager to talk with a Russian who was so different from the other Soviet officials.

Americans, after observing Safronchuk, came to their own conclusions. They decided that this particular person was sent to Kabul with a special mission, the goal of which was to affect regime change in Afghanistan. Having analyzed the dossier of the diplomatic adviser (he had worked in the Soviet Mission at the United Nations, which was always a cover for the KGB) and noticing that he was freely defying the *nomenklatura’s* unwritten rules, the Americans concluded that Safronchuk must be endowed with great

authority. They figured that the most likely figure behind Safronchuk was Andropov himself. What was interesting was that Andropov's actual envoy, B. S. Ivanov, remained unrecognized as such by the Americans at the time.

The message of the cables sent from the U.S. embassy in Kabul to Washington was that Safronchuk could become the "behind-the-curtain director" of the drama of regime change, which "most probably would include the departure, or even better, the death, of Amin."

It is important to mention that the Americans, although understaffed and under a lot of pressure from Afghan special services, were quite precise in their analyses of the situation in the summer of 1979. In particular, they predicted the forthcoming rapid changes in Afghan power structures.

"The Russians are very concerned by the worsening of the situation in Afghanistan, knowing that the regime has very little support and is losing control over the situation in the country," one of the cables reported. "Amin, who is unilaterally in charge of the government, is making miscalculations. Moscow thinks that a new, strong prime minister, who is not involved in current politics, is needed. According to the source, Safronchuk is tasked to see to it that Amin is replaced. The source says that 'now we witness the concluding chapter of the activities of this government, and August is going to be hot. I do not have the weather in mind.'"

According to some unconfirmed information, the "anonymous source" feeding Americans fables about Safronchuk was the German Democratic Republic ambassador to Kabul, Hermann Schweisau. It is also possible that a behind-the-scenes gambit of the special services was taking place. However, there is another possible scenario—the East

German diplomat was collaborating with the Americans. In order to raise his standing in their eyes, he concocted the story of Vasily Safronchuk's secret mission. The fact that in August, Schweisau allegedly broke his leg and departed from Kabul forever supports this scenario. It is known that in such cases, GDR counterintelligence always responded in an uncompromising manner.

Whatever it was, our Vasily Stepanovich continued to work according to his official mandate. He continued to advise Amin, who kept the portfolio of the foreign minister. Following the instructions of the CPSU Central Committee, Safronchuk tried to convince the Afghan leaders to put an end to the intra-party squabbles and to begin to expand the social base of revolution. He appealed to them to forgive the Parchamis and to bring them back to their positions in the party and the government. He was helping Dost to set up the working infrastructure of the Afghan Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

As a true diplomat, Safronchuk maintained good relations with everybody. He met with Amin regularly, at least once a week. At first, he was charmed by this energetic and engaged person. However, Safronchuk soon realized that the prime minister was not as simple as he appeared to be, and that his convictions (or his imitations of convictions) were extremely dangerous. But although Safronchuk would argue with Amin, he never crossed the line, and always left the last word to the Afghan leader. Once, they discussed the evaluations of the Afghan revolution in an article written by the deputy head of the International Department of the Central Committee, R. A. Ulyanovsky. The article was published in the journal *Kommunist*. Ulyanovsky put the DRA in the category of national democratic states such as Laos, Burma, Ethiopia, and the Yemen Democratic Republic. Amin disagreed with Ulyanovsky's analysis: "We belong to a group of countries that bypass

the stage of advanced capitalism on the way towards socialism—such countries as Vietnam, North Korea, and Cuba.”

“Might this be your wish rather than reality?” asked Safronchuk.

“Certainly not,” responded Amin firmly. “How can you put Afghanistan on the same level with Ethiopia, where the avant-garde party was created only after the seizure of power? Our Marxist-Leninist party appeared fourteen years ago.”

“But you proclaim everywhere a leading role for the working class,” continued Safronchuk. “Even your guests arriving at the Kabul airport are greeted with the sign ‘Welcome to the capital of the country of the victorious proletariat!’ But when in March, during the Herat uprising, we recommended that you engage the working class to deter a counter-revolution, you responded that the number of workers is insufficient, and that most of them are not even particularly conscientious.”

“It is true that during the revolution it was the army that fulfilled the role of the working class in my country. But as the revolutionary process evolves, we are leaning on the proletariat and the poorest peasants more and more,” responded Amin. “We learned Lenin’s theory very well. We know that one should treat it creatively. Lenin’s theory is not a dogma. You will see yourself how, with the assistance of the Soviet Union, we will quickly march from feudalism to socialism. This will be our contribution to the development of Marxist-Leninist theory.”

Gradually Safronchuk realized that while considering himself the second-ranking person in the PDPA, Amin displayed only a superficial knowledge of party theory. He was a fan of sharp quotes and slogans. In Afghanistan, where there were few literate people, he could easily pass for a major theoretician.

In June, having received another memorandum from Moscow laced with anxiety about the situation in Afghanistan, and including a set of recommendations for the Afghan leadership, Puzanov and Safronchuk scheduled a meeting with Taraki and Amin. The two listened to the customary advice very calmly (“maintain collegiality in leadership, create a clear and effective system of local organs of power, do not break the law, do not allow mass repressions, attract religious authority to your side.”)

However, when Safronchuk and Puzanov moved on to the issue of expanding the social base for the new regime and uniting all the healthy forces, Amin snapped: “Now, again, you’ll be telling us that we must create some national front. I categorically disagree. Our party is the national front. We will never share our political power with anybody. First of all, it was just us who carried out the great revolution. Nobody helped us in that fight. Secondly, it’s us and only us who reflect the core interests of all strata of Afghan society. There can be no other organizations besides the PDPA here in Afghanistan.”

Puzanov, as usual, preferred to remain silent. Safronchuk, with a genial smile on his face, attempted to object: “Please understand, this is not about yet another formal organization. This is about political unification of all democratic and progressive forces in the country. Isn’t this a timely issue for Afghanistan today?”

“There is nobody with whom we can unite,” objected Amin forcefully. “In Afghanistan there have never been other organizations that promote progress and socialism. You, Comrade Safronchuk, are new here. After you have lived here for some time and start to understand this country better, it will become clear to you that more than ninety percent of the population supports our party and the revolutionary reforms.”

“What about the unrest occurring in different parts of the country?” asked

Safronchuk.

Amin pretended to be astonished. He glanced at Puzanov, who remained stone-faced. Then he stared at Taraki as if inviting him to join in.

“You don’t know the explanations? But everybody knows. Comrade Puzanov knows.” The ambassador readily nodded in response. “And Comrade Taraki knows. All our problems are imported from abroad. Pakistan and Iran will never make peace with the fact that we chose the path of freedom. And in addition there are the United States, Saudi Arabia, China, Israel—my list is long.”

“We thank you and the comrades from the Central Committee of your party for the recommendations,” said Taraki to signal that it was time to wrap up the meeting. “Please tell them that we continue to value the assistance of the Soviet Union very highly and that we will welcome any advice from our elder brothers with gratitude.”

The National Organization for Defense of the Revolution was established in July, instead of the National Front. The purpose of the new organization was to unite the trade unions (which were still non-existent), peasant committees (which had just begun to be organized), youth and women’s organizations (which had just been conceived), artistic unions, and other organizations. The purely formal gesture of announcing the new organization was presented to Moscow as “another important step towards the unification of all democratic and progressive forces.”

In reality, Amin continued to succeed in bureaucratic intrigues and the formation of a government apparatus confined to those who were personally loyal to him. Daily, he spent a lot of time and energy on these sorts of activities. In May, just after Safronchuk had begun his work, the minister introduced his new deputy to him. “This is my nephew,

Asadullah,” said Amin without a hint of embarrassment. “Although he is young, he is very experienced in the revolutionary struggle. He is a reliable and trustworthy comrade.”

As it became clear later, Asadullah didn’t have any particular experience relevant to revolutionary struggle. However, he was fanatically loyal to his uncle. Having recently graduated from medical school, he didn’t know any foreign languages, had no practical bureaucratic experience, and was far removed from international affairs. “You will be the one who turns him into a major specialist,” Amin said to Safronchuk. “Help him with the language and introduce him to the field. He is a capable young man, and can potentially become a minister.” That led Safronchuk to suspect that he had been chosen by Amin to serve as a mentor of Amin’s nephew in Kabul.

Amin openly disliked his deputy, Shah Mohammad Dost, whom he considered to be politically unreliable. He suspected that Dost belonged to the Parcham faction and scolded him for his unnecessary liberalism and misunderstanding of the essence of the April Revolution. Dost, a professional diplomat with over twenty years of experience in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, received the unfair accusations patiently. He never complained to Safronchuk, and continued to carry out management of all routine activities of the Foreign Ministry. When Amin once mentioned in passing that he was going to fire Dost from the ministry, Safronchuk jokingly responded, “Then the Foreign Ministry should be closed, because nobody will remain there to do the work.”

In July, Hafizullah Amin removed himself from the position of minister of foreign affairs to focus exclusively on his responsibilities as the head of the government. Another prominent Khalq member, Shah Wali, became the new foreign minister. Shah Wali maintained distance from Safronchuk and acted as if the Soviet diplomat represented a

danger to him. However, it is possible that Amin gave specific instructions to Shah Wali regarding the mode of communication he should use with Safronchuk. However, Vasily Stepanovich remained on friendly terms with the prime minister himself.

On June 5, KGB operative Victor Bubnov arrived at a meeting with Osadchiy. While the chief was talking on the phone, Victor laid three notes out on the desk in front of him. After Osadchiy finished his telephone conversation, Victor began speaking.

“Yesterday I had a meeting with ‘Mahmoud.’ According to him, a serious rupture is about to occur in the upper echelons of the Khalqis.”

As soon as the chief heard these words, he picked up the phone and dialed a number.

“Boris Semyonovich, may we come by your office? Bubnov has some important information.”

“Please come,” replied Ivanov.

Bubnov picked up his notes and put them into the side pocket of his sports jacket. Sighing, he followed Osadchiy into the general’s office.

Victor left the notes in his pocket so that no one could accuse him of not following the correct protocol for covert activities, or of a lapsing memory.

“Boris Semyonovich, yesterday I met with my trusted agent Mahmoud. According to him, and he has never given us bad intelligence, a serious rupture is gestating in the highest echelons of Khalq.”

“Wait a minute, Victor Andreyevich,” interrupted Ivanov, gesturing to Bubnov to stop speaking.

The general called Bogdanov and asked him to join the group. Leonid Pavlovich arrived immediately, smiling and exuding optimism.

“Please sit down, you should listen to this.”

Bubnov began his report for the third time:

According to his agent, in late winter/early spring of this year, the head of AGSA, Assadullah Sarwari, began to inquire about in whose interests the repressive activities of the Afghan special services had been conducted. Until then, Sarwari had been fulfilling all of Amin’s orders without hesitation. Amin would say, “It’s necessary to ‘clean up’ here and there—these should be jailed, and those should be ‘sent off to Pakistan’”—which meant they should be executed. Sarwari was doing as he was ordered, and there was no doubt about his recognition of Amin’s authority.

Sarwari owed everything in his career—becoming a member of the PDPA, promotion in the party, appointment as head of AGSA—to Amin. However, recently, heavy doubts had begun to plague the soul of the AGSA head. Amin would give orders for arrests or executions, but no one blamed him of being excessively cruel. Amin appeared clean. In his position, he was in charge of issues of foreign policy, economics, and the armed forces, while he, Sarwari, was fulfilling the secret orders of Amin. The whole country considered him to be a bloodied executioner. It particularly hurt Sarwari that because of that reputation, some of his close friends and relatives stopped dealing with him.

The more Sarwari thought about it, the worse the situation appeared to him. Pondering what had happened after the revolution, the former pilot concluded that Amin’s orders to use repressive tactics against various people, families, and clans not only failed to enhance stability in the country, but had the opposite effect of fostering unrest. For

example, what was the purpose of Amin's order to kill the members of the family of the prominent Afghan spiritual leader Sibghatullah Mojaddedi? During that operation, in which Sarwari personally participated, eighteen people were captured and executed without trial. What for? The operation produced an effect opposite of what was intended—Mojaddedi, who was in Denmark at the time, upon learning of the execution of his family members, immediately went to Peshawar, where he proclaimed jihad on the Khalqi regime. He emerged as a prominent leader of the counter-revolutionary movement.

The operation against another Muslim leader, Sheikh Sayyid Ahmad Gailani Effendi, appeared even more senseless. Immediately following the revolution, this leader of the most influential Sufi order in Afghanistan, Qadiriya, attempted to establish contacts with Taraki and Amin through the former rector of Kabul University. He wanted to find out what status he would have under the country's new conditions. However, all of his well-intended efforts were in vain. Amin ordered his arrest and execution, and also that of his family members. Sarwari relayed this order to his subordinates. However, Gailani somehow found out about Amin's plans before the operation began. He immediately left Kabul for his estate in Sorhrud, not far from Jalalabad. Accompanied by hundreds of well-armed and fanatically loyal *murids*, he crossed the Afghanistan- Pakistan border. Neither Afghan nor Pakistani authorities attempted to prevent him.

All of these measures could be considered to be excessive, symptoms of Amin's revolutionary fervor. However, at the same time there were cases where Sarwari's people searched and arrested true enemies—Pakistani and Iranian spies, terrorists, provocateurs, and proven participants in anti-government revolts. Yet when Amin was informed of such arrests, he demanded that Sarwari free them without delay.

A serious suspicion grew in Sarwari's mind. Was it possible that "the loyal pupil of the leader of the Afghan nation" did not want stability in the DRA? Was it possible that he was purposefully rocking the boat? But why would he? In order to emerge as a leader of the nation? Then what about Comrade Taraki? What destiny did Amin have in mind for Taraki?

By spring, Sarwari started to find various reasons not to fulfill Amin's orders. He made up different excuses: the need to collect additional evidence, to investigate the connections of those who were under suspicion, and so on. He started to avoid taking decisive measures such as "sending people off to Pakistan." Amin called the head of AGSA into his office and confronted him. In the most aggressive way, he accused Sarwari of losing his revolutionary fervor and becoming incompetent. Assadullah listened to the offenses obediently, but he was deeply insulted. That was the kind of insult that a Pashtun would never forgive. As he was very familiar with Amin's style, Sarwari realized that the next step would be removal from his AGSA position and an exile abroad as an ambassador, or possibly something considerably worse.

In a private setting over a cup of tea, Sarwari shared his concerns with his closest friend, the minister of communications, Gulabzoi, whose life Sarwari saved during the April Revolution. Gulabzoi, who considered himself to be Taraki's adopted son, became very concerned—not about his own life, but about the threat that Amin posed to Taraki. He agreed that it was obvious that Hafizullah Amin was clearing the path to supreme power in Afghanistan for himself.

"Boris Semyonovich, do you remember the report in early May about my conversation with Sarwari?" asked Bogdanov when Bubnov paused.

"Share it with the comrades, let them know about it," suggested Ivanov.

“This is what happened,” began Bogdanov. “In early May, when there were only two of us in his office, Sarwari approached me very closely, so that nobody else could hear him, and very quietly said, ‘Amin is a very cunning, cruel, treacherous, and dangerous person. He is able to do anything it takes to strengthen his personal power in the party and the government.’ Sarwari said some other negative things about Amin, but I didn’t understand them. It was all very unexpected. At first I thought that it was some kind of provocation—that he was checking out my reaction to such statements. Then I thought it was all said on behalf of Taraki. Frankly speaking, I was very confused. When the interpreter walked into the office, Sarwari moved back to his seat at the desk and, as if nothing happened, started to discuss some insignificant, mundane issues.”

“So you see, Leonid Pavlovich, your information about a serious discord among the Khalqi just received further confirmation,” said Ivanov. “Forgive me for interrupting you, Victor Andreyevich,” he turned to Bubnov. “Please continue.”

In the second part of his report, Bubnov shared more intriguing information: “Minister of Defense Aslam Watanjar, who is a national hero of Afghanistan, is another enemy of Amin. Watanjar’s tank is now exhibited on a pedestal in front of the Ark. Watanjar learned from one of Taraki’s aides-de-camp, a personal friend and former colleague, that Amin persistently tries to convince Taraki to remove Watanjar from his position as the minister of defense. The arguments for firing him are simple: ‘The minister cannot do anything against the rising counter-revolutionary forces. The army is disintegrating. Uprisings are frequently occurring in military detachments. Many officers are siding with the rebels. All of it is because Watanjar lacks an adequate military education, experience in party leadership, and doesn’t pay enough attention to his work responsibilities, preferring

the drunken company of young prostitutes and musicians to his work in the ministry.”

“One can think that there are scores of people, all highly educated military strategists and ascetics who are eager to spend nights pouring over military maps, in line to take the position of minister of defense,” intervened Osadchiy.

“Naturally Watanjar could not forgive Amin for such overtures to Taraki,” Bubnov continued. “Mahmoud says that the minister of defense had a very frank conversation about it with Taraki, and Taraki said to him, ‘there is nothing for you to worry about as long as I am the head of the country.’”

“It sounds like Watanjar was joined by his old friend, also a former member of a tank crew, Minister of Internal Affairs Mazdouryar. He is also unhappy with Amin, for not sanctioning the elimination of criminal gangs in Kabul, which consist of relatives of the PDPA Central Committee members Alemyar and Sahrai—fervent Amin supporters. For now it’s difficult to say whether these ministers have united into a group or not, but Mahmoud is certain that they will eventually unite,” Bubnov summed up his report.

“Does Taraki have full information about these disagreements?” asked Ivanov.

“He is certainly aware of them. After Amin demanded that Taraki remove Watanjar, the minister of defense came to Taraki to clarify the issue. However, Mahmoud is not certain about the extent to which Taraki is aware of the details,” said Bubnov.

“Boris Semyonovich, don’t you think that the so-called ‘opposition’ is created by Taraki on purpose, in order to provide a counterbalance to the expanding influence of Amin?” suggested Osadchiy. “It is hard to believe that these ministers may have their own political ideas, interests, or ambitions.”

“I share Vilior Gavrilovich’s point of view,” said Bogdanov.

Ivanov hesitated. There was a silence in the room, as Andropov's envoy was not in a hurry to voice his conclusion.

Summing up the conversation, Boris Semyonovich said to Osadchiy: "Please prepare a cable to the Center. Address it to Andropov. The telegram should contain all of the information relayed by Victor Andreyevich as well as the essence of your analysis. Please include what Sarwari told Leonid Pavlovich in early May. I will sign it."

Ten days later, more information about the deepening fissures among the Khalqi elite arrived from Mahmoud. Now, according to the agent, the anti-Amin group had been formed and included Head of AGSA Sarwari, Minister of Defense Watanjar, Minister of Communications Gulabzoi, and Minister of the Interior Mazdouryar. Demonstratively, the four ministers refused to work with Amin and addressed Taraki directly on all questions and issues. Moreover, Hafizullah Amin began to avoid having any meetings or contacts with Watanjar. Once, Taraki, noticing that Amin was absent from a meeting of the Revolutionary Council, called him: "Comrade Amin, this is not the first time you have been absent from a meeting of the Revolutionary Council, and other such meetings. What is the reason for your absence?"

"Watanjar said that if he sees me anywhere, he will kill me immediately," Amin responded, sounding insulted.

"Well, Watanjar is a serious man. If he has so promised, then he would certainly go through with it," Taraki responded, and smiled at the members of the Revolutionary Council.

"But under these circumstances, I cannot fulfill my responsibilities," continued Amin.

“Okay, let’s discuss this situation *tête-à-tête*,” Taraki responded seriously.

Another cable, describing this episode, signed by Ivanov, Bogdanov, and Osadchiy, went to the Center.

Unlike Bogdanov and Osadchiy, who were permitted to leave Kabul only under exceptional circumstances, General Ivanov traveled to Moscow quite frequently. Not only could Ivanov travel to Moscow, he was also included in the official Soviet delegation to the summit meeting with President Jimmy Carter in Vienna. Vienna was the site of the summit where the important arms control treaty SALT II was to be signed.

According to protocol, the treaty signing ceremony was supposed to take place in Washington because U.S. Presidents Nixon and Ford had previously visited the USSR two times in a row. It was therefore Brezhnev’s turn to fly across the ocean. However, his doctors objected to such a journey because of the general secretary’s poor health. After lengthy consultations, a mutual agreement was finally reached to meet in Vienna.

The Soviet delegation arrived in the capital of Austria by train. The delegation was led by Brezhnev and three other senior members of the Politburo: Gromyko, Ustinov, and Chernenko. Boris Semyonovich Ivanov, officially listed as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs expert at the rank of adviser, was the KGB point man in the delegation.

Ivanov was present at almost all stages of the negotiations, which lasted for several days and were finalized by the signing of the SALT II Treaty. The deterioration of Brezhnev’s health was very obvious to everyone. Ivanov noticed with anxiety that the general secretary could not maintain even a basic dialogue on his own with the president of the United States. All of the speeches that Brezhnev read were typed in large font on a

special typewriter. He also had to rely on prompts to respond to Carter's questions. His assistants would hear the question and would place the appropriate response in front of Brezhnev, and the general secretary would mumble the text with no understanding of what he was saying. Several embarrassing situations occurred. When Carter asked Brezhnev a question that required only a short answer, the interpreter quickly crossed out the unnecessary text on the response note before passing it to Brezhnev. Brezhnev read the response to the point where the text was crossed out and asked, "Should I not keep reading?" President Carter and his assistants exchanged meaningful glances.

The summit meeting included a visit to the famous Vienna Opera. Everybody knew that Leonid Ilyich was indifferent to any kind of high culture, classical music in particular, and tried to avoid such visits. Carter, however, convinced him to sit through the first act of Mozart's "The Abduction" from the Seraglio so that their joint visit to the opera would be reported in the media. Carter was driven by PR considerations. It would have been better, however, if the general secretary had declined the invitation, as he fell asleep numerous times and snored loudly during the performance. Members of his entourage had to physically elbow and push Brezhnev to wake him during such lapses in consciousness.

However, such tiny "details" did not seem to be of particular concern to other members of the Soviet delegation. After all, there was no need for any additional serious discussions with the Americans, as the text of the treaty had been agreed upon in advance. All that was left to do was sign the treaty, toast to its success with a glass of champagne, and return home. A slight hitch occurred, however, at a meeting in the Soviet embassy. President Carter, who normally did not deviate from standard topics, and who obviously was sensitive to the Soviet leader's incapacity for serious conversation, unexpectedly

raised an important and sensitive issue.

“It would be good,” Carter said, “if the détente that is now underway in Europe would spread to other regions in which the United States and the USSR have disagreements. We have vital interests in some of those regions, and the USSR should recognize this.” Carter paused, obviously preparing to say something very important. The able members of the Soviet delegation became tense. “Some of these vitally important regions are the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Peninsula. We appeal to you to show restraint there, so that the status quo and the interests of our national security are not affected. There are many problems in Iran and Afghanistan, but the United States does not interfere in the internal affairs of those states. We hope that the Soviet Union will do the same.”

Having finished, the American president looked at Brezhnev expectantly. Leonid Ilyich remained silent. He had no prepared response for such an intervention. He turned to Gromyko with hope, as if saying, “Help, Andrei Andreyevich.” However, the minister of foreign affairs maintained an icy silence in response to Brezhnev’s look. Carter had brought up the issue of spheres of influence, and such an issue could not be addressed spontaneously.

In order to mitigate the situation, the general secretary uttered a clichéd response: the Soviet Union had never interfered in the domestic politics of Afghanistan, and expected the United States to do the same. That was the end of the exchange.

Later, Carter’s smart and cynical national security adviser, Brzezinski, wrote in his memoirs that they did not succeed in engaging the Russians in a detailed discussion of American geopolitical concerns while in Vienna. It is most likely that the American president had been prompted by Brzezinski to touch the nerve of divided spheres of

influence. This topic was last discussed by the leaders of the United States and the USSR in Yalta at the end of World War II.

However, upon return to Moscow, Soviet leaders, including B.S. Ivanov, subjected Carter's words to a thorough analysis. Ustinov and Andropov's interpretation was that the Americans were proposing that the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Peninsula should fall within the American sphere of influence, while the Soviet Union would receive Iran and Afghanistan. Ustinov believed that they should immediately accept such a proposal. Gromyko cooled him down: "In Vienna, Carter did not speak about the division of spheres of influence, but only appealed to mutual restraint in all matters related to Afghanistan and Iran. This is the first point. The second point is that we should agree that the Persian Gulf states are in the geopolitical sphere of interests of the United States." In this regard Andropov was also not a supporter of the idea of such negotiations with the Americans. He considered that Afghanistan was already in Moscow's orbit, while Iran was, for the time being, lost to both the United States and the USSR.

After long discussions, the following decision was made: the proposal voiced by Carter was to be ignored, while the situation in the Middle East was to be very closely monitored. Growing American involvement in Pakistan, particularly the obvious U.S. support of Afghan counter-revolutionaries, was of great concern to Moscow.

On June 29, members of the Soviet Politburo discussed the memorandum signed by Gromyko, Andropov, Ustinov, and Ponomaryov, and agreed that the situation in Afghanistan was becoming more complicated. The phrasing of this memorandum reflected the growing concern in the Soviet power ministries.

When analyzing the causes of the situation's deterioration, Politburo members were

directly pointing out that Taraki and Amin had consolidated all power in their hands, frequently made mistakes, and violated the law. There was a lack of broad support for the new regime in the country. The local organs of self-governance had not yet been created, while “the recommendations of our advisers regarding these issues are not being put into practice by the Afghan leadership.” The memo also stated that the measures taken by the DRA to stabilize the government were not efficient, and that the efforts of counter-revolution were focused on the disintegration of the Afghan army: “Different means, such as religious fanaticism, bribes, and threats are being used to achieve that goal. Officers are being approached individually to sway them towards acts of treason. Such reactionary practices are being conducted on a large scale and can have dangerous consequences for the revolution.”

As standard methodology required, the informational narrative in the memorandum was followed by a set of recommendations. These measures included sending a letter on behalf of the Politburo to the Central Committee of the PDPA, the purpose of which was to express the Soviet leadership’s concern and anxiety in a friendly tone and to voice suggestions for strengthening the people’s power. It was also proposed to strengthen the staff of the PDPA adviser and to authorize the allocation of party advisers to city and regional councils. It also was proposed that an experienced general and a group of officers be sent to work in the Afghan armed forces in order to help the head of the Soviet advisory contingent. In addition, the suggestion was made to send fifty military advisers, including military political specialists, as well as military counterintelligence officers.

However, the most important, and classified, part of the memorandum was the fourth item. It said the following: “Upon agreement with the Afghan side, a battalion of

paratroopers, disguised in aviation technician uniforms, will be sent in order to provide security and defense for the planes of the Soviet air force group stationed at Bagram Airport. A special detachment of KGB operatives (125-150 persons), disguised as embassy service personnel, will be sent to Kabul for the protection of the Soviet embassy. In early August of this year, after the completion of training, a special detachment of the GRU General Staff will be sent to the DRA (Bagram Airport) to be engaged in protection and defense of government sites of high significance in case of an emergency situation.” According to the same Politburo decision, B. N. Ponomaryov was dispatched to Kabul again, “for discussions with the leaders of the DRA.”

There are reasons to believe that in the beginning of the summer, the mood in Moscow began to shift towards making more radical decisions in regards to Afghanistan. Although Taraki was regarded as a nice person by the members of the Soviet Politburo, he seemed unable to navigate a ship through a storm. Amin irritated them more and more with his intrigues and his stubborn determination to play his own game. Under such circumstances, the ship could sink at any moment. Something had to be done, but precisely what was not yet clear.

The KGB was prepared to restore ties that had been frozen with exiled leaders of Parcham, most of whom by then had emigrated to European countries. The Intelligence Directorate of the General Staff continued its intensive training of the Muslim Battalion in Chirchik. The KGB Residency in Kabul received instructions to focus on the growing opposition inside Khalq.

The negotiations, or rather haggling, between Taraki and Amin regarding “the gang

of four” continued for over a month and a half. Amin insisted on sending the head of AGSA and other ministers abroad as ambassadors. Taraki, unwilling to betray the personal loyalty of those officers to him, was determined to protect the status quo, or at least to reach the appearance of peace with Amin. However, Watanjar and Sarwari, who knew the rules of the game all too well, would never accept that approach. Finally, Taraki made what seemed to him to be a slight compromise with Amin. On July 27, according to a special decree of the Revolutionary Council of the DRA, Taraki became the commander in chief while entrusting the position of the minister of defense to his “outstanding and beloved pupil, Comrade Amin.” Watanjar was transferred to the position of the minister of the interior. Mazdouryar was removed from the Ministry of the Interior and became the frontier affairs minister.

These changes in the government were introduced to the members of the Revolutionary Council and the Central Committee of the PDPA by Taraki and Amin as a decision coordinated with the Soviet leaders. They referred to secret consultations with B.N. Ponomaryov, who had recently paid another unofficial visit to Kabul. In reality there had been no discussions of changes within the Afghan government during the meetings of Ponomaryov, Taraki, and Amin. There had also been no discussions of the rupture in the upper echelons of Khalq.

It is quite possible that the analyses that had been provided by the KGB Residency in Kabul to Moscow did not appear sufficiently alarming to the Center. It is also possible that these analyses were not conveyed to the very top in the way they should have been reported. Or it may be that nobody in Moscow at the time was prepared to deeply and seriously process the information from Kabul in order to appreciate the possible

consequences of the confrontation between Amin and Taraki.

The Soviet leaders, who were unfamiliar with the cruel Pashtun traditions, were thinking approximately the following: "Well, they might send a couple of young ministers abroad as ambassadors. It won't be too bad for them. They can broaden their worldview and gain some experience and perspective. Besides, the switching of diplomatic posts is the domestic affair of our Afghan friends and we shouldn't interfere. Islamic extremists, who never part with their weapons, pray five times a day, practice polygamy, and are not afraid of death because they think that those who are killed while fighting infidels are guaranteed a spot in heaven, are a different matter. Those are people who exist in a mysterious world, very different from ours. This is where a true threat to Afghanistan's progress lies."

During the meeting with the Afghan leaders, Ponomaryov expressed the Soviet leadership's deepest concern about the activation of counter-revolutionary activities by Islamic groups, particularly the growing influence of reactionary clerics in the Afghan armed forces. His interlocutors confirmed that the threat was very serious and raised the issue of Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan. Ponomaryov craftily avoided discussing the topic of Soviet military intervention and switched to the necessity of expanding the social base of the revolution by attracting the broadest groups of the working population of the country, the natural allies of the PDPA. Further, they discussed the work of party advisers who had been sent to Afghanistan by the Central Committee of the CPSU. The leaders of the DRA, to the great satisfaction of their Moscow guest, highly valued the activities of the party advisers, characterizing them as "carriers of the priceless wisdom and experience of the Soviet communists, who provide a great assistance to the development of the party."

Ponomaryov's unofficial visit to Kabul again appeared not to have produced significant results. Conversations with the Afghan leaders were lifeless. The guest from Moscow did not receive any new, interesting, or compelling information, and no specific agreements were reached.

Both Taraki and Amin sensed that Ponomaryov was not the person who was making decisions in Moscow. They perceived him as a high-ranking party bureaucrat who had absolutely no power and was unable to come up with any personal initiative or defend his own point of view. They were hopelessly uttering the customary requests for direct involvement by the Soviet military against the opposition. Ponomaryov, in turn, was again appealing to the Afghans, without any hope of being heard, to work in a collaborative manner and to mind the principle of collective leadership in the party.

Ponomaryov's role in the situation was not to be envied. The Politburo had tasked him with an impossible mission. By the summer of 1979, the situation in Afghanistan had become so tangled, controversial, and complicated that it caused widespread confusion among the Soviet leaders. When the subject of Afghanistan was brought up in meetings in the Kremlin and in the Central Committee of the CPSU, the reaction of Soviet leaders was one of irritation and a wish to transfer responsibilities for Afghan affairs to somebody else. Instead of the promised building of socialism across Amu Darya, chaos, bloodshed, and a real war within the Afghan leadership were developing there.

As to the breakup within Khalq and the threat looming over Taraki, it should be mentioned that there were other factors that contributed to Moscow's inadequate reaction. Along with the information supplied by the KGB, messages arrived via other ministerial channels. For example, the military advisers Generals Gorelov and Zaplatin highly valued

the organizational talents of Hafizullah Amin and fully supported him in his struggle against “the gang of four.” When Ponomaryov, during his visit to Kabul, asked the senior military political adviser for his opinion regarding the conflict between Amin and the ministers, Zaplatin told him the following story: Zaplatin’s office was located on the second floor of the Ministry of Defense building. Watanjar’s office was located on the first floor. So from his window, Vasily Petrovich could observe what the minister of defense was doing. Normally, by noon, Gulabzoi and Mazdouryar would arrive at Watanjar’s. Sarwari would also show up, but less frequently, and the four of them would depart to some unknown location together. Once, Zaplatin couldn’t contain his curiosity and decided to find out what the heroes of the revolution routinely did after lunch. He entered the office of the minister of defense without warning. Gulabzoi was trying to hide behind a room divider, from where he was extracted by the general, as though he were a boy who had done something naughty. When Zaplatin chided them for not working, the ministers responded: “We are young men; we carried out the revolution, and we have the right to enjoy occasional entertainment.” It turned out that they were entertaining themselves almost every day and worked only until lunch.

So there were lots of reasons for Amin to be displeased by Taraki’s appointees. Amin himself was a workaholic who demanded the same from his subordinates, which placed him apart from most other Afghans. Not everything was so cut and dry in the conflict between Amin and the “gang of four.”

The Herat uprising became a signal for the CIA to intensify its involvement in Afghanistan. The CIA sent their suggestions for the covert support of anti-government

forces to the White House in March. That document stated that the Soviet leaders were obviously concerned by the situation in Afghanistan. In their attempts to explain the reasons for failure, Moscow blamed the United States, Pakistan, and Egypt, which, according to Moscow, were actively supporting the armed opposition. In reality, American engagement in Afghan affairs, at least on the federal level, was insignificant at that point. It was in that March memorandum that the CIA proposed a significant increase in assistance to counter-revolutionary forces.

American intelligence was watching Afghanistan in the context of the overall regional situation at the time. The United States had been painfully defeated in Iran, which they had to leave following the overthrow of the shah. Khomeini's supporters, who had seized power in Iran, were fervent critics of America. The enormous territory, rich in oil and natural resources and of great strategic importance from many points of view, at the time was not in anyone's sphere of influence, though one could imagine that it might fall under Soviet control. American political analysts named the region that stretched from Ethiopia and the Near East to Iran, Pakistan, and Afghanistan an "arch of crises," and sought to convince U.S. citizens that the permanent goal of the USSR was to maintain presence in this important region.

But because there was no serious evidence of Soviet expansion then, a story about Peter the Great's will was dug out from the archives. That story told how the tsar allegedly ordered his descendants to get as close as possible to Constantinople and India: "Who rules there, rules the world." Independent American media suddenly joined together, as though someone had issued a directive, and began exploiting this myth, frightening the population with the threat of Soviet expansion in "the arch of crises" area, most importantly in the

Persian Gulf.

Détente was coming to an end, and the prolonged period of confrontation was rapidly following on its heels. The Cold War was nearing its peak.

Proposing to initiate a large-scale operation to support the Afghan rebels, American intelligence had far-reaching goals, the most important of which was to engage the Soviets in an armed struggle and bleed them to death. CIA analysts argued that if the rebel positions could be strengthened, Moscow would be obliged to expand its military assistance to the regime, including direct military intervention in Afghanistan. This would become a trap for the Soviet Union—a trap that would clamp down as soon as the first Soviet troops crossed the Afghanistan border and engaged the Islamic opposition.

The Soviets would inevitably become mired in a bloody partisan war and would lose their opportunity to establish total control over the oil-rich Persian Gulf region. The forthcoming conflict would be a gift for the propaganda warriors, who would finally receive evidence of the perfidy of the Kremlin and its expansionist designs. If the military activities were drawn out, they would exhaust the USSR, and then America would triumph in the Cold War.

On March 6, a Special Coordination Committee (a closed structure of the cabinet overseeing covert operations) requested that the CIA develop a more detailed plan of American engagement in Afghanistan.

CIA operatives traveled to the Middle East to study the situation and develop specific proposals. They found camps in Pakistan with tens of thousands of Afghan refugees, many of whom were prepared to return to Afghanistan to overthrow the regime of infidels. All they needed was weaponry. There existed one formal difficulty, however,

which was related to the cooling of relations between Zia ul-Haq and Carter. The West criticized the president of Pakistan for human rights violations, lack of democratic freedoms, and the covert development of nuclear weapons. The CIA operatives quickly figured out that the president of Pakistan was certainly “a son of a bitch, but he was our son of a bitch.” It was possible to agree with him on almost all issues pertaining to the support of the Afghan resistance.

The bureaucratic machine in Washington was launched in that direction, and no force was capable of stopping it.

On March 30, at a secret session of the Special Coordination Committee, a representative of the State Department reported that the Carter administration agreed that the United States should influence the situation in Afghanistan and should prevent the expansion of Soviet influence in this region, as well as in other countries of the Third World. However, at that time there was no clear strategy about which steps to take to reach that goal. Should the rebels be supplied with weapons and ammunition? Should they be given financial support? What would Moscow’s reaction be? How far would the communists go in their response?

The risk of provoking World War III was very high. Therefore, Americans were proceeding with their secret plans with great caution. Brzezinski’s proposal was to provide assistance at first not by supplying weapons, but rather medicine, field radios, technical assistance, and money. A sum of 500,000 U.S. dollars was allocated for these purposes, as well as for propaganda and psychological warfare, in the summer of 1979. It was a miniscule sum in comparison with the billions of dollars given to the rebels later. However, American special services continued to exercise caution and secretiveness throughout the

duration of the war in Afghanistan.

According to the conditions put forward by President Zia ul-Haq, American assistance could not be sent to the rebels directly; it could only be provided through Pakistani Intelligence Services. Using ISI as an intermediary was much more costly because of the high levels of corruption in Pakistan and the fact that part of the assistance would inevitably remain in the ISI coffers. However, that model permitted the CIA to avoid direct engagement on the ground.

Meanwhile, CIA officers stationed in Kabul were instructed to monitor internal processes in the DRA even more closely, as well as the degree of involvement by the USSR, and to study the potential for the growing counter-revolution in the country.

The rumor that Amin was an old CIA agent, which had been launched by Amin's enemies in the PDPA, reached the U.S. ambassador in early 1979. The ambassador was intrigued and asked the CIA resident if that was indeed the case.

"Unfortunately, such things happen only in Hollywood," Turko burst into laughter. "It's too good to be true."

"But maybe we don't know everything? He could have been handled by the FBI."

"It's possible," agreed the resident, "but someone from the United States would surely have arrived to maintain ties with the agent, and besides, Amin is too much of a Pol Pot type to be our man."

Amstutz, who became the chief of mission following Dubs's death, had five one-on-one meetings with Amin. Those were private meetings without protocol, and were unknown even to Amin's closest entourage. The media did not report them. According to Amstutz, Amin always "exhibited unbending animosity towards the United States" during

their conversations. The secretive nature of the meetings between Amin and Amstutz was used against Amin later. KGB operatives, who had found out about it, concluded that the Afghan leader had begun his own game behind Moscow's back, and it was a good enough reason to eliminate him.

It seemed as though some high-level officials in Moscow and Washington developed a sort of mutual paranoia at that time. The Soviets suspected the Americans of undertaking secret preparations to capture Afghanistan, while the United States endeavored to convince themselves and their allies that the Soviets were about to send tanks southwards to capture the oilfields of the Persian Gulf.

In the summer of 1979, the Islamic armed opposition (future mujahadeen, and later Taliban) began to receive American assistance via ISI. Soviet intelligence learned about it immediately. After the information was analyzed, the Central Committee of the CPSU took the bait of the information war by involving Soviet, East European, and Third World countries' mass media, as well as left-leaning Western newspapers. The State Department orchestrated an adequate response via diplomatic channels when the wave of accusations against Americans was raised in world media.

Ambassador Puzanov received a request for a meeting with the American embassy's acting chargé d'affaires, Flatin. Flatin informed Puzanov that Amstutz had left for Washington for consultations and he, Flatin, was assigned to present a State Department memorandum to the Soviet side entitled "False Statements about American Interference in Afghanistan." It was a short diplomatic note that sluggishly downplayed the United States' involvement. Having read it, Puzanov decisively rejected all accusations directed against the Soviet Union. He attempted to assure his guest that the Soviet mass media correctly

reported and objectively interpreted developments in Afghanistan.

“Our correspondents refer to speeches of Comrades Taraki and Amin, who repeatedly cited cases of American interference in the domestic affairs of Afghanistan. But there are also a number of articles published by Western journalists, including those in American newspapers and magazines, which certainly cannot be suspected of having a biased attitude towards the United States.”

Upon hearing that, Flatin became somewhat less enthusiastic, as recently an influential American weekly had reported some of the details of covert CIA operations against the DRA. Puzanov continued to put pressure on the American: “Stop your interference, and then there will be no basis for accusations. I would also like to remind you that the U.S. Congress declined President Carter’s request to allocate 17 million dollars of aid to Afghanistan, and despite that, the government of the DRA maintains friendly relations with you. How about the fact that on the Fourth of July, there was a number of high-level Afghan officials, including two ministers and two deputy ministers, present at the Independence Day reception at your embassy.”

“All of this is true,” agreed Flatin, “and we highly value such positive cases. However, at the same time, I would like to direct your attention to the fact that the U.S. government is unable to put any pressure on the military administration of Pakistan because of a number of bilateral disagreements, including our differences with regard to the nuclear issue.”

The American and the Russian parted coolly.

As the confrontation intensified, the State Department reduced its staff at the U.S. embassy in Kabul. The decision was made to evacuate family members. About one hundred Americans were to depart from the Afghan capital. Amstutz notified DRA Deputy Foreign

Minister Dost in advance about these plans. During his meeting with Dost, Amstutz emphasized that such measures were taken not for political reasons, but exclusively with safety considerations in mind. Besides, Amstutz made the point that the American side was not going to publicize such a step.

“However, if journalists ask us directly, we will have to give an honest response,” warned the American chargé d’affaires.

Unfortunately, a State Department representative received a direct question on the subject from a correspondent of the *Washington Post*. Afghans were outraged when they read the straightforward response about the evacuation, which was published by the *Washington Post*. Deputy Foreign Minister Dost summoned Amstutz and harangued him in protest.

“Such publications create the wrong impression of Afghanistan,” he said. “You violated the agreement not to leak the fact of the evacuation of your citizens to the media.” But that was not all. The same day, the American embassy received a diplomatic note from the DRA Foreign Ministry demanding a further cut in the number of diplomats accredited in Kabul.

Having decided that these anti-American measures were orchestrated by the Russians, Amstutz, accompanied by Flatin, arrived at Puzanov’s office.

“We have an impression that the Afghan side’s reaction to our routine steps—the goal of which is to provide security for American citizens—is disproportionate,” announced Amstutz once the routine exchange of greetings was over. “U.S. officials on several occasions made a point that the United States does not support the rebels in Afghanistan with weapons or money. Two years ago, Afghanistan enjoyed good relations with most

countries, including Iran, Pakistan, China, and the United States. Now its relations with its neighbors, as well as with Western countries, are ruined. We have begun to think that Amin is deliberately seeking to provoke a confrontation with the United States.”

“Your assessment is unreasonable, Mr. Amstutz. Under no circumstances is Afghanistan trying to damage Afghan-American relations,” objected the Soviet ambassador. He again made reference to the recent reception at the American embassy where the Afghan side was represented at a high level at the Independence Day celebration. As to degradation of relations with neighboring countries, Puzanov maintained that it stemmed from these countries’ open interference in the internal affairs of the DRA.

Each diplomat at this meeting was supposed to play a well-rehearsed role, and both played their roles well. However, toward the end of the conversation, Amstutz decided to improvise a bit: “Still, I cannot help but notice that the Afghan government has not been cooperating with our embassy as enthusiastically as before. This trend has become apparent on a number of issues, for example, the murder of Ambassador Dubs,” said Amstutz. “Four times we sent a note to the Afghan Foreign Ministry asking them to respond to a number of questions about the weapons that were used by the terrorists, but we never received a response.”

“We would like to know that as well,” thought Puzanov, but he only said the following: “The process of improving bilateral relations must be mutual. It is inappropriate to express dissatisfaction with our inability to influence the Afghan side on the issue of the evacuation of American citizens. This is not within our realm. The Afghan leadership decides what to do and how to do it on its own.”

Amstutz smiled with understanding. The conversation was adjourned.

The life of KGB Lieutenant Valery Kurilov took a sharp turn on a gloomy October morning in 1978. An ordinary operative of the KGB regional headquarters of Orel, he was invited to the office of the department head, who informed Valery that a decision had been made to send him to Moscow for training. The young officer was happy to receive the news, thinking that he would be studying in the famous Red Banner Institute—the training school for officers of the First Main Directorate in Foreign Counterintelligence. Officers of the First Main Directorate were the “white collar” contingent of the KGB, its elite. It was considered extraordinarily lucky for a provincial operative, without special connections, to get to study at the Red Banner Institute. However, Valery’s boss was quick to disabuse him of this idea, informing Valery instead that he was being sent to the advanced training course for officers located in the Moscow suburbs, in Balashikha, under the auspices of the Covert Intelligence Directorate. The rumor was that the course was taken by those who would operate as saboteurs deep in enemy territory in case of the outbreak of a major war. Participants of the course in Balashikha had to be in great physical shape—at the level of professional athletes—who knew at least one foreign language and had an exemplary moral record.

Kurilov figured out right away that instead of a comfortable life under the roof of some embassy, he would have to learn how to become a saboteur. However, he didn’t think for long. Whatever was in store for him, it would still be more exciting than searching for spies in a provincial town. In the beginning of January 1979, along with other lieutenants and captains who were selected throughout the Soviet Union, he arrived at the secret base in Balashikha and began his studies.

By then, the school of saboteurs had already existed for ten years. Several hundred

officers took a seven-month-long course at the base in Balashikha, and as a rule, upon completion they went back to their previous jobs. However, the Center entered their names in a special database. That special contingent of the PGU from then on had to live in a state of permanent alert and readiness to be deployed covertly to different countries. There would be a number of different tasks on their plate, from working with local agents to destroying strategically important sites of a potential enemy, such as strategic headquarters, missile bases, and lines of communication.

Kurilov found the curriculum interesting. Like most of his fellow trainees, he didn't believe that they would ever have to use the skills that they were learning. He didn't think that war would ever break out, that he would have to plant explosives to derail trains, eliminate guards, or lead an assault. But skepticism was secondary to the truly manly training that he received. He had to learn self defense, master cold steel weaponry, do parachute jumping, scuba diving, plant explosives, and master camouflage. Valery was smart enough to understand that his professional duty after completion of the course was to become a kamikaze. But he did not mind, as he did not think that a real war would ever happen, and considered the training to be a real adventure, for which he was grateful.

Kurilov was one of the few who thought that there would be no war. Those who organized the training in Balashikha, who nurtured and supervised the program with great care, thought differently. Andropov himself, as well as his generals in Headquarters "S" (covert intelligence) paid special attention to the curriculum. A highly experienced, veteran saboteur, Colonel Boyarinov, was appointed to oversee the course. Boyarinov kept meticulous research on foreign covert saboteur activities, which included Soviet and all known foreign experience. The most experienced specialists in the recruitment of agents,

preparation of explosives, area studies, and expert snipers were among the faculty at Balashikha. Besides being taught the routine curriculum, the trainees received psychological training, where they adopted a particular self-perception that made them feel as if they were superior to others and knew no obstacles to achieving their goals.

Half a year into the program, in early June, the trainees could tell through the behavior of their faculty that something had changed. Class topics were switched to ones that were slightly uncharacteristic for the training of saboteurs. Suddenly they were being trained to free hostages, to capture and defend strategic sites. Then some high-level official arrived from the PGU. Having skipped any introduction, he informed the trainees that their cohort would become a special detachment, which would be deployed in Afghanistan. Their task was to provide for the security of Soviet citizens in Afghanistan, to help Afghan special services fight the rebels, and to fulfill any other tasks that might arise. The high officials also said that the detachment would be formed on a volunteer basis, and that nobody would be forced to join.

Again, Kurilov did not ponder the news for very long. His colleagues did not reject the offer either. The young men, most of whom had never been abroad, were tempted by the opportunity to experience life in another country. They didn't think of the potential risks that their deployment in Afghanistan might entail, as they only had a very vague idea about life in Afghanistan and knew almost nothing about the situation there.

By early July, a detachment of thirty-eight men with the code name "Zenit" was ready for action. For the first time in many years, a special detachment of KGB, which was equipped with its own means of communication, weapons, and other special devices, was being deployed abroad. Grigory Boyarinov was appointed the commander of Zenit. Vasily

Glotov and Alexander Dolmatov were appointed as his deputies. During the night of July 4, an airplane with Zenit members on board took off from the Chkalovsky airdrome in the suburbs of Moscow. Afghanistan was its destination.

Upon arrival in Kabul, the newly arrived commandos settled in an empty school of the Soviet embassy. They lined up in front of Lieutenant Colonel Bakhturin, who was introduced as a security officer at the Soviet embassy. Bakhturin, short and stocky, outfitted in a black leather jacket, strictly inspected the elite group of commandos, and very unexpectedly issued a warning to those who would dare to have affairs with unmarried young women at the embassy: “In case of such a transgression, you will be kicked out of Afghanistan and out of the KGB,” he said by way of a promise to the commandos, in place of a greeting.

Another surprise arrived from Ambassador Puzanov’s wife, who was called “mama” at the embassy—a nickname that implied a mix of fear and respect. She prohibited Zenit commandos from using the embassy pool, shopping at the commissary, and socializing with diplomats, their wives, and children. “Mama” treated the new arrivals as a lower caste. That bothered Kurilov. “How is this possible?” he thought. “We arrived here to provide security for the embassy and the whole Soviet colony. We will be risking our lives to protect them, while they think of us as some substandard creatures.”

Much of the new foreign life appeared strikingly different from what they had expected while still in Moscow. At first, the elite commandos of the special forces were ordered to guard the territory of the embassy—a mundane task. They walked along the perimeter as ordinary soldiers, served at guard booths, and accompanied senior administrators and officers on their trips into Kabul. There was nothing heroic about those

assignments. Only once, when a battalion of Afghan commandos rebelled in the Bala Hissar Fortress and a rumor flared that the rebels were on the way to kill communists and the Soviets, did a hint of danger appear. Zenit commandos took their positions, which were prepared in advance, and got ready for the battle, but not one shot was fired. The rebellion was suppressed by the Afghans themselves on the same day.

The day after that incident, Kurilov was called by the commander of the detachment: “Pack your bags. The car will take you to Dolmatov’s villa now. You will live there and serve there from now on.”

A group of officers from Zenit lived in a two-story villa that was surrounded by an imposing stone fence. The residence was called the “First Villa.” It was located not far from the embassy, in a district of Kabul that consisted mostly of similar buildings, inhabited by high-level bureaucrats, merchants, and some staff members of the Soviet embassy.

The move heralded the beginning of a new phase of life in Afghanistan for Valery Kurilov—a much more pleasant one than before. Valery was at the service of Alexander Dolmatov, whom he had met at the KGB Academy. Dolmatov was teaching physical training, hand-to-hand fighting, and mastery of cold steel weaponry and other objects that could be used as weapons. According to Dolmatov, a basic broom could become a lethal weapon, not to mention a toothbrush. He taught the same course at Balashikha base. Alexander Ivanovich, who was short, stocky, and animated, was a favorite instructor among the young officers. As for Kurilov, he established a very special connection with him, the kind that can develop between a talented teacher and a very capable student.

Dolmatov squeezed Kurilov’s hand in a handshake that made him cringe in pain. “You have served as a watchman long enough, Valery. Now we are going to do real work.

You will be assisting me in special training of the local counterintelligence operatives. They are good guys, but completely inexperienced. They don't know how to do anything. Is your task clear?"

"Yes, Comrade Lieutenant Colonel," responded Kurilov happily. "You may rely on me."

"I know that," the deputy commander of Zenit said. "I've been watching you for a while."

Training sessions with AGSA operatives began in an area called Paghman in the Kabul suburbs. Dolmatov lined up the AGSA operatives and declared: "In exactly one month you will become real pros in hand-to-hand fighting. You will be undefeatable. Your skills will overshadow those of Japanese karate masters, whom you saw in the movies."

To eliminate any doubt, he arranged a demonstration session, with Kurilov in the role of his sparring partner. Valery attacked Dolmatov from the back wielding a knife, then tried to kill him with a bayonet, but every time found himself struck to the ground. The Afghans were greatly impressed.

Sessions in Paghman were combined with regular trips to the city. They were tasked to learn more about the capital, to develop emergency routes for extraordinary situations (such as a sudden evacuation, a secret meeting with an agent, etc.), and to investigate approaches to some important sites. All of that finally felt like real work. Besides, Valery devised tasks for himself. Being a professional counterintelligence officer, he started to closely watch the Afghan trainees who were taking their classes. He was considering the possibility of recruiting them in the future. He was quietly but systematically collecting relevant personal data, studying their character, habits, and weak points; in addition, he

intuitively identified their political preferences and ties. He wrote all of that information down in his notebook. It did not take long for the Afghan trainees to begin to trust their instructor and share with him personal secrets and particulars of their work.

Kurilov soon understood that their work routinely consisted of identifying and punishing enemies of the revolution. Most often, those enemies turned out to be their party comrades who belonged to Parcham, rather than mysterious and terrifying religious fanatics. Enemies—Parchamis—were arrested almost daily in the armed forces, state institutions, and in their own beds in the middle of the night. Kurilov's trainees naively boasted, "Today we executed yet another one." Sometimes when describing the arrests, in order to please their Soviet instructors they reported that they had a chance to use the techniques that Dolmatov had taught them. Instructors from Zenit would only exchange glances in response to such revelations. It was strictly prohibited for them to intervene in the operative affairs of Afghan counterintelligence.

However, Kurilov, who had little knowledge of local political nuances, sometimes thought that those unidentified Parchamis were truly the evil enemies of the April Revolution. In Soviet history, there were also all kinds of Trotskyites, Zinovievists, and members of other factions, and the Communist Party dealt with them mercilessly. Besides, all of these political events were taking place in the mystical, complicated Orient, which was so difficult to comprehend.

Kurilov learned one thing well: Afghanistan was within the Soviet sphere of global politics, and he was protecting the national interests of his country by helping the April Revolution.

Gradually, during the process of learning more about the Afghan trainees, Valery

was surprised to find out that not all of them admired Hafizullah Amin, the leading hero of the revolution. Moreover, some of them simply hated him. Once, a student whispered into Kurilov's ear at a convenient moment, "Tell your people not to believe Amin. He is an enemy. He is a real fascist. He wants to kill Taraki." Kurilov was shocked to hear that. The Afghan continued, "We have information that he is preparing Taraki's assassination at the airport."

This time it seemed to be important enough information to share with his superiors. When Dolmatov learned about this, he drove Valery to the embassy to talk to the commander of Zenit. Boyarinov dialed an internal number and talked to somebody. "Go upstairs to the second floor. You will see a deputy resident. Report everything to him," he instructed Kurilov.

Orlov-Morozov listened to the report. When Kurilov passed him the notebook with the data that he had collected, Orlov-Morozov was surprised.

"Did you receive an assignment in Moscow to develop local counterintelligence operatives?" he asked, making long pauses between words.

"No, it was my own initiative." Kurilov suddenly realized that he had done something wrong. "At the moment, I am a special services operative, but my profession is counterintelligence. This is why I decided that it would be useful to learn more about the operatives of foreign special services. Who knows, perhaps this could be of use someday."

"Who else is informed about this initiative of yours?"

"Commander of the detachment, Boyarinov. I got his permission to do it."

"Alright," said Orlov-Morozov, softening up. "Leave your notebook with us. Continue the work that you started. But be careful! Come to the embassy to write down your

observations. Don't keep any written records at the villa."

"It is strange that he doesn't react to the disconcerting news about the plan to assassinate Taraki," thought Kurilov. At the same moment Orlov-Morozov said: "We already know about the possible terrorist act at the airport. Your information serves as another confirmation of what we already know. We are working in this direction."

Soon the group of Afghans who were trained by the Soviet instructors from Zenit had to take graduation exams. The head of AGSA, Assadullah Sarwari, personally arrived at Paghman to check on the success of their training. Sarwari appeared to Kurilov as an impressive, imposing figure, with alcohol on his breath early in the morning. However, Sarwari seemed pleased with the theoretical competence and practical skills of the graduates. Dolmatov rewarded Valery with a full glass of alcohol on the occasion.

But the most important days for the Soviet special forces were yet to come.

That summer, in early July, a paratroop regiment from the 105th Air Force Division, based in Vitebsk, was transferred to the Bagram Airbase. The task of the regiment was to provide security and defense of the airbase and the cargo that would be arriving from the USSR. Participation in military actions against the rebels was prohibited.

On August 11, Starostin and his wife were on their way to Sheremetyevo Airport. Their vacation was over. It was time to return to Kabul. The taxicab was filled with silence. They were sad to leave their eight-year-old son behind with grandparents because of the worsening situation in Afghanistan. After the events in Herat, many Soviet citizens who worked in Afghanistan brought their children back home. Some also sent their wives back to the Soviet Union so as not to endanger them.

The taxi driver sensed that his passengers didn't feel like engaging in small talk. He turned the radio on. A tragic accident in the city of Dneprodzerzhinsk was reported on the news program. Two airplanes had collided. There were many casualties, including members of the football team Pakhtakor. Starostin thought the news of the tragic accident was a bad omen—there was a long day and several flights ahead of them.

Valery recalled the words of a colleague who was a Center handler with the KGB Kabul Residency. At a picnic for Starostin and his family during their vacation, the colleague said: "I am not surprised anymore when trains are two, sometimes three, hours late. I am not surprised when airplanes crash. I am surprised that the train system functions at all. I am surprised that airplanes take off before crashing. The country is a mess. Nobody cares about people. Everything is done to submit reports to the higher ups. The reports tell one story. Real life has nothing to do with the reports. You, Valery, tried to provide your superiors with an objective analysis about the situation in Afghanistan. Do you know what the response of General Polonnik, the head of our Near East Division, was to your analysis? Once you left his office, he said to me: "Why is he such a pessimist? At his age? He is challenging the official line of party advisers directed at the expansion of the social base of the PDPA...He must consider himself to be smarter than everybody else."

It was true that Starostin's assessment of the situation in Afghanistan was grim. He made a case to the department head that the Khalq regime was not functional and that the Soviet party advisers' strategy to expand Khalq by granting membership to more workers and peasants was a mistake. Most of those newly recruited party members were illiterate or poorly educated at best, and they were not familiar with either history or PDPA documents. Starostin was trying to make an argument that such "growth of party ranks"

was inflicting harm, and that as a result of it, party discipline was deteriorating and the influence of the party in the country was weakening.

When recalling his conversation with the department head, Starostin grew sad. General Polonnik had no expertise in the Middle East. His previous work involved the United States.

Despite his inexperience in Middle Eastern affairs, Polonnik lectured Valery during that memorable presentation: “You should be thinking about applying yourself harder to achieve the main goals of Soviet intelligence, rather than focusing on the miscalculations of Soviet advisers in the DRA. Afghan domestic problems are not so important for us. Under current conditions they will be successfully resolved through the comprehensive assistance of Soviet advisers. The office of our representative in Kabul, which is working directly with Afghan special services, is in a much better position to gather information about domestic issues than the Kabul Residency. KGB operatives, and you in particular, must focus on working against the main enemy and the Chinese. Nobody yet cancelled this fundamental goal of Soviet intelligence. I recommend that, upon your return to Kabul, you organize a reception. Invite diplomatic representatives who work at your level, at the level of second and third secretaries, attachés. There are funds available for such a gathering. Put forward an initiative of creating a club of young diplomats. Intensify your contacts with representatives of Western countries. We badly need agents among Americans and representatives of other countries, members of NATO. If you manage to recruit a strong American or Chinese agent, I promise you an award.”

Having safely made it to Kabul, Starostin immediately went to the resident. Osadchiy listened to Starostin’s report about his meetings and conversations at the Foreign Ministry

and PGU with great attention.

“It sounds like our comrades in Moscow do not understand the possible outcomes of this Afghan scenario. They seem to expect a happy ending. I am afraid they will receive a tragedy instead,” commented Osadchiy.

However, he was quite enthusiastic about Polonnik’s decision to switch the focus of Starostin’s work towards developing Chinese and Western agents. He immediately made a call and ordered funds to be allocated for a reception for young diplomats. He suggested that “clean” staff members of the Soviet embassy and a journalist from TASS be invited to the reception. Then he asked Starostin to meet with “Kim,” an agent who was recently recruited. Kim had direct ties with an Islamic counter-revolutionary group that was actively working in the Afghan army.

That task from the resident was very timely. A rebellion had flared up in early August in the 26th paratroopers regiment and in the 444th battalion of commandos that were located in Bala Hissar Fortress. The rebellion was suppressed only because of the decisive and cruel measures undertaken by Chief of Staff of the Afghan Army Yaqub. There were many casualties as a result of the operation.

That particular uprising produced a strong impression, bordering on shock, on diplomatic and staff members of the Soviet embassy, as well as Soviet advisers and specialists who were stationed in the capital. All the previous counter-revolutionary uprisings had taken place far from Kabul. Bala Hissar Fortress was located nearby, only three kilometers away from the Soviet embassy. The Soviets knew that the Afghans based in Bala Hissar were not ordinary infantry, but elite commandos who could slaughter everybody at the embassy or at any other site in a flash, without having to fire a shot.

On August 20, Osadchiy invited Starostin to his office. At first, he shared a cable from the Center in which the leadership praised Starostin for the information that he received from the agent Kim, which illuminated covert activities of Islamic fundamentalist groups in the Afghan army. Then, smiling cheerfully, the resident inquired about Starostin's health and his immediate operative plans. As the interlude was getting a bit long, Starostin realized that the resident was positioning himself to raise some serious issue.

Finally, Osadchiy told Starostin that one day ago, during a celebration of the Independence Day of Afghanistan, one of the "clean" diplomats of the Soviet embassy was approached by Afghan Minister of Communications Sayed Mohammad Gulabzoi. Gulabzoi expressed a wish for a confidential meeting with the Soviet ambassador. Gulabzoi asked Soviet comrades not to inform any Afghans about his request, under any circumstances. When Ambassador Puzanov was told about this request, he flat out refused to grant a meeting to Gulabzoi. Puzanov was correct. Why would a Soviet official representative, the head of a diplomatic mission, jeopardize his ties with Taraki and Amin by setting up a confidential meeting with a third party without clearing it with them first? However, the ambassador invited Ivanov and Osadchiy and informed them of what had transpired. Both intelligence officers immediately understood that Gulabzoi had an intention to deliver a message about the split in the Khalqi top leadership to the Kremlin. Both officers saw a unique opportunity to finally find out about the details of the emerging situation in Khalq if Gulabzoi's request was granted.

Starostin understood that he was chosen to meet with the minister. "This will be the end of my work with the Chinese and Americans," he thought without regret. The resident finally addressed the purpose of the meeting.

“Valery, you should meet with Gulabzoi as soon as possible. Here is his home telephone number.” Osadchiy placed a piece of paper with a five-digit number on the desk. “Call him tonight, as late as possible, but certainly not in the middle of the night. The best would be for you to arrange a meeting tomorrow.”

“Vilior Gavrilovich, I will certainly do as you wish, but I do feel uncomfortable. Gulabzoi is a minister. What am I? Only the third secretary of the embassy.”

“This is good. If the ambassador himself, or Boris Semyonovich, or even I, an adviser at the embassy, were to meet with Gulabzoi, it would have to be a meeting at a diplomatic level that would be treated as an attempt to conduct political negotiations behind the back of the country’s leaders. It will be a different case if you, a young man, the third secretary of the embassy, would meet with him. If anybody finds out about the meeting, it can easily be depicted as yours or Gulabzoi’s irresponsible initiative, as a misunderstanding that is not worth discussing.”

Osadchiy rubbed the top of his head and said after some silence: “You see, we cannot be certain that Gulabzoi did not inform some third party about his intention to secretly meet with us. This is why the probability of failure here is quite high. By sending you to such a meeting, we want to minimize the possibility of a political scandal. It is clear that you are the one who is most at risk under such circumstances. You will be the one blamed for everything in case of a scandal. But what to do? Somebody should go to the meeting. However, you shouldn’t name your position at the embassy to Gulabzoi. You may mention that you are acting per your superiors’ instructions, but let him guess who your superiors are. Avoid discussing issues other than the ones that he wants to raise in the conversation. Don’t express any opinion of your own. Do not give him any guarantees. You may promise

him only one thing: everything he says—to a ‘t’—will be relayed to the highest Soviet leadership. Don’t tell anybody except Boris Semyonovich about this meeting. Deal with the logistics of the meeting yourself. With your experience working in Kabul, you won’t have any difficulties arranging it. It would be best if you bring Gulabzoi home. Try to get him to like you—be confident and magnanimous at the same time. Make him trust you. By the way, he is four years younger than you. If everything goes well, try to make arrangements regarding future confidential contacts, which we would be able to initiate. I think you will do a good job.”

Having finished, Osadchiy took out French cognac, two glasses, and a wooden, ivory-encrusted Pakistani bowl filled with dried apricots, raisins, and nuts from the bar.

“Vilior Gavrilovich, why do you think Gulabzoi is looking for an unofficial contact with us?” Starostin asked what seemed like a very appropriate question.

“I think I know, but I cannot tell you. Please do not be offended. I just don’t want to predetermine the theme of the conversation with Gulabzoi. I think that not only the words that will be said at your meeting, but also your spontaneous reaction to what you will hear will be important. Try to feel the mood of the minister, his state of emotions. Now, Valery, let’s drink to our success. High-quality cognac improves complexion and promotes blood circulation, digestion, and longevity.”

They drank. Then they ate raisins and nuts. Starostin, having refused coffee, walked towards the door. When he pulled the door handle, Osadchiy said with sadness, “Sometimes it seems to me that we are getting our heads into a noose.”

“Thanks. This sounds really encouraging,” replied Valery, glancing back at the resident.

Major General Zaplatin was very worried about the unrest in different provinces of Afghanistan. He was particularly anxious when he heard about uprisings within the Afghan armed forces. The general was a true communist and a fervent Marxist-Leninist. He firmly believed in the victorious nature of the communist idea. That was why he could not fully comprehend why revolutionary progress was stalling in Afghanistan. What was taking place? The anti-popular regime of Daoud had been overthrown in Afghanistan. Ordinary Afghans had been promised freedom. Women could finally take off the horrible Stone-Age burqas. Peasants could receive land to work on as they pleased. All children would receive an education. The country would leap from feudalism straight into socialism—the ideal society, free from exploitation, the most just society in the world. Clearly many difficulties had to be overcome on the way to this wonderful future. Many enemies—feudal lords, wealthy landowners, reactionary clerics, and prominent representatives of the bourgeoisie who resisted revolutionary changes had to be defeated. It was also clear to the general that the revolution had many enemies outside of Afghanistan. They supplied weapons and trained gangs of *ikhvans* to fight in Afghanistan. General Zaplatin could not understand, however, why Afghan soldiers were rebelling against the revolutionary authorities. Why were huge uprisings taking place in Herat, Jalalabad, and Kunar? Those who threw rocks at women who dared to uncover their faces, those who destroyed provincial PDPA committees and killed activists, were not Daoud's generals or feudal lords. The rebels were ordinary peasants, small shop owners, and soldiers—those in whose name the revolution had been carried out.

Why was that happening?

Zaplatin, like everybody else in his entourage—Soviet advisers and Afghans alike—called the detachments of counter-revolutionaries “gangs” and rebels “bandits.” What else were they, when they fought against freedom and progress, when they sought to reinstall obscurantism and darkness? To the general, they were true bandits.

Once, when traveling in the east of Afghanistan, the general met a man who shook his confidence, or at least made him rethink his convictions. That man was a modest major from the Asmar garrison, who was recommended to Zaplatin as a possible political army operative. A commander of an infantry brigade, Abdul Rauf, recommended the major to Zaplatin. He mentioned that although his protégé was not a party member yet, he was an avid reader, a well-educated and honest officer. Abdul Rauf himself was not a PDPA member, although as Zaplatin was told in Kabul, he was a party sympathizer and had firm ideological positions.

Based on what he was told, Vasily Petrovich decided that the conversation with the potential political operative would be a pure formality. However, the conversation, which began with routine biographical inquiries, took an unexpected turn. It happened after the general asked his interlocutor an innocent question: How many operational gangs were on record in the province of Kunar? The major, who earlier had been looking directly into the general’s eyes, shifted his gaze downwards. He was thinking.

“Well, can you give me at least an approximate estimate and name the key bandits?” the general encouraged him to respond.

“We do not have gangs,” the major finally said slowly. “And we don’t have bandits. To be precise, there are and always will be thieves and robbers, but we do not fight against those. It is the responsibility of the police.”

Zaplatin sternly glanced at the interpreter, concluding that the major's response was a result of the interpreter's incompetence. But the lieutenant, a recent graduate of the Military Institute of Foreign Languages, confirmed that his interpretation was correct.

"When I say 'gangs,' I mean weaponized counter-revolutionary detachments," clarified Zaplatin. "Those who are fighting against lawful authorities."

Inner struggle was apparent on the major's face. He seemed to be making a choice between being frank with the Soviet general and giving him the answer that was expected from him. The major appeared nervous. He was looking past the general.

"I hear that there are more than five thousand such people in the province."

"You must be exaggerating," responded Zaplatin condescendingly. "Where did you get this information?"

"People from security services told me. But I think that there are many more of them." The major seemed to have made a decision to speak frankly. "And as you may understand, not all of them can simply be called bandits. Five thousand bandits are a bit too many for our small province."

Zaplatin felt as if he had hit a wall. Until that very moment, nobody—either in Kabul or the provinces that he had visited—ever expressed any doubt regarding the openly criminal, hostile nature of the counter-revolution. The rebels were talked about with clear disdain. The lowest epithets were used to describe them. Plenty of stories were enthusiastically told about the atrocities they had committed, selling their souls to foreign instructors.

"And who are they, if not enemies, may I inquire?" asked Zaplatin, trying to remain calm. "They rebel against the April Revolution that brought freedom to Afghanistan and

gave hope for a better life to all citizens of your country.”

“I have nothing against freedom,” responded the major quickly. “I like many of the plans of the new authorities. I like the plans that would pull our country out of the Stone Age, poverty, and backwardness; all that is long overdue. But there are different ways to get there. Perhaps, the methods of the new government do not seem appropriate to everybody.” He was obviously trying to display some sensitivity.

“Are you familiar with the theory of class struggle?” asked Zaplatin, in hope of switching to a more comfortable topic.

“In general.”

“So let me tell you that during these days in Afghanistan we are witnessing real battles between the exploiters and the exploited, between feudal lords and peasants, between the bourgeoisie and the working class. Class struggle is a permanent process, which occurs while any social inequality exists, and continues while some people live at the expense of others. We don’t have class struggle in the Soviet Union because we built a fair society where everybody enjoys equal opportunities. We do not have landlords and capitalists. Nobody is oppressed. Everybody is working towards the good of the state and receives what is needed from the state.”

“I never visited your country, but I read a lot about it and heard many good things from my friends who studied there,” injected the major. “Please believe me that I have great respect for the Soviet people.”

“Fine. Let me finish. Here in Afghanistan these days, we witness the intensification of the class struggle because of the recent revolution. The goal of the armed forces—your goal—consists of defending the revolution and destroying its enemies.”

The Afghan understood that the Soviet general was not going to execute him on the spot, but was prepared to have a serious conversation. He became daring.

“The problem is,” he said slowly, “that I personally know many of those whom you call bandits. They have nothing to do with feudal lords or capitalists. I studied at school with some of them. Some were my neighbors. They are ordinary citizens. Some of them are perfect representatives of the ‘exploited class.’ I swear, they also love their motherland and wish it well. But different paths lead to heaven. They simply chose another path.”

“What kind of path is that!” exclaimed the general indignantly. “That other path is flooded by blood. Those are beasts, not humans.”

“But, Comrade General, I would like to ask you a question. What does all of this have to do with class struggle? Perhaps it is more appropriate to name it a civil war, when one part of society fights against another? Perhaps you and we should try to understand what divides them, what makes them enemies? As to cruelty, both sides have a record of it. I know it quite well.”

“Well, this major is not such a simple guy,” Zaplatin thought to himself. “He is certainly not fit to be a political military operative, as he is ideologically unprepared.” For a brief moment the general felt a burning desire to make a call and invite a counterintelligence officer here. Have him deal with the major. He would simply be shot without any further discussions. But as Zaplatin was the one who had encouraged the major to be frank, and who had provoked the outpouring of misunderstanding, he felt that it was his responsibility to enlighten the major and help rid him of his mistakes.

“Fine,” Zaplatin said. “If you don’t like the term ‘class struggle,’ let’s talk about ideological struggle. I hope you agree that it exists? There is a progressive ideology, which

was proclaimed by the PDPA, which reflects the hopes of the majority of the people. There is also a reactionary ideology, which is supported by the reactionary forces. Yes, I admit that certain people who fell for the enemy's propaganda followed the reactionaries. The same happened in Russia after the October Revolution, when the White Movement deceived some people and attracted them to its goals. But the Bolsheviks won because they represented progressive ideology."

"I know," agreed the major. "I read about it. But please listen to me now and try to rise above your customary convictions. The truth sometimes lies beyond one's convictions. And convictions sometimes turn into misunderstanding. Afghanistan is not Russia. You cannot apply the same measure to our country as to yours. Even we, who were born and raised here, sometimes are unable to understand and explain all the complexities of our life.

"There are many ethnic groups here, which live independently. Every ethnic group has its own history, customs, mentality, and value systems. There is no unity even within one ethnic group. Take my tribe, Pashtuns, for example. Each bloodline has its own ambitions, demands, and interests. Do you take this into consideration? No, you don't. We are one people for you. You speak with this people in a language of party slogans, which is unclear to them.

"Our life is very patriarchal. We are committed to traditions that were left to us by our ancestors. You declared these traditions to represent some form of medieval obscurantism. That challenged the very foundation of our life. It is possible that many things here in Afghanistan seem unexpected and even barbaric to you, but please let us figure it all out by ourselves. Afghans do not tolerate any interference in what is sacred for

them.

“Finally, here is the most important argument. What I am going to tell you now will most probably be misunderstood by you. You are an atheist. Lenin is your god. Any religion seems reactionary to you. I don’t want to argue about it. But it is a fact that all our citizens, with very few exceptions, are deeply religious. Deep respect for Islam is inculcated in us from birth. Even many party members secretly pray. I know it. Do you know what Comrade Taraki is saying? That in three years our mosques will be empty. Such marginalizing and sometimes openly hostile attitudes toward religion make this government absolutely unacceptable for the majority of Afghans. Most probably, it is not a secret for you that you—the Soviets and our leaders in Kabul—are called *kafir* (‘infidel’) behind your backs. And it is not as harmless as it may seem. The next step will be a proclamation of jihad, holy war, against you all. Neither Amin nor Taraki will be able to withstand jihad.”

“Even if the Soviet Union will supply weapons, ammunition, and expert advisers more actively?” asked Zaplatin.

“Of course,” responded the major with great conviction. “Even if you undertake a military intervention. One cannot defeat the Afghans. One can either kill them or...make a deal with them. And when making deals with them, one should pay them well.”

The conversation was winding down. Zaplatin thought that it made no sense to continue talking, because his arguments were obviously weaker than the Pashtun’s. For the first time in his life, Zaplatin talked to a man who was not ingratiating himself, who did not act as if each word from Zaplatin about the class struggle was a revelation. Despite their difference in age and rank, they were speaking as equals. The major did not shake Zaplatin’s ideological beliefs or convictions about the righteousness of his goals. But the

peace of the general's soul was disturbed for a long time after that conversation.

Departing, the Afghan smiled to the general as to a friend or a neighbor and said, slightly embarrassed, "Forgive me, Comrade General, for acting insubordinately. I see that you are a good, honest man. I would like to give you one bit of advice before saying goodbye to you. Never believe any of my countrymen, even if they swear by all the saints. Words do not mean anything here."

Zaplatin immediately recalled that Minister of Defense Qadir used to say the same thing to him. Where was Qadir now? Was he in prison, or rotting away six feet under?

The major departed.

During evening tea, the commander of the brigade asked Zaplatin about his impressions of the major.

"He is an educated man," responded Zaplatin evasively.

"I assure you that all officers and soldiers in my brigade are prepared to give their lives for the victory of the revolution," said Abdul Rauf with great pathos.

Having returned to Kabul, General Zaplatin was told that almost immediately after his departure, an armed uprising had broken out at the garrison in Asmar. More than a hundred officers and soldiers who were sympathizers of the new regime were killed. The infantry brigade, almost in its entirety, took the side of the rebels. Later they were joined by other detachments from the Ninth Mountain Infantry Division that was stationed in Kunar province.

Abdul Rauf, the commander of the brigade, led the uprising.

Zaplatin never heard about the major again. He could have left for the mountains with the rebels. He could have been killed. Or he could have crossed the border to

neighboring Pakistan to become a refugee. Everything was possible.

In the evening, after his last meeting with the resident, Starostin organized a late dinner at the shish kebab restaurant in the center of Kabul with his wife and friends—faculty of the Kabul Polytechnic Institute. It was the month of Ramadan, when the Afghans enjoyed their special meals with the arrival of darkness. While Starostin’s company was enjoying juicy Afghan kebabs, sprinkling crushed grape seeds and pouring pomegranate juice on the meat, Valery left for a minute to place a call to Gulabzoi from a public telephone. The minister took the call himself. Valery could hear laughter of children and the voice of a woman, trying to calm the children down, in the background. Valery, in very vague terms, reminded the minister about his conversation with a blonde Soviet diplomat at yesterday’s reception. Then he proposed to meet next evening at 7:30 p.m. near one of the restaurants in the center of Kabul. Gulabzoi asked Valery if he was an Afghan. “No, I am a close friend of the person with whom you spoke yesterday.”

“I will come,” responded the minister.

The next day Valery arrived for the meeting dressed as a teacher from an Afghan elementary school. He wore old trousers, a wrinkled denim shirt, and cheap, worn out shoes. His expensive sunglasses were a detail that did not fit the image. Valery parked his gray Volga not far from the meeting place. He was slowly pacing the street waiting for Gulabzoi to arrive. In a couple of minutes a light-colored Toyota Corolla parked in the street. A man who looked similar in figure and moustache to the minister got out of the car. Once the Toyota took off, Valery quickly approached the man.

“Hello, Mr. Gulabzoi,” Valery greeted the man. “Let’s not go to the restaurant because

everybody there may know you. Let's go to my house and discuss everything there," continued Valery.

Gulabzoi appeared to be slightly uncomfortable, even uncertain.

"Are you an Afghan?" he asked Valery the same question again.

"No, I told you that I am Russian," responded Starostin with some irritation. "I work at the Soviet embassy. My name is Valery. Please follow me, get into my car, and we will drive to my house."

While Gulabzoi was getting into the Volga with curtained windows, Starostin checked if anybody was watching them and asked the minister if his bodyguards would get alarmed. The minister responded with a smile that he was his own bodyguard. "Here is my pistol, here is my Pashtun moustache—they give me sufficient protection. You may drive me wherever you want. What is important to me is that you know what I have to tell you. There is no other way out."

Once they arrived at Valery's home, Gulabzoi felt comfortable. Starostin's wife served a nice dinner with pilaf and other Russian and Afghan dishes. A bottle of chilled Stolichnaya was prominently featured on the table. They drank a toast to their meeting. Starostin explained to Gulabzoi that the Soviet ambassador avoided non-protocol contacts because of his status and never met with anybody covertly. That was why Valery was asked to have a candid discussion with Gulabzoi about all the issues of concern. The Afghan did not ask Starostin which organization he represented or what his position was at the embassy. He was silent for a minute, as if collecting his thoughts. Then he began to speak quickly and with a great deal of emotion.

"Comrade Valery! The April Revolution is in danger! A coup d'etat is brewing in

Afghanistan. Comrade Taraki is facing physical elimination. The plot against the revolution is being organized by the CIA, with participation of the long-term American agent Hafizullah Amin. He is a provocateur, a traitor to the Afghan people and the April Revolution. He wants to turn Afghanistan into a U.S. military base at the southern borders of your country. With that goal in mind, he is going to trigger a civil war in Afghanistan, turning our people against the PDPA and other progressive forces. He wants to compromise the brotherly assistance of the Soviet Union and destroy the long-term friendly ties between our two countries. This is why the Soviet Union, keeping in mind not only our interests, but also those of the entire international communist movement, must initiate military intervention in Afghanistan without delay, and send at least one or two airborne paratrooper divisions. This could interrupt Amin's evil plans because in case of Soviet military intervention, the commanders of the Afghan armed forces who are prepared to support Amin would not dare side with the traitor. Write down what I am telling you," Gulabzoi said in a ministerial tone and pointed to a notepad and pen on the table.

The declaration about Amin's planning of a coup d'etat, which was made in such a direct and categorical way, not by some kind of a journalist but by the hero of the revolution, an Afghan minister who was close to Taraki, by the man whose portrait decorated the first page of Afghan newspapers, overwhelmed Starostin. "Ahh, Vilior Gavrilovich! Why didn't you tell me what this visitor had in mind! You must have known for sure or at least had an idea of what Gulabzoi was so eager to share. And I wouldn't be sitting here like a fool gasping for air, but would have prepared for this conversation," thought Valery. Coming back to his senses, he grabbed a notebook and wrote down the essence of what Gulabzoi had said. While taking notes, he concentrated on the continuation

of the conversation.

“Comrade Gulabzoi, you are talking about very serious things. Such accusations regarding one of the leaders of the state require detailed and reliable evidence. How can you prove that what you told me is true?”

“I know for a fact that Amin is meeting daily with many officers, among whom there are a few of my friends and former colleagues. Some officers come to me and share with me the sentiments of those conversations. As a rule, Amin is quite openly trying to convince them that Taraki is old, that he is very ill, that he is out of his mind, and that his continuing participation in leading the state and the party will harm the revolution. However, I can state responsibly that Taraki is healthy and energetic. He works a lot. He wisely resolves a variety of state and party issues. He is persistent in trying to achieve the goals of our revolution. There is no sign of his weakness as a Khalq leader. He meets with foreign diplomats and journalists often, and not one of them ever doubted his competence and abilities. Amin directly appeals to the officers to help him remove Taraki from his position as leader of the state and the party. If Taraki refuses to leave willingly, Amin will not hesitate to overthrow him. Amin offers money to some of the bureaucrats and officers who agree to support him. He offers from fifty to one hundred thousand Afghani to those traitors as a payment for their allegiance to him and support at the crucial moment. He also promises them appointments to high-level state positions or promotions in military ranks.”

“Comrade Gulabzoi, can you be more specific? My superiors will want to know facts, numbers. For example, what are the names of those whom Amin was attempting to recruit? How much did he pay them? What exactly did he say to them? Did he ask for written commitments? In which institutions and at what positions do the officials who are making a

deal with Amin work? Where do the officers who were 'purchased' by Amin serve? In which military detachments? And would those detachments support Amin if he attempted to overthrow Taraki militarily? How would they act then? Which members of the Revolutionary Council and the Central Committee of the PDPA would support Amin in his conflict with Taraki?"

Gulabzoi was thinking. His dark eyes seemed to have darkened even more.

"At this moment, I can provide you with only a few facts. However, I will be able to give you more information in a couple of days."

"Please make some brief notes in regards to these questions that are of interest to us," said Starostin, and gave the minister a pen and a blank page from his notebook.

He repeated the questions again. The guest noted them on the paper: "Who? How much? Verbal discourse? Promises? Positions? Numbers? Members of the Rev. Council, Central Committee, etc.?"

"I will collect the information that you request in the nearest future," he promised, and put the piece of paper with the notes into his appointment book.

"Could you write the information down in Dari? I would like to be able to present as comprehensive and as detailed a report as possible to the Soviet authorities."

"I will do my best. However, I will have to ask others to assist me here." Gulabzoi seemed to be calculating something in his head.

"Are those people reliable? They will not tell Amin or anybody else about our contact?"

"This is out of the question. They are absolutely reliable. They will not say a word to anybody."

“Who are they?”

“There are very reliable people,” repeated Gulabzoi, who was unwilling to name his friends.

“How would you explain your intention to compile the lists to them?”

“This is my business. I am not going to explain anything to them. I am confident that they will not ask me about anything.”

“Would you be able to give me these materials the day after tomorrow, on the day of Eid al-Fitr?”

“Fine. This is a happy holiday and the best day of the year for faithful Afghans. It will be very convenient for me to meet with you on that day.”

“Do the logistics of meeting as we did today work for you?”

“Yes, that’s fine with me.”

“Then let’s meet on Saturday, August 23 at 8:10 p.m. near the bridge across the River Kabul on the road from Mikrorayon. I will arrive from Mikrorayon, so you should wait for me on the right side of the road.”

“Why aren’t we meeting at 8 p.m. sharp? Why at 8:10 p.m.?” asked Gulabzoi with confusion in his voice.

“To be more precise,” responded Starostin vaguely.*

Starostin’s report about his meeting with Gulabzoi made a strong impression on Ivanov and Osadchiy. The head of the KGB Representative Office, Bogdanov, was away on vacation at the time.

* According to the rules of covert procedures, operatives were advised to avoid scheduling meetings on the hour.

“It looks like the situation within PDPA’s leadership is about to explode,” Boris Semyonovich said with great concern. “It seems that Amin is in a hurry to remove Taraki at any price, by accusing him of inability to control the situation in the country. Sarwari and the three ministers appear to be the biggest obstacle for him in this endeavor. Under such circumstances, we must send a very strong message about the evolving conflict to Yuri Vladimirovich. We should use the same expressions as Gulabzoi and make sure that the message fully reflects the gravity of the situation. Prepare a short preamble in the beginning of the document. Remind them that we informed the Center about the situation several times in the past. Include Gulabzoi’s short bio and mention his particular loyalty to Taraki. In the end of the cable, mention that we have no doubt about the truthfulness of the information shared with us by the minister of communications of the DRA and that in connection with this information, we would like to receive recommendations regarding possible means to prevent the escalation of the conflict. Mention that a separate cable containing specific information regarding Amin’s recruitment of participants of the planned state coup d’etat will be sent around August 24.”

When giving these instructions, the senior operative seemed very calm and confident. However, Osadchiy and Starostin, who knew Ivanov’s style quite well, sensed that it was not easy for Boris Semyonovich to authorize such a direct message. It was possible that deep down, Ivanov still harbored some doubts.

The cable signed by Ivanov was reported by Andropov to Brezhnev and some other members of the Politburo. It seemed to have left a strong impression on the Soviet leaders. Previous KGB analyses about disagreements among the leaders of the PDPA arriving from Kabul were not reported to the “very top” and none of them sounded as dramatic as this

last one. The previous cables seemed to leave open the possibility that the sources had exaggerated the danger to the Afghan leader. They highlighted the evolving battle between Amin and Taraki in a way that made it seem plausible that one might overcome the current tensions without resorting to any emergency measures.

A lot of thinking was underway in Moscow. Detailed studies of the situation were taking place in high offices, as were consultations with experts, working meetings, and the initiation of various proposals.

The Center was even more alarmed by the second cable, which arrived from Kabul on August 24. It was addressed to Kryuchkov. The cable contained lists of members of the Central Committee of the PDPA, officers and high-level state apparatchiks, who were involved with Amin in the plot against Taraki. The military detachments that would side with the rebels were listed as well. The Soviet leaders were shocked by the quotations that were cited from the conversations between Amin and his allies. They contained specific references to Amin's plans to overthrow and physically eliminate Taraki. That cable, as well as the preceding one, quoted Gulabzoi as saying that Amin was suspected to be a CIA agent. It said that he intended to capture power in order to compromise the politics of the USSR towards developing countries and turn Afghanistan in the future into a U.S. military base at the Soviet Union's southern borders.

Those who received this information agonized over what to do in this situation. It was obvious that they had to make a decision quickly. At the same time, everybody realized that hasty action could lead to detrimental consequences that were not confined to the development of Soviet-Afghan relations. The information related to Amin's preparation of the coup d'etat was given "top secret" classification. However, at the same time, the best

analysts in the International Department of the Central Committee of CPSU, at the Foreign Ministry, Ministry of Defense, and KGB were tasked to develop recommendations regarding the situation in Afghanistan.

The KGB's First Chief Directorate sent an important document, signed by Kryuchkov, to Andropov, who presented it at a meeting of the Politburo. The document did not refer directly to Amin's plotting, but contained broader proposals regarding the situation.

It is possible that this very document became the basis for further political recommendations put forth by the Soviet leadership. Among other things, the document stated: "Domestic situation in the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan continues to rapidly deteriorate. Activities of armed groups of counter-revolutionaries which receive comprehensive support from the United States, China, England, Pakistan, Iran, and Saudi Arabia continue to expand. As a result of a direct military offensive, the rebels managed to gain full control over the provinces bordering Pakistan, captured a considerable part of the territory of Central Afghanistan, created a dangerous climate in most of the provinces adjacent to Kabul, and intensified their activities in northern areas adjacent to the Soviet border. They continue provocations in provinces bordering Iran. Recently, the reactionaries organized open military offensives in the capital. During the last two months, two serious attempts to overthrow the current regime were undertaken in Kabul. The situation in Kabul is aggravated by the fact that it is de facto cut off from the majority of other provinces that supply food to the capital. Only one highway of three, Salang, which connects Kabul with the Soviet border through the mountain range Hindu Kush, is more or less operable. However, this highway has also been frequently blocked by the rebels in the

last few days.

“Realization of social-economic reforms, which were introduced in a hurried manner and without necessary preparation, is put on hold because of the current situation involving the approaching state of civil war in the country. The government of Taraki and Amin is losing authority among the people of Afghanistan. Anti-Soviet sentiment among the population appears to be on the rise.

“Advice and recommendations to bolster propaganda activities among the people in order to strengthen the broader social base of the regime that were given to Taraki and Amin by Soviet representatives are not being implemented. Taraki and Amin continue to turn to military force as the main means for resolving all domestic political problems. As before, they make important state decisions without consulting other members of the Politburo of the PDPA Central Committee; they continue to pursue the politics of unfounded repression against their own population...”

Further, the head of the PGU reminded the reader about the elimination of Parchamists, repression directed at patriotic officers, clerics, and intellectuals. He mentioned the PDPA leaders' failure to work with Pashtun and Baluch tribes. He gravely concluded that Taraki and Amin themselves did not believe in the loyalty of their armed forces, and therefore were insisting that the Soviet leadership send Soviet military detachments to the DRA, including for their personal protection.

“In the current state of crisis, it is possible that the achievements of the April Revolution may be lost and the interests of the Soviet Union in this important region of the world may be gravely affected,” Kryuchkov's analysis continued. “Under such circumstances, the following recommendations should be considered:

1. Find a way to remove H. Amin from the position of leading the country by making him personally responsible for the senseless repressions and miscalculations in domestic politics.
2. Convince Taraki of the necessity of creating a democratic coalitional government, which should be headed by PDPA members, including representatives of Parcham. Representatives of patriotically minded clerics and tribal leaders, as well as representatives of ethnic minorities and the intelligentsia, also should be engaged in the new government.
3. Release from prisons and rehabilitate political prisoners, in particular members of Parcham who were unlawfully convicted.
4. Conduct an unofficial meeting with the leader of Parcham, Babrak Karmal, who is currently in exile in Czechoslovakia. Issues related to stabilization of the domestic political situation in the DRA must be discussed during the meeting.
5. Prepare leadership—a reserve of new leaders of the PDPA and DRA in case of further escalation of the crisis in the country.”

The most experienced readers of Kryuchkov’s document immediately took note of the first item, which proposed finding an occasion to remove Amin from power and putting all the blame for the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan on him. Kryuchkov, a very experienced bureaucrat, sought to kill two birds with one stone—he was proposing to simultaneously remove obnoxious Amin and turn him into a scapegoat.

However, there were not many experienced people with a good sense of the situation among those who read the document. Brezhnev by then had difficulty

understanding what was happening around him. His entourage tried to shield the general secretary from bad news. Ustinov, who was receiving information not only from PGU, but also from GRU and his own military advisers, had not yet decided in August who he would bet on. Gromyko also was reading not only the cables from the KGB Residency, but also documents sent by Puzanov and party advisors, which maintained that Taraki was not in danger. The foreign minister, as usually, did not rush to conclusions. He waited and put out feelers for the “leadership line” in order to support it at an opportune moment. Andropov was the most informed man at the Politburo then, but he was also very aware that the stakes were very high and required a lot of caution.

It is possible to conclude with certainty that in August there was not yet any specific plan for removing Amin. The seed, planted by Kryuchkov, had not yet germinated. But Moscow had begun to take some steps. Karmal’s name had reappeared. Andropov gave orders for the quiet engagement of agents and trusted friends to find out about the current life of the Parcham leader—his mood, contacts, and health.

It was early summer when Babrak Karmal and his family members were transferred by Czechoslovak security agents to a new residence. Ever since Karmal fled Amin’s agents in the fall, he had been hiding out at a secret State Security *dacha* near Karlovy Vary. This time they moved even further from Prague, which had become more dangerous, to Slovakia. They were allocated several furnished rooms at the sanatorium of an aluminum combine. They were given full board, swimming pool passes, and authorization to receive free medical services.

“Take advantage of it,” their Czechoslovak comrades told them. “The local mineral

water has such healing properties that it can raise people from the dead.”

Karmal grinned in response. His health was never of concern to him. He never complained about it. He was more bothered by inactivity, although at first, a year ago, he had perceived his forced departure from Afghanistan as salvation.

Finding himself in Prague in July 1978 and engaging in his new ambassadorial responsibilities, he initially felt at ease, as if he had just been liberated from an enormous burden. He was a professional revolutionary who had spent thirty years of his life in political struggle, and without any hesitation was prepared to continue his revolutionary path. However, everything that had happened in the last few months, beginning from April 27, weighed heavily on him, and seemed to be unnatural and inherently dangerous for him and his beloved Afghanistan. Although Karmal was a fighter to the core, he was absolutely unable to inflict violence or indulge in intrigues. He was an idealist who perceived the moral dangers of “the building of communism” too literally.

Karmal’s character and his revolutionary career, which were steady and open-faced, were highly respected among his allies and within the broad circles of democratic forces. However, everything changed a year ago. The events of April 27, the unexpected revolution that turned into a bloodbath, felt like an open wound in his soul.

A year earlier, having found himself in the heart of Europe, in the beautiful old city of Prague, he suddenly realized that the hated Amin was far away, which meant that all the humiliations inflicted by Amin were also far away. He thought that he did not have to bear responsibility any longer for what was happening in Afghanistan, that he would become a diplomat representing his country. He thought that he could finally take a break from the incessant hostilities between Parcham and Khalq, the animosity that evolved into Amin’s

bloody war against his allies. He was grateful for having survived, for having received this opportunity to take a break, even if a short one. He needed to rest, to get his thoughts in order, to ponder the future.

The new DRA ambassador's residence was a three-story mansion in one of the elite districts of Prague. He was allocated a black Tatra and an experienced Czech driver, as well as another car for the needs of his family. Babrak, his wife Mahbuba, their two sons and two daughters, and his personal secretary, Abdullah Bahor, settled in the mansion.

Very soon, Karmal, as expected by protocol, presented his credentials to the Czechoslovak president. Gustav Gusak asked him questions about Afghanistan and the April Revolution with sincere interest. Karmal eagerly responded, but did not share too many details with Gusak.

The first few weeks went well, almost too well to last. Karmal walked a lot, visited museums with his children, and took the family on road trips around Prague. They visited castles and temples. However, by the middle of August his mood had sharply deteriorated. Karmal turned tense and gloomy. He spent an increasing amount of time in his office alone. News arrived from Kabul that the remaining Parchamis, led by Keshtmand, had attempted to carry out a coup d'etat. There was very little specific information. It was unclear whether the Parchamis had only discussed the possibility of rebelling against the Khalqis, or had actually committed such actions. Regardless, Taraki and Amin took advantage of the situation to finish off their opponents. Keshtmand and his allies were arrested, thrown in prison, tortured, and proclaimed to be enemies of the revolution and the Afghan people, as well as agents of imperialism.

Karmal immediately understood that his quiet life was over. It was clear that he and

the other leaders of the faction who had been sent abroad as ambassadors would be considered the main instigators of the alleged plot. Karmal called Baryalai in Islamabad, Najib in Tehran, Anahita Ratebzad in Belgrade, Nur in Washington, and Vakil in London and discussed the current situation with them. At the same time all the ambassadors—Parchamis—were ordered by Kabul to return home, some “for consultations,” others “to be appointed to new positions.” Karmal got in touch with his Soviet comrades and asked them for advice. Two vans arrived at his residence a day later. The family’s personal belongings were loaded in those vans. The ambassador, his family members, and his secretary quickly left for an unknown location.

Czech security operatives brought them to a hunting lodge that was located one hundred kilometers from Prague. The new residence was a comfortable estate hidden in a deep forest. It was impossible to believe that someone could discover Karmal’s shelter, which was only linked with the outside world by telephone. However, being well versed in the rules of conspiracy, Karmal knew that he had to be very discreet when having his infrequent telephone conversations. For a long time, even his closest allies had no idea he was alive. The allies also left their respective embassies and went into hiding, first in Belgrade, then in Paris.

Karmal and his wife spent a long time trying to determine what to do regarding their children’s higher education. They took a great risk by letting their older son Vostok, who was so named after the Soviet spaceship, enroll in Prague University, and their daughter Anahita continue her studies at Moscow State University. Vostok and Anahita attended classes without any bodyguards.

Amin made an attempt to send a group of killers to Czechoslovakia to find and

assassinate his political rival. However, Soviet and local special services succeeded in preventing the assassination attempt. The killers were arrested.

Somebody, who introduced himself as a staff member of the Department of International Affairs of the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, visited Karmal in November. He was obviously embarrassed to give Karmal a message from his Moscow colleagues with instructions not to conduct any separatist activities and not to struggle against the current progressive regime in Afghanistan. He was also informed that repression against Parchamis and their families was on hold at the moment, and that the party was working harmoniously to build a new society. The thrust of the message was for Karmal to cease his anti-government activities, to stop engaging his friends in those activities, and to change his attitude toward the current regime.

Stone-faced, he listened to his guest and decided that it made absolutely no sense for him to enter into a discussion and offer any excuses. The messenger had nothing to do with the nature of the instructions. Besides, Karmal did not believe that the message objectively reflected the true attitudes of the Soviet leadership. Yet, when saying goodbye to the Czechoslovak visitor, he could not hold back: "Wait, the time will come soon when our Soviet comrades will change their tune."

However, the time when things would change did not come soon enough.

Anahita Ratebzad arrived and visited with the Karmals for a long time. Loyal friends Najib and Baryalai also visited from time to time.

Sometimes he suffered from melancholy moods—then the future seemed dark and uncertain. Once, Karmal, while walking with his younger son, said to the boy: "Kava, do you know why my friends and I became revolutionaries? The suffering of the Afghan people

was burning our hearts. We simply could not watch it and do nothing about it. But, having begun our struggle, we entered a deep, dark forest. And each one of us had to blindly find our own paths. Some eventually made it to a wide, clear road, while some got lost. If we only knew early on how dark and sometimes impassable that forest would turn out to be.”

Even though he resided at a balneological thermal springs mountain resort, Karmal felt worse day by day. The mineral water with healing properties could not heal the newly opened wounds of his soul. Karmal listened to the BBC every night and eagerly awaited the news from Afghanistan. He became more and more depressed.

Karmal could not know that Moscow had begun to think of him again, that Kryuchkov’s and Andropov’s operatives were watching his every step, and that soon his forced inactivity would come to an end.

In the middle of August, the Soviet minister of defense sent his representative to Kabul. General I.G. Pavlovsky, deputy defense minister and commander of Soviet ground forces, was accompanied by an impressive group of generals and senior officers who, upon arrival, traveled to different provinces of the country. Their goal was to clarify the situation and evaluate the military capabilities of the Afghan armed forces and the degree of danger posed by the rebels.

Before departing for Afghanistan, General Pavlovsky called the Soviet minister of defense, who was on vacation in Sochi, and asked him if there were any plans to begin a Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan. “Under no circumstances,” Ustinov firmly assured him.

Pavlovsky did have experience in military intervention in a sovereign country on his

curriculum vitae. He was the commander of the 500,000 Soviet troops dispatched to pacify Czechoslovakia in 1968. One year later, he was awarded the highest military honor, “The Hero of the Soviet Union.” Lev Gorelov, the current military adviser in the DRA, served in Czechoslovakia under Pavlovsky’s command. Lieutenant General Boris Ivanov, who was serving in Afghanistan along with Gorelov, also had been an active participant of the 1968 Soviet military intervention.

General Pavlovsky was a member of the Central Committee of CPSU, a deputy of the Supreme Soviet of CPSU, and the highest-ranking military figure who was sent to Afghanistan. He immediately became a member of the top council of Soviet officials working in Kabul, along with the Soviet ambassador and the KGB resident. Amin immediately appreciated the political prominence of the newly arrived high-ranking Soviet official. He used his first meeting with Pavlovsky to ask the general to forward his “personal request” to dispatch an air force brigade to Afghanistan. Pavlovsky got in touch with Ustinov and firmly stated that there was no need for military intervention. The minister recommended that Pavlovsky stick to the same line of thinking in the future.

Starting from the first hours after their arrival in Afghanistan, Pavlovsky and the members of his group could distinctly sense tension within the Afghan leadership and among Soviet officials. During the orientation session at the Soviet embassy, which took place on the day of their arrival, General Ivanov approached Colonel General Merimsky, deputy head of Pavlovsky’s group, and informed him that he had some materials related to Amin that might be of interest to the newly arrived colleagues. He said that Amin may have been of some interest to the CIA during his studies in the United States, and allegedly he could have been recruited by the agency. Now, according to Ivanov, Amin was planning to

carry out a coup d'état by overthrowing Taraki. This information was news to both Merimsky and Pavlovsky (as it turned out later). Merimsky responded in very generic terms, hinting that such information required comprehensive verification. Ivanov agreed with him and asked Merimsky not to tell anyone about the information. However, in the evening, when the generals retired to their residence, Merimsky was paid a visit by Gorelov.

“What was Boris Semyonovich telling you? Most probably, he was trying to convince you that Hafizullah Amin is an American spy. This is nonsense! KGB men always fantasize about spies and saboteurs. I am certain that Comrade Amin is an honest revolutionary, a loyal and sincere friend of the Soviet Union. You will have plenty of opportunities in the future to see it for yourself.”

At the time, Kabul was filled with rumors about the “second-ranking person in the DRA” being an American spy. There were even leaflets with that information disseminated in the city. It was unknown who authored and dispersed them.

Gorelov and Ivanov were invited to report on the situation in Afghanistan at a Politburo session in Moscow. It was there that the conflict between the head of the Soviet military advisory mission and representatives of the KGB became evident. Gromyko, Andropov, Ustinov, and Head of the General Staff Ogarkov subjected the two generals to a barrage of questions about the potential of the counter-revolutionary movement, the military capabilities of the Afghan army, the relationships among the leaders of the DRA, and the reasons for past failures. Gorelov was firm in his assessment: contradictions in the leadership can be overcome, and that will require Moscow to trust Amin more; Afghan armed forces are capable of defending the revolution even if Pakistan dared to begin direct

military intervention; there should be no Soviet military intervention.

The analysis of the KGB's Ivanov was the opposite of Gorelov's. He warned the members of the Politburo's Afghanistan Commission about the fissures in the Khalqi leadership and the danger of confrontation between Amin and Taraki, and he exuded skepticism about the military capabilities of the Afghan army. However, he was careful to avoid the issue of the possibility of direct Soviet military participation in the conflict.

The longer the discussion at the Politburo Commission went, the gloomier the Soviet leaders became. However, judging by some questions and remarks, it became apparent that Ivanov's analysis more closely appealed to the hearts of the Politburo members.

Having just returned to Kabul, Gorelov went to southern Afghanistan to lead an operation with the goal of liberating Urganj Province from the rebels. General Pavlovsky joined him at the command quarters of the troops. In the height of the operation, the two generals decided to fly over the area of fighting in a helicopter. However, they did not see any fire or smoke on the ground below them. They landed. Afghan commanders reported: "Success! When the rebels found out that two divisions were deployed to fight them, they immediately left for Pakistan. There were no casualties on either side."

Pavlovsky and Gorelov, both of whom were World War II veterans and participants of the Soviet military intervention in Czechoslovakia, looked at each other and, emotionally stirred, hugged. "It is so good, Lev, that there are no casualties," said Pavlovsky. "Enough of casualties. It is time to resolve the situation peacefully."

As strange as it may seem, those two generals did not want a war in Afghanistan. Perhaps it was their direct experience in suppressing the Prague Spring that turned them into opponents of Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan. Memories of the mass

indignation of Czech citizens watching Soviet tanks roll into the streets of Prague were too fresh in the generals' minds.

Pavlovsky, particularly at first, fully shared the point of view of Gorelov and Zaplatin, who thought that Moscow should bet on Amin. In Gorelov's view, Amin was the person who was capable of dealing with any challenge, while his enemies were petty plotters (Sarwari and his Khalqi company) or small-minded revisionists (Karmal and other Parchamis). Pavlovsky's thinking played a trick on him.

This is what happened. In late August, B.S. Ivanov, who wanted to receive confirmation from the original sources about the coup d'etat being plotted, confidentially met with Sarwari and Watanjar. The Afghans convinced him that Amin would begin arresting all his opponents throughout the country as soon as Taraki departed for the next session of the Conference of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), which was to be held in Havana, Cuba. Both Sarwari and Watanjar were speaking about their intentions to forestall Amin by striking first, with the support of loyal officers from the two tank brigades that were deployed near Kabul. As always, having listened to the guests, Ivanov asked them to use restraint and avoid being provoked. However, his tone was such that both Afghans left the meeting convinced that he supported their mission. They thought that their Soviet comrades obviously did not mind such decisive measures.

Ambassador Puzanov held a meeting with the participation of Safronchuk and representatives from the KGB and GRU. The decision was taken to send a cable to Moscow confirming the insidious plans of the Afghan prime minister. Puzanov suggested that General Pavlovsky also sign the cable. Ivan Grigorievich was invited to come to the embassy. He read the prepared text, but, surprisingly, refused to sign it.

“I don’t have my own intelligence here; thus I am not signing the report, which has not been verified.”

The meeting participants probably wondered what Pavlovsky had in mind, as the GRU was an outlet of the General Staff.

Ivanov broke an awkward pause: “Fine, we shall send the cable only to the Foreign Ministry and the KGB. We will not send it to the Ministry of Defense.”

The cable was sent. Kryuchkov called the next day. As Ivanov was out of the office, General Neshumov, who was in charge of border protection, took the call.

“Tell me, Comrade Neshumov,” Kryuchkov spoke dryly, “Did General Pavlovsky know about the cable that was sent yesterday?”

“Yes, Comrade Kryuchkov. He did.”

“Thank you, Comrade Neshumov. Please tell Boris Semyonovich that Pavlovsky sent his own cable yesterday, in which he recommends against believing the rumors about the plot against Taraki, calls Amin a loyal friend of the Soviet Union, and recommends that we support Amin. Also tell Boris Semyonovich that Andropov and Ustinov, each having received their cable, asked that it be distributed among the members of the Politburo. Do you realize what happened? Two opposite messages arrived on the same day from Kabul,” said Kryuchkov with irritation. “Find out what is going on there and have Comrade Ivanov present his report to me by tonight.”

Hafizullah Amin, as the de facto head of its government, should have represented Afghanistan at the Havana session of the NAM Summit. However, since the summer, Amin had applied a lot of pressure on Taraki for him to travel to Cuba as the new leader of the

global revolutionary movement. That should have made the general secretary suspicious of Amin's hidden intentions, as Taraki was well aware that Amin would never miss an opportunity to be the star on the international stage or mingle with such extraordinary personalities as Fidel Castro. Yet all of the sudden Amin was trying to pass on such an opportunity to "his teacher." However, Taraki had a soft spot for adulation, and thus he did not sense anything suspicious.

The KGB Residency in Kabul received Kryuchkov's recommendation to talk Taraki out of traveling to Cuba. The Center had reasons to believe that Amin might take advantage of Taraki's prolonged absence from the country in order to seize power. Alas, Taraki did not want to listen to those arguments. Moreover, he decided to use a Boeing jet, recently acquired from the Americans, for the flight to Havana. The Center got alarmed even more as they thought about potential sabotage. KGB representatives in Kabul were ordered to meet with Taraki once again and persuade him to use a specially allocated Soviet government plane with a Soviet crew. After great difficulty, Taraki was finally persuaded. The Afghan delegation left for Cuba on August 30. Besides Taraki, the delegation consisted mostly of people who were close to Amin—Minister of Foreign Affairs Shah Wali, the former head of Tsarandoi and current head of the Secretariat of Head of State, Tarun, Commander of the Presidential Guard Jandad, and others. The delegation planned to make a stop in Moscow on their return. Therefore Amin instructed his men to hold confidential meetings with Soviet representatives and inform them that a group of prominent Khalqis was preparing a plot against him.

Amin seemed to be very well informed about the plans of the three ministers and Sarwari. The issue was, who would strike first?

The Soviet government plane, returning from Havana, landed in Moscow on the morning of September 10. According to the plan, the Afghan leader was supposed to make a stop for rest in Moscow and meet with Brezhnev. Late in the evening of September 10, the meeting took place in the Kremlin.

However, it was not a routine protocol meeting between the leaders of two friendly countries. Leonid Ilyich was supposed to deliver a number of unfavorable assessments of the situation in the DRA and directly appeal to Taraki to sort things out among his entourage.

The Afghan guest, who had recovered from the long flight and heavy feasts that began in Cuba and continued on board the Soviet plane, at first expected a routine discussion within the framework of protocol. He was not concerned by the fact that he was the only one invited to the meeting in the Kremlin. His retinue stayed behind. Brezhnev was flanked at the table by Minister of Foreign Affairs Gromyko and his adviser, Alexandrov-Agentov. Both men were deliberately business-like and severe looking. Gavrillov, an adviser to the Soviet Foreign Ministry, was interpreting. After exchanging handshakes and kisses, Leonid Ilyich quickly moved to business. Reading the prepared text without pause, he methodically named the errors committed by the Afghan revolutionaries and the problems that had to be immediately resolved.

First Brezhnev focused on party building, the necessity of expanding the party by engaging more workers, peasants, and progressively minded intellectuals. One of the authors of the text in Brezhnev's brief included a passage describing a period of Russian civil war. Leonid Ilyich diligently read: "The Central Committee of our party, led by V.I. Lenin, conducted special 'party weeks.' Those were mass campaigns to recruit the best

workers, avant-garde peasants, and intelligentsia to the party ranks. New party members were departing for the fronts of the civil war...That was the way to solve the problem of strengthening and expanding the party ranks, while at the same time fighting the counter-revolution.”

“This is all correct,” nodded Taraki, thinking, “Where should we get those best workers and avant-garde peasants?”

“Intensification of political and educational activities among the population is very important,” Brezhnev continued reading. “By the way, here is a question, Comrade Taraki. Soviet Communist Party advisers assist secretaries of provincial PDPA committees in as many as eleven of your country’s provinces. Many of those secretaries combine their PDPA appointments with positions as provincial governors. It would be more appropriate to separate official government positions from PDPA appointments.

“Because of your country’s specific conditions, the issue of clarifying the PDPA’s and the government’s stance toward religion for the broad masses is of particular importance...Selection and placement of military, PDPA and government cadres are becoming particularly important in the conditions of the continuing struggle against counter-revolution. I also am aware of your bitter experiences caused by the treachery of some army officers and violations of the party norms by government and party officials in some provinces.”

“Thank you, Leonid Ilyich,” Taraki said, agreeing with the criticism. “I will speak about this issue later. I would like to ask you, if it is possible, to send the translation of your remarks to me via the Soviet ambassador. I’ve been taking notes, but would like to have the full text in order to study it more attentively.”

“We will send you the translation,” promised Brezhnev, taking a short break from reading his prepared text. He was about to convey the most important message, which was the main reason for inviting this Afghan revolutionary to the Kremlin: “Many times, in our conversations and correspondence, we have touched upon the importance of a truly collective party leadership and the need for strict adherence to the principles of collective leadership. I know that your Politburo recently adopted a number of excellent decrees in this regard. However, it seems that it is taking much too long to implement these decrees. I am going to frankly tell you, Comrade Taraki, that we are convinced that the lack of resolution of this issue, as well as violations of the norms of inner-party democracy and the groundless repression against your party comrades, hold back the energy of the party, prevent the evolution of its creative powers, and create an atmosphere of tension among the cadres and the population.”

Having uttered such a long monologue, Brezhnev paused and gave his Afghan guest a stern look above his reading glasses. The guest seemed depressed. Gavrilov, who was interpreting the conversation and who had familiarized himself with Brezhnev’s text in advance, turned pale. He nervously shuffled his papers. The moment was coming when Brezhnev was supposed to warn his Afghan guest about the imminent danger. Would the general secretary of PDPA be able to perceive this warning adequately? Would he be able to understand it?

“I would not consider my duty fulfilled to the end, Comrade Taraki, if, in confidence, I did not touch on an issue that is of great concern to us. Not only to us, but according to the information that we have, to some PDPA activists as well,” Brezhnev put emphasis on those words. “Your special role as the general secretary and the chairman of the Revolutionary

Council in leading the party and state, in the conditions of the Afghan revolution, is clear. However, it hardly makes sense for anyone but you to occupy the sole leadership position of your country, its armed forces, and the state security services. To do otherwise may lead to undesirable consequences.”

“That is correct,” quietly mumbled Taraki.

Gavrilov, taking advantage of the pause, tried to glean if the guest fully understood what he had been told. That message was the main reason for the meeting. The general secretary of the Central Committee of the CPSU had given his colleague an unambiguous signal: stop playing with fire, stop sharing power with Amin, get rid of him. But Taraki’s demeanor did not enable his hosts to discern if their guest comprehended the danger or still remained naively unaware of it. “This is correct,” was Taraki’s only response to the grave warning.

Continuing, Leonid Ilyich pointed out to Taraki the weak military capabilities of the Afghan armed forces, the unsatisfactory political and moral condition of the military, and the passivity of the army in pushing back the rebels. Brezhnev reminded his guest that the USSR had provided Afghanistan with hundreds of tanks, armored vehicles, heavy weapons, jets, and helicopters in the last six months. He reproached Taraki: “Unfortunately, the recommendations of the 1,500 Soviet military advisers who work in the Afghan armed forces are not being fully implemented.” He then assured Taraki, “The Soviet Union will continue to provide comprehensive support and assistance to your party and the Afghan people.” Brezhnev seemed visibly relieved when turning over the last page of his text. It was now Taraki’s turn to speak. He was very experienced in bureaucratic protocol, and began with a long and elaborate expression of gratitude for the advice and criticism. He

then moved on to comment on some issues that seemed particularly important or controversial to him. For example, with reference to the separation of the party and state positions, he said: "We tried to implement it, but because of the specifics of the Afghan situation, we failed. As the country is in a state of war, we have to concentrate power in the hands of one individual." He agreed that it was necessary to create an efficient system of local organs of power. "Until now we have not eliminated the feudal way of governing," he admitted.

"Our troops, particularly the ground troops," said Taraki, "were under the strong influence of mullahs and religious fanatics, who called themselves 'Muslim brothers.' We call them 'Satan's brothers.' It is natural that the moral condition of such soldiers was low. Now we are going to cut the arms of Satan's brothers off, which will certainly improve the situation. Not one soldier betrayed us. It is officers who are the traitors," Taraki lied in his attempt to flatter the Soviet leaders. He hit the bull's eye, because Gromyko, who had been silent until then, suddenly got stirred up.

"This is very interesting. This is a class-related phenomenon."

Taraki also expressed his disagreement with the remark that the Afghans do not always take the Soviet military advisers' recommendations into consideration. He reassured his hosts that there was no groundless repression, and finally moved on to the main topic. Most probably, he did not understand the full extent of the threat that had been directed at him.

"You mentioned that somebody could take advantage of the powers that I am endowed with as the general secretary of the PDPA and the chairman of the Revolutionary Council. This is a very serious business. From now on I will very closely watch everything

that is happening behind my back.”

That was all that Taraki said regarding Brezhnev’s warning. Brezhnev did not return to the topic, and neither did Gromyko. However, in the very end, Brezhnev glanced at his text and seemed to discover one more item there, which he had failed to read. So when Taraki asked to discuss the topic of further Soviet military assistance to Afghanistan, Brezhnev awkwardly blurted out: “I would like to clarify—do you think that there is unity in the Politburo of your party?”

Taraki hesitated for a minute, but decided not to spill his grievances to the Soviets. “Such unity exists, in my opinion,” he said without a great deal of conviction. “Before the revolution, there existed negative personal relationships, animosity among a few members of the Politburo. However, now that the party is in power, the animosity is gone.”

At the conclusion of the meeting, Taraki, as before, implored Brezhnev to authorize additional supplies of military vehicles, ammunition, and equipment. The list he read was long: 11,000 trucks, ten Tu-22 jet bombers, ten Mig-21bis jet fighters, one hundred and fifty armored vehicles, sixty-two BMP, 100,000 pairs of boots, 20,000 blankets, and 30,000 overcoats. Taraki also reminded his hosts about his earlier request for allocation of thirty million US dollars for “covering expenses caused by the raise in salaries and material supplies for officers and soldiers.” He also asked the Soviet Union to provide medical treatment for a thousand wounded soldiers and officers in military hospitals in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

Brezhnev, who had become very tired and visibly eager to say goodbye to the Afghan revolutionary, assured him that all those requests were being considered by the Soviet government and that the Afghan leaders would be informed once the decisions had

been taken.

It was past midnight when Taraki arrived at the guest residence in Lenin Hills. He was exhausted and eager to go to bed. The time difference between Havana and Moscow was eight hours. Immediately upon his arrival in Moscow he had felt compelled to speak to the Afghan students who were studying in the USSR. Then he had the intense meeting in the Kremlin. On the way to the bedroom, in a corridor of the residence, Taraki unexpectedly walked into his old acquaintance Alexei Petrov, whose official position in Kabul was a TASS correspondent. They embraced and Taraki invited Alexei to have a drink. Petrov obliged, as he had a good reason to be at the residence at that late hour.

The PGU leaders were not at all certain that Taraki would actually understand the gravity of the warning delivered by Brezhnev. So in order to ensure that Taraki got it, Petrov, who had a close relationship with Taraki, was sent over to the guest residence. Alexei spoke Dari fluently, so they could have a one-on-one conversation.

When they had settled at the table in the dining room and the waiter had served them drinks, Alexei asked Taraki about his impression of the meeting with Brezhnev. "It was a very good meeting," Taraki replied enthusiastically. "Leonid Ilyich and Fidel Castro are true revolutionaries!"

Then Alexei carefully inquired: "How did you perceive Leonid Ilyich's message that nobody else but you should have an exclusive position in the leadership of the country?" Taraki took a minute to think. Then he had some whiskey and said to Petrov: "You know about jet lag after several long flights. I slept very little, felt very tired, and did not understand everything that Leonid Ilyich said to me. But he promised to send me detailed notes of the conversation."

Petrov responded sternly, briefly summarizing the essence of the message that had been delivered to Taraki in the Kremlin: "A coup d'état is being plotted in Afghanistan. Hafizullah Amin wants to remove you from your position. This may happen in the next few days. This is what Leonid Ilyich was trying to tell you. But because of his status, he could not say it so openly."

Taraki seemed surprised, but not scared. It was apparent that he still did not appreciate the acuteness of the threat that was looming over him.

"What should I do when I arrive in Kabul?"

"You should find an appropriate reason to strip Amin of his titles, remove him from his positions, and then, possibly, try him for all the crimes that he has committed."

"I think we will settle all these issues with Amin, Alexei." Taraki stood up. So did Petrov. It was time for Taraki to rest. The old friends embraced before saying goodbye to each other.

Amin's people who accompanied Taraki on that trip did not waste any time on that day, September 10, either. Their task was to inform the Soviet leaders about the plot against the prime minister, which was prepared by the "heroes of revolution" who had gone astray. Counterintelligence Chief Aziz Akbari approached Colonel Bogdanov on the day of the delegation's arrival and said that he needed to speak with him. Leonid Pavlovich asked some intelligence operative who spoke Dari to interpret. Akbari said that he had an assignment, given to him by Comrade Amin, who wanted his Soviet colleagues to be informed that a plot against him in Kabul was being spearheaded by four prominent Khalqis. Akbari listed the names of the four plotters and added: "Comrade Amin asked that our conversation be interpreted by Major Tarun, who speaks Russian well." However, to

Bogdanov's astonishment, he added: "Please keep in mind that everything I am going to say in Tarun's presence does not reflect reality."

Bogdanov, who was very intrigued, approached Tarun: "Would you please help us with the interpretation?" Tarun eagerly agreed.

When only the three of them remained in the room, Aziz Akbari repeated the information about the plot and named the four key plotters. Bogdanov pretended that he had never heard about it before. When the conversation was over and Akbari walked out of the room, Bogdanov asked Tarun for his opinion about the information. Tarun confirmed that everything that Akbari said was true. He added that the traitors not only wanted to remove Amin from his position, but they were planning to eliminate him physically. Bogdanov was aware of that as well. Then the tone of the conversation changed. Tarun started to curse Taraki, saying that he was out of his mind, and added that the plotters also wanted to kill him, Tarun.

Bogdanov, as had become routine, appealed to Tarun not to get carried away by the provocations and to do everything possible to prevent a split within the Afghan leadership. After the conversation was over, he went looking for Aziz Akbari again. Akbari appeared frightened and agitated. He told Bogdanov that the real plot was being planned by Amin himself, and that Amin had decided to remove Taraki and become the single ruler of Afghanistan. Amin, according to Akbari, had the allegiance of Head of the General Staff Yaqub and other members of the Central Committee. Because the three ministers and Sarwari were an obstacle in his path to full control of power, Amin wanted to eliminate them first. The coup should take place in the nearest future.

Bogdanov was in Moscow on vacation. But after all those conversations, it became

clear to him that he had to return to Kabul. When he arrived in Yasenevo in the morning of the next day, he wrote a detailed report about his conversations with the Afghans. He concluded that Amin was going to undertake some decisive steps in the next few days.

Kryuchkov held a meeting that evening, and Bogdanov, as head of the KGB Representative Office in Kabul, reported his analysis of the situation. He suggested that if the coup d'état succeeded, then Hafizullah Amin would unleash mass repression. He would try to destroy not only the remaining Parchamis, but also the Khalqis who did not demonstrate personal loyalty to him, which would mean the destruction of the party. As a Pashtun nationalist, Amin would transfer military activities to the tribal zone, which meant the territory of Pakistan. That would inevitably cause an outbreak of major war between the two states. Because the Soviet Union provided Kabul with enormous military aid, this scenario might cause a direct confrontation between the Soviet Union and the United States in the region.

After delivering this very grim prognosis, Bogdanov said that he fully supported those colleagues who were proponents of severe measures against Amin.

Kryuchkov agreed with him: "Amin's influence over the political process must be curtailed."

"We have taken an important step already," said General Medyanik. "We warned Taraki about the danger. He must do something about it, unless he wants to die."

"What else is possible and necessary to do?" Kryuchkov stared at the meeting participants with displeasure. "Think. Perhaps we can use the parliament in order to resolve the situation in a legitimate way?"

His colleagues shrugged their shoulders. Which parliament? The chief seemed to be

confusing Afghanistan with Switzerland.

The sentence for Amin had been issued. That was clear to everybody. But who would carry it out? Who would become the executioner? No one in that office dared to utter the words that could destroy his future career.

“Fine,” Bogdanov broke the silence. “Let's agree to do the following. I am leaving for Kabul. During the meetings with both sides, I will express our current unwavering position of support for the unity of the party and its leadership. If the opposition raises an issue about Amin again, I will signal to them that the solution rests with them. The Soviet Union will not interfere in the domestic affairs of Afghanistan.”

That was how the meeting was adjourned.

A major conference dedicated to Afghan affairs had been conducted by Kryuchkov several days earlier. It was an interagency conference. Leaders of the First Chief Directorate were joined by representatives of the GRU in Yasenevo. The GRU group was led by General Ivashutin, the head of Military Intelligence. Both agencies put forward very pessimistic analyses of the situation. Kryuchkov, referring to the opinion of the special KGB representative Ivanov, declared that Amin, with his intrigues, ambitions, and unpredictability, had become a direct threat to the socialist course of Afghanistan and to Soviet interests in the country.

The GRU head cited numerous instances in which American positions in the region were being strengthened. According to Ivashutin, the only way to maintain control over the situation was to initiate a Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan.

The room grew silent after that statement was made. All of the participants in that secret conference knew General Ivashutin well. They realized that he would never deliver such a

statement without the support of the powerful minister of defense. It was possible that Ivashutin's presentation was intended as a litmus test to gauge the reaction of other members of the intelligence community.

Kryuchkov abstained from voicing his own opinion. He was authorized to express the opinion of his boss. "Yuri Vladimirovich thinks that we should not do this now."

In conclusion, both sides agreed that there was a serious foundation for concerns about the situation in the region in general and in Afghanistan in particular. They agreed to work together to keep Amin under control and to be vigilant about any possible attempts he might make to contact the Americans directly. The exposure of American interference in the domestic affairs of Afghanistan was to be continued. The rebels were to be depicted as mercenaries of imperialism and Zionism. As to Soviet military intervention, it should be possible to send troops to those areas where the lives of Soviet citizens might be in danger. Kryuchkov did not say a word at that conference about the PGU activities in Europe that dealt with preparing emigrant Parchamis for the impending new coup d'état. This information remained highly classified even for his colleagues from the GRU.

Chapter 7:

Chronicle of the Coup d'Etat

September 11

On September 11, 1979, Nur Mohammad Taraki, along with members of an accompanying delegation, was returning to Kabul from Moscow. Soviet advisers and staff members of different ministries and organizations flew with their families in the same government-chartered plane as the Afghan leader. Naturally, they were not seated in the special salon reserved for top officials, but rather were closer to the rear of the aircraft. At the time, as is the case today, it was considered a great honor to travel in the same plane as the top leader of a country.

Many important officials arrived at the Kabul airport to greet Taraki. Members of the PDPA Central Committee, ministers, and leaders of the security services, as well as ambassadors, were all eager to pay their respects to the returning head of the Afghan state. The diplomats who were present at the greeting ceremony were also eager to receive information about the situation in the top ranks of the Afghan government. At the time, Kabul was buzzing with incredible rumors that Amin was a CIA agent and would soon be demoted, that Taraki's tenure was nearing its end, and that a coup d'etat was imminent.

Alexander Mikhailovich Puzanov, the doyen of the diplomatic corps accredited in Kabul, also arrived at the airport. Several ambassadors and senior diplomats from different countries, all eager to hear Puzanov's take on the situation in Afghanistan, immediately surrounded him. The ambassador's responses were vague and indirect; it was impossible to gain anything other than generalities from him.

There were also several plain-clothed Zenit agents among the group of Soviet diplomats. They were all armed, but their task was vague: simply to observe, react to the situation as appropriate, and avoid provocations.

The welcome party crowded in front of the airport's modest terminal and scanned the clear Afghan sky for the airplane that was scheduled to arrive at any moment.

In Afghanistan, everything that appears—the first rays of the morning sun, the cloud that breaks into rain, bringing relief to valleys exhausted by the merciless sun—always appears from behind the mountains. Refreshing cool winds appear from behind the mountains, as do the devastating winds that destroy everything in their path. Travelers and airplanes arrive from behind the mountains as well.

The second-in-command and de facto head of government, the driving force behind the armed forces, special services, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the hero of the revolution, Comrade Hafizullah Amin, was nowhere to be seen, even though the time for the plane's arrival was fast approaching. Anxious whispers began to circulate among those present. Some diplomats began to come up with extraordinary explanations for Amin's absence. Could it be that Amin had already been relieved of all his positions? Perhaps he was hiding in a specially guarded section of the airport and would not appear in public until a certain time?

Finally they saw the glint of silver wings above the horizon. The plane started its descent, but suddenly the pilots, as if changing their minds, evened out the trajectory and flew past the airport and over the mountains. A few minutes later the plane reappeared and seemed to be preparing to descend. That maneuver was suddenly aborted as well, and the plane began circling over the airport. The behavior was erratic, to say the least. The

weather was clear and cloudless, with one hundred percent visibility. There were no obstructions visible on the landing strip. It seemed like an invisible force prevented the airplane from landing.

The welcoming crowd grew increasingly more anxious. What's going on? The diplomats exchanged nervous glances. Only on its third attempt did the airplane touch down on the ground and begin to taxi towards its parking area. At that moment, a Volkswagen appeared on the tarmac. Hafizullah Amin emerged from the vehicle, dashed to the congregation assembled at the airfield, and at the last moment took his place alongside the carpet runner.

Taraki was the first passenger to disembark from the aircraft. He descended to the ground with his typical smile, radiating warmth. Upon greeting his assembled sycophants, he enthusiastically embraced his "loyal pupil." However, some of those present said that Taraki was taken aback when he saw Amin amongst his greeters, as if his presence was completely unexpected. From afar, however, everything seemed to be in order. The "pupil" bowed gratefully and kissed the hand of his "teacher" before they embraced like very close relatives. "I hope everyone is here," said Taraki, perhaps alluding to the disgraced ministers. "Don't worry," replied Amin. "Everyone is in place. Everyone was anxious for your return."

Taraki shook hands and exchanged kisses with the other members of the government and party leadership before energetically proceeding to a group of foreign diplomats. He firmly and with great enthusiasm shook the hand of the Soviet ambassador before greeting the heads of the diplomatic missions of other states.

After the conclusion of the greeting ceremony, the presidential motorcade left for the

People's Palace, where a joint meeting of the Central Committee, Revolutionary Council, and the government was to take place. Taraki and Amin drove in the same car.

But what happened that day at the Kabul airport? Why had Amin been so late? Why did Taraki's plane spend so much time circling above the Afghan capital? The answers to these questions only emerged with time.

It turned out that the prime minister had been warned that a group of specially trained officers, allies of the "rebellious four," would attempt to assassinate him upon his appearance at the airport. It is difficult to gauge how credible the threat was, but Amin ordered those loyal to him to conduct a thorough search of the airport facilities and replace the guards on the highway leading from the airport to downtown Kabul. Anyone who looked even remotely suspicious was to be detained, searched, and arrested without delay and until further notice. The process had to happen carefully and inconspicuously, so as not to arouse undue suspicion or rumor. Amin stayed in his residence until he was assured that the airport and highway were under the full control of his trusted forces. When he received confirmation, he got into an unremarkable Volkswagen and drove himself to the airport to meet his "favorite teacher," without any guards.

Earlier, a similar threat directed at Taraki had appeared on the desk of the head of security services, Assadullah Sarwari. Sarwari's agents in Amin's entourage reported that the plane with Taraki on board would be hit during its landing by a surface-to-air missile fired by an air defense force unit guarding the airport. Sarwari immediately sent operatives to each site that could pose a potential threat. He replaced the radio-location communications operators on duty and removed almost all the officers who had been in charge of artillery units stationed around the airport. Only when he was completely

assured that there was no threat to Taraki's plane did Sarwari permit the landing. Not unlike Amin, he joined the line of officials greeting Taraki at the very last moment.

Amin was correct: there had been no accidents during the head of state's absence. All prominent government members remained in their posts. On that occasion, Amin's and Taraki's sides ended with a draw, but the stakes had been very high.

The meeting at the People's Palace went smoothly. Taraki gave a very long, flowery speech concerning the results of the Non-Aligned Movement Summit in Havana, in which he emphasized Afghanistan's role in the movement. He also mentioned that he had personally received special attention from many foreign journalists. Amin asked a provocative question concerning Brezhnev's peculiar reception of Taraki in Moscow, in which other members of the Afghan delegation were not invited to participate. Taraki evaded a direct answer by bringing up the topic of the Soviet Union's plans for military assistance to Afghanistan. His message that the general secretary of the Central Committee of the Soviet Union's Communist Party was committed to satisfying all Afghan requests regarding a considerable increase in supply of weapons, ammunition, equipment, and technology was greeted by applause. "Such issues, my son, should be resolved confidentially," he explained somewhat condescendingly to Amin. But Amin most likely either knew for sure or could figure out that it was not only the issue of military assistance that was discussed by Taraki and Brezhnev in the Kremlin.

September 12

Amin wasted no time while the head of state was away at the remote "Island of Freedom." During the ten days that Amin was in charge of Afghanistan, he reinforced his

position within the leadership of the country and the party even though he could not eliminate the “gang of four.” With the help of his nephew Asadullah, the same one who had been mentored by the Soviet adviser Safronchuk, Amin recruited more allies from among the members of the Central Committee and heads of various prominent ministries. The pair favored a certain method of appraising the loyalty of their potential allies: Asadullah would invite a bureaucrat for a conversation and then directly ask whether he would support Amin in his struggle against the opposition and the traitors. Meanwhile Asadullah sat behind a desk that had a loaded pistol lying on it in plain sight. If he sensed any hesitation in his interlocutor’s response, he would brandish the gun and threaten death or imprisonment. By that point very few people had any lingering doubts as to who was the most powerful man in Afghanistan.

By the time he went to see Taraki on the day after his return, Amin had stopped playing the role of obedient “pupil.” The situation was clear to him. Either he would remove the rebellious Khalqis, or the Khalqis would remove him. However, as of two weeks ago the outcome of the struggle was still uncertain. Having formed a secret pact of support with most of the Central Committee’s members, Amin decided to take decisive action. He directly demanded that the general secretary remove all four members from their positions and indict them on charges of plotting against Amin and the revolution.

He was well prepared for the conversation. While discussing the case of Sarwari, Amin began citing instances of the cruel and widespread crackdowns carried out by the security services. He compared the AGSA to Daoud’s gendarmerie, to the brutal security services of the shah of Iran, and even to the CIA. He cursed while describing the dirty methods practiced by Sarwari, and insisted that only Sarwari’s removal would clear the

shameful connotations from the organization. He described the others—Gulabzoi, Mazdouryar, and Watanjar—similarly.

Taraki, who initially attempted to conduct the conversation in his characteristically peaceful manner, finally said, “Perhaps you yourself should take a break from state affairs. Why don’t you go abroad as an ambassador to the country of your choice?”

Amin glared maliciously at the head of state and uttered a phrase that rendered the rest of the conversation unnecessary. “You’d better shut up. Your drunkenness and old age deprive you of reason.”

He left Taraki’s office without saying goodbye. The bridges were burned. Later the same day he called Taraki and posed an ultimatum: “If you don’t fire these four traitors and transfer them to my authority, I will stop obeying your orders as head of state.”

September 13

Here we include the direct testimonials of various witnesses to the events of that September.*

Leonid Pavlovich Bogdanov, Head of the KGB Representative Office in Afghanistan:

On the night of September 12, I flew by Aeroflot to Kabul. My first deputy, Vladimir Chuchukin, picked me up at the airport and briefly described the situation. We agreed to have a more detailed discussion at my home during lunch. I wanted to take a nap after lunch, but was soon awakened by Assadullah Sarwari, the head of AGSA. He said he needed to speak urgently. I noticed that he appeared very anxious. Skipping the customary prolonged Afghan

* The authors of the book interviewed these people during the period of 1989-2010. The interviews were conducted in Kabul, Moscow, and West European countries.

greeting, he informed me that Amin had ordered his arrest, along with three of his fellow ministers. I recommended that all four of them go immediately to Taraki's palace and remain there until further notice. I myself went straight to the embassy and called Kryuchkov. "Amin must be neutralized immediately, or else it will be too late."

Just then, however, Ivanov entered my office. He took the receiver and tried to soften the tone of the conversation: "Allow them to make one last attempt to resolve the conflict peacefully." Then we both went to the ambassador to discuss how to proceed. A short while later, Puzanov, Pavlovsky, Gorelov, Ivanov, and Rurikov all went to Taraki's.

At about 6 p.m. I was told that Sarwari and the three ministers had arrived at the embassy without prior notice. They persistently requested that I meet with them, so I went downstairs and walked outside to where a Mercedes was parked with Sarwari behind the wheel and the three ministers inside. Sarwari repeated his concern about an order that had been issued for their arrest or liquidation. They had come to the Soviet embassy seeking shelter. I tried to calm the unexpected guests by informing them that at that very moment Soviet comrades were talking with Amin, and that they should hope for the best. Another guest, Aziz Akbari, head of counterintelligence, arrived unexpectedly. He had been instructed by Amin to inform the embassy about the "gang of four" plot. Noticing the Mercedes, he approached it, exchanged phrases in Pashto with Sarwari, and left.

I understood that it would make no sense for the ministers to remain inside the car, so I invited them into the embassy and arranged for tea to be served. At some point, I was alone with Sarwari. He quietly asked how the Soviet Union would react to the elimination of Amin. My response was the same that I've repeatedly used: "We support unity in the Afghan leadership. This is our principal position. It is my personal view that nobody should be allowed

to divide the party. I cannot add any more to what I said regarding this subject. This is your internal affair." It seemed that Sarwari understood my response as an indication that the Soviet Union would not oppose his plans. "Why didn't we do this before? I should have strangled Amin with my own hands when he last met with Taraki."

Then I was summoned to the telephone. Major Tarun was on the line. Akbari must have tipped him off about our guests, because the major sarcastically asked if there was some sort of reception being held at the embassy. I got rid of him by saying that I had just arrived and was unaware of what was going on.

Watanjar then asked for permission to use our city phone line. One of our diplomats accompanied him to the phone. He began to call, as we understood it, commanders of military detachments located near Kabul. He was asking for their loyalty in rebelling against Amin. Because he was speaking in Pashto, our diplomat did not understand everything that was said. Later, we found out that all of the commanders, after finishing their conversations with Watanjar, immediately called the head of the General Staff, Yaqub, to inform him of Watanjar's intentions. This was very unpleasant for us, because Watanjar was using an open line that was most certainly being monitored by Amin's people. It would appear as though the plotters were trying to fashion a coup against the prime minister from the Soviet embassy.

Our representatives then returned from the palace and began to compile a cable describing the results of their meeting with Taraki. The phone rang again and the caller asked for Watanjar. It was Amin on the line. He spoke rudely to Watanjar, saying, "You, heroes of the revolution, are as scared as rats." Then Taraki took the phone, calmed the ministers down, and recommended that they return home because their lives were not in danger.

Alexander Mikhailovich Puzanov, Soviet Ambassador to Kabul:

By late August, the situation was worsening by the hour. Amin had cast his net around his “teacher.” Under no circumstances should Taraki have left Kabul, but he was careless.

He asked us for an airplane to fly to Cuba, but then, a day before his flight, he declared that he would fly in his own plane. The Afghans had recently purchased a Boeing from the United States, and Taraki wanted to use that aircraft. Why did he change his mind so abruptly? We felt that something was not right. Anything could have happened; the airplane was old and the crew had not been vetted. I attempted to talk Taraki out of the idea. “This is not good, Comrade Taraki. Our government plane is already in Tashkent. The Soviet leadership may react negatively if you refuse their offer to use it.” Amin called me the next morning to say, “We don’t need your assistance—we have our own plane.” My response was harsh: “We will stick to the original plan.”

We will never find out what had been going on behind the scenes then. Perhaps it was nothing noteworthy, or perhaps Amin was plotting something.

During their meeting in the Kremlin, Brezhnev alerted the Afghan leader in general terms of possible danger. And, imagine this, after he returned to Afghanistan Taraki completely neglected to heed the warning. It is unclear how he could have been so reckless. It’s possible that Amin managed to convince him that his apprehension was baseless, or maybe he simply ignored our counsel. To make a long story short, everything continued as before. It would have been quite easy for Taraki to demote Amin. He could have removed him from his high post, using the crackdowns organized by Amin as a pretext, but it did not happen.

When we understood that Amin was unstoppable, we sent a very open cable detailing the matter to the Center. First Deputy Foreign Minister Korniyenko called me to dictate a

response to our cable. "Meet with Comrade Amin immediately and relay the following: a war is underway in Afghanistan. The Soviet Union expresses its serious concerns about the fractious state of the party and Afghan leadership, as well as the continuing hostilities. We are obliged to warn you that if immediate emergency actions are not taken, the consequences may be grave." This is not the message verbatim, but the essence of it.

In the evening we went to the Ark Palace. I was accompanied by Pavlovsky, Gorelov, Ivanov, and Rurikov, our interpreter. We told Taraki, "We are tasked with relaying the Soviet leadership's position, but we would prefer it if Comrade Amin were present during our conversation." Taraki explained that Amin was in the palace and would be joining them shortly. Amin appeared soon after, dressed in an Oriental robe and slippers, as if he'd just gotten out of bed. Where did he come from? Why was he dressed that way? Another mystery.

I informed them of the directive from Moscow. Taraki replied, "There are a number of disagreements within our leadership, but what leadership is without disagreements? Please inform our Soviet friends that we are grateful for their participation and that we assure them that everything will be in order."

Amin looked absolutely unperturbed and self-confident during the meeting, as if the conversation had nothing to do with his recent actions. He also took the floor. "I agree with everything that my dear Comrade Taraki said. I would like to add only that I would die praising Taraki. If destiny has it for Taraki to depart before me, I will sacredly continue the policies of my leader and teacher."

I would like to draw your attention to the fact that only a few hours remained until it was all over.

We returned to the embassy, where we discovered four unexpected guests—the Khalqis.

I suggested that we kick them out immediately, but my colleagues had a different attitude. All of those Afghans were still state officials. Three were members of the government and they had the formal right to visit the embassy for a consultation, even at such a late hour.

Sayed Mohammad Gulabzoi, Minister of Communications for the DRA:

The Soviet comrades were opposed to Taraki's trip to Cuba. I was also against it. Taraki himself had doubts as to whether he should go, but Amin outmaneuvered us all. At a meeting of party activists, with five to six hundred people in attendance, Amin announced, "Our great leader will travel to Cuba to participate in a summit of the Non-Aligned Movement!" The announcement was greeted by a storm of applause. Taraki said to me, "How can I not go now, after this chatterbox has told the whole world?" I advised him to feign illness, but he refused. Then I said that he may go, but not for more than five days. Taraki agreed and promised to return soon. He did not keep his word. Instead, he spent ten days in Cuba, buying Amin a vital opportunity to prepare his final blow. Sarwari and I went to see Taraki very late on Wednesday, September 12, to warn him of the threat and propose our plan to eliminate Amin. Taraki listened to us and said to me morosely, "Son, with these hands I have been protecting Amin my whole life. And for that they were beaten. Look—they are even swollen from those blows. Perhaps you are correct."

After receiving this gesture of approval, we prepared to carry out our plan on Thursday, during the daily lunch held at Taraki's. Unfortunately there was a traitor in our midst, who knew the details of the plan and tipped off Amin, who did not arrive for lunch that day. When he was called and asked about his absence, he lied and said that his daughter was sick.

We began to consider alternatives. "The situation is not ideal, but we should still

implement our plan," I told Taraki. "I will fix this myself," was the general secretary's response. He took the phone and called Amin. "Why can't you make peace with each other? I have Gulabzoi and the others here. Come here and talk like men. You should make peace with each other." Amin replied, "I will not come until you remove Gulabzoi and Sarwari. Remove those two at least. Send Gulabzoi away as an ambassador." But Taraki still insisted: "Come, I will help you make peace with each other."

Later that day, Amin himself called Taraki to warn him that he was not going to officially recognize him as head of party and state anymore. Unable to hide his disappointment, Taraki hung up. I had a small pistol on me, and I gave it to the general secretary. At first he took it and placed it in the drawer of his desk. But then, after considering it for a moment, he changed his mind and returned the pistol to me. "It's better that you have it, son."

"Comrade Taraki," Watanjar proposed. "Give us ten minutes and we will resolve this issue. There is a plan and there are people."

"It's not going to work," objected Taraki. "You are military, not politicians. You only know to shoot."

"Then demand an emergency session of the Revolutionary Council or Council of Ministers," I suggested. "And we will remove Amin officially."

"That's not the way out either," said Taraki.

"Well, another option would be to announce formally on radio and television that Amin has been removed from all positions in party and state. Call a session of Politburo and during the session, isolate his allies."

Taraki only shook his head. "Tell me," he asked me, "is the commander of the guards

your man or Amin's man?"

"He will listen to the order of the one who first gives him an order."

"Then you have lost, son. And remember, my friends, I will not kill a fly, even to save myself. Let my destiny be determined by the party and by the people."

After that we retired to our offices. In the evening, around 8 p.m., I was informed that Amin had allegedly made a public broadcast on the radio announcing that he had rooted out our conspiratorial plot and that all four of us were removed by him from our positions. I immediately called the palace. "It can't be!" Taraki exclaimed when I told him.

Without wasting a minute, we went to the Soviet embassy to ask our Soviet comrades for advice.

On that day, Valery Starostin was preparing his house for a reception for young foreign diplomats planned for September 17. He had just returned from the Pul-e Heshti, where he had bought a string of lights to decorate the lawn in front of his house, when the phone rang. Gulabzoi's voice, normally quiet and measured, sounded extremely agitated. He said that all of them, Minister of the Interior Watanjar, Head of AGSA Sarwari, and Frontier Affairs Minister Mazdouryar were currently sitting in his apartment. They urgently wanted to meet with Starostin and inform him of the important circumstances related to the worsening political situation. Gulabzoi could not restrain his emotions and exclaimed with a tragic voice that a coup d'etat was underway in the country, that the revolution was in danger, and that Comrade Taraki was in peril.

Starostin asked where and how they could organize a meeting with Gulabzoi and his friends. Gulabzoi gave his address in Mikrorayon. However, he requested that Starostin not

enter his apartment, but rather wait for Gulabzoi to come out. He said that as soon as he saw Starostin through the window, he would come down to escort him to the location of the meeting.

Valery went to the embassy immediately. It seemed that Osadchiy had anticipated that Gulabzoi might call the operative, as he was not surprised when Valery reported what had transpired. "Tell these ministers that as long as Taraki is alive and able, the Soviet Union will not support any other individual who wants to assume Taraki's position. We will accept neither Amin nor any other leader. Puzanov received a cable regarding this today. Leonid Ilyich said the same in a telephone conversation with the ambassador."

After his report to Osadchiy, Valery drove to Mikrorayon as fast as he could. It turned out that Gulabzoi's apartment was located in a building occupied mostly by Soviets; thus the appearance of a Soviet embassy staff member would attract little attention. After parking his car behind a neighboring building, Starostin approached the place identified by Gulabzoi. He didn't notice anyone who could possibly be a spy for Amin. At that moment the situation seemed favorable. A small summer movie theater was set up in front of the house where the Afghan minister lived. The Russian movie "White Sun of the Desert" was playing. Valery stood behind the back row of movie spectators and watched the movie out of the corner of his eye while waiting for Gulabzoi to appear. An hour passed without any sign of the Afghani.

The dark Afghan night descended. Human figures appeared as fleeting silhouettes in the bleak light of windows and street lamps. As the movie was reaching its end, Afghan and Soviet women began calling from their balconies to gather their children. Valery decided not to wait any longer. His mind was anxiously racing with questions. What if Gulabzoi and

his friends had already been arrested? Perhaps that would explain why there was no sign of Amin's people watching the building.

When Starostin returned to the embassy, he saw a Mercedes with Afghan license plates parked in front of the office building. He ran up the stairs to Osadchiy's office to report that the meeting with the Khalqis did not take place for reasons unknown. He thought that everything had been done correctly, as per the agreed-upon instructions, but Gulabzoi never came out of the house.

"They're all here," said the resident. "The whole gang of four is sitting in our embassy waiting for the situation to be resolved." Osadchiy cracked the window and pointed to the Mercedes that had been parked in front of the building. "They came here to talk with the ambassador, but he had already left for a meeting with Taraki and Amin. These four claim that Amin is planning to kill them tonight, and that Taraki may be removed from power by tomorrow."

"Do you really think it's possible?"

Osadchiy looked at the car in front of the building before he turned to Valery and said, with a very serious expression, "Yes. I think that scenario is possible."

"But we can't just sit and do nothing," said Valery with despair. "We should do something."

"What can we do? Puzanov just spoke with Moscow and received clear instructions to try to make peace between them all, by any means necessary." Osadchiy continued looking out the window. "At whatever cost," he said gloomily.

"Even at the cost of the lives of these ministers, who are the recognized heroes of the April Revolution?"

“It appears that way.”

“So the Soviet Union—you and I—are betraying these people? The same way we betrayed Karmal and his Parchamis?”

“You and I, Valera, are dealing with political intelligence. Sometimes one must renounce moral principles in matters of politics,” commented Osadchiy quietly and sadly. He closed the curtain, sat at his desk, and began leafing through some documents. The conversation was over. Starostin left.

As he exited the embassy, Valery saw the Mercedes filled with the former Afghan ministers drive off the embassy premises and head towards the city.

These people had just received a guarantee from Taraki that they could sleep soundly with the knowledge that they were not in harm’s way. But by then Starostin knew the cost of such guarantees very well. One wise intelligence officer, who had a long, successful career in the Middle East, used to say, “It’s impossible to bribe an Arab. It’s impossible to buy an Arab with money. An Arab can only be rented for some time.” A promise, an assurance, a written treaty held by oath and even blood in the East may or may not work. It all depends on the changing interests of the two parties making the agreement.

The ousted ministers themselves knew the value of their leaders’ promises, but they also knew where to expect ambushes and who was likely to have their fingers on the triggers. Instinct led them to the Kabul Military Hospital instead of their homes. Sarwari had reliable people at the hospital who would shelter them in the chamber of the Department of Infectious Diseases.

September 14

By some strange coincidence, all of Afghanistan's important historical events tend to occur on Fridays. It's possible that the phenomenon is purely coincidental, but it's also possible that those figures behind the changes pick Friday because it is typically a day off, and as such presents ample opportunity to replace certain people with others. September 14 was just such a Friday. On the eve of that day, newspapers in Kabul contained no mention of Taraki for the first time since April 27, 1978. It was an ominous sign for the master of the Ark Palace.

Friday morning began with arguments over the phone between Taraki and Amin. Hardly attempting to mask his anger and irritation, Taraki asked the prime minister why he had fired two tank commanders who had arrived for a private conversation with the general secretary the day before. Then Taraki asked why Amin had arrived at his house with armed guards the previous night.

"Because my life was in danger," responded Amin.

"You shouldn't do that in the future," snapped Taraki. "You should come to me without delay, and without any guards."

"Nobody wants to die by his own will," Amin replied.

Following that conversation, Amin ordered a detachment from the Kabul garrison to be placed on high alert.

Major Tarun, who was loyal to Amin, reported Taraki's every move to him. At 3 p.m., he informed Amin that Taraki had invited the Soviet ambassador for a visit. When the ambassador and accompanying persons arrived at the palace thirty minutes later, Amin ordered Tarun to grant them access to see Taraki. By then it sounded as though Taraki was the head of state only nominally. His "loyal pupil" had assumed control over the situation.

L.P. Bogdanov:

At about 8 a.m. armed soldiers appeared in the reception room of the head of AGSA, Sarwari. Among them was Deputy Head of Security Services Navab (a distant relative of Amin's), the head of the political section of the security services, Saltan, and an accompanying officer. The head of AGSA's personal bodyguard, Kasem, renowned for his extraordinary courage and nicknamed "The Lion," was seated at a desk. The visitors asked if Sarwari was in his office. Kasem, who had been instructed to do so earlier by his chief, replied that visitors were not permitted to enter if armed. They pushed him aside and approached the door to Sarwari's office, at which point Kasem shot and killed Navab with his submachine gun. Saltan returned fire and killed Kasem instantly. Saltan opened the door only to discover that Sarwari's office was empty. Amin was promptly informed of the incident, after which he immediately called the Soviet embassy and requested a meeting with Ivanov.

An interpreter accompanied Boris Semyonovich and me to the meeting. By that point Amin had moved from the main government building to that of the General Staff, also behind the fortress wall of the vast Ark compound. Amin greeted us with his characteristic smile and asked if it had been long since I'd returned from vacation. I told him briefly about yesterday's events, including his opponents' visit to the embassy. "I know everything," he said with a smile. "I even know that Watanjar called the Fourth and Fifteenth Tank Brigades from the embassy to appeal to the commanders to act against me."

Boris Semyonovich expressed his condolences related to the death of Navab. Then Amin described the situation. It turned out that yesterday, after the departure of the Soviet comrades from Taraki's residence, Amin continued his conversation with the head of state and

party, demanding that he remove the opposition figures from their posts. Taraki agreed only to remove Sarwari from the position of head of AGSA and appoint Akbari in his place. Amin suggested Tarun as a candidate and continued insisting on the removal of the rebellious four. They didn't manage to agree on anything.

Head of General Staff Yaqub entered Amin's office during our meeting. They exchanged some phrases in Pashto. Then Amin told us that if the Soviet comrades insisted on his resignation, he would be prepared to leave, although in his view it would be more appropriate to call an urgent Central Committee plenary session to order and discuss the issues in that venue. He also stated that he would be prepared to leave the country and emigrate to the USSR, or even shoot himself if it were in the interests of the revolution. Then Major Tarun entered the office and started to speak to the prime minister in an agitated way in Pashto. Sensing our displeasure, Amin told Tarun to switch to Russian, a language that he understood well.

Tarun said the following: "I warned Comrade Amin to decline the invitation to lunch at Comrade Taraki's. If he appears in the palace, he will be killed. There is a specially prepared Kalashnikov in Taraki's office for the occasion, as well as two loaded pistols in his desk."

Amin looked at us without disguising his excitement. "What are you going to tell me now? Several minutes ago I received the same warning from Yaqub over the telephone. Shall I go to lunch, or not? I ask your advice."

Ivanov and I looked at each other. The situation was very sensitive. "If I were you, I would go," responded Boris Semyonovich, "but it is your decision to make."

We returned to the embassy. I understood that another cable had arrived from Moscow directing the leadership to meet again with Amin and Taraki in order to attempt to reconcile

their disagreements peacefully. The directive suggested the facilitation of mutual compromises, but frankly speaking, I didn't believe such a thing was possible. Amin had gone too far. He had removed the head of security services from his position and attempted to imprison him. The attempt was accompanied by bloodshed. He had also issued an order to arrest the commanders who were not loyal to him, as well as military political operatives in the Kabul garrison. It seemed to me that internally, Amin had made his choice, and that he was prepared to follow it through to the end.

Gulabzoi called Starostin again around 9 a.m. In a tragic, broken voice he said, "Comrade Valery, events are developing very quickly. In the next few hours Amin will eliminate me and my allies, and then he will remove Comrade Taraki from power. You should come to my house immediately. If you do not come immediately, it will be too late."

The call was an act of desperation. It had not been twelve hours since Taraki and Amin had agreed to resolve the situation peacefully and the ministers had received assurances about their safety at the Soviet embassy. Now there was a call from one of those ministers requesting an ordinary member of the embassy staff to rescue them from imminent death. That staff member had to decide whether to go to Gulabzoi's apartment in response to a call that was certainly being monitored by Amin's people, ensuring that Starostin was probably already labeled an enemy of the "second man" of the state. If Starostin were to decline the plea for help, the ministers' situation would become hopeless.

Starostin replaced the telephone and took a small Browning from his suitcase filled with clothes. He checked to see whether it was loaded, then placed it in the pocket of an old sports coat that had been sewn by a tailor in Kabul. In an attempt to disguise himself as an

Afghan school teacher, Valery decided not to wear a tie. Then he headed to the Soviet embassy.

As soon as Osadchiy found out about Gulabzoi's morning call, he dragged Valery to Ivanov.

Boris Semyonovich issued a very clear order: tell the disgraced ministers that Ambassador Puzanov, he, Ivanov, and other senior Soviet comrades would pursue very serious talks today with Taraki and Amin regarding the restoration of unity within the Afghan leadership. He asked the ministers to understand that the success of these historically important talks would, to a large degree, depend on their common sense. The general was particularly insistent that Valery "directly state" that the ministers were not welcome at the Soviet embassy again, "regardless of the circumstances."

"So we are turning in these rebellious Khalqists," Starostin thought to himself on his way to Mikrorayon. "Amin will destroy them in the near future. The talks to be led by the ambassador about safeguarding unity between the generals, Taraki, and Amin have no future, and will surely collapse as soon as the ministers are removed. Amin is already prepared for the coup. He has involved many people in the plot. He is past the point of no return. He will go to the end, or he will die. In the next few days, Amin will remove Taraki and become the head of Afghanistan. The Soviet leaders will disapprove for a while, but they'll ultimately come around and acknowledge the new head of state. It's a good thing that I took the pistol with me. I will arrive at Gulabzoi's at just about the same time as Amin's assassins. Nobody will bother to figure out who I am. It'll be good if they kill me right away, so I won't suffer. I have no documents on me and I'm dressed like an Afghan school teacher. At the embassy they'll say that nobody is missing, and will make up a story

that the diplomat Starostin left for Moscow several days ago for personal reasons. But these are not the important questions. What if I am wounded? It is a good thing that I have the gun. It will be difficult to kill someone else using it, but I can certainly shoot myself with it.”

When he got to the third floor apartment, Starostin rang the bell. Gulabzoi opened the door. He was glad to see Starostin and invited him into the apartment to introduce him to his friends. There were no servants or family members in the apartment. Valery was acquainted with the configuration of rooms in such apartments from childhood. He himself once lived in a very similar one. Walking along the narrow corridor, with the kitchen and bathroom to his left, Valery entered the living room. Near the wall to the right there was a cheap couch of local origin. “The Executioner of the Afghan People” Sarwari and a thin young man dressed in an Afghan air force uniform sat on the couch. The voice of Minister of the Interior Watanjar, who was speaking with Taraki in Pashto, could be heard from the next room. Starostin, who had never formally studied Pashto but was constantly working on the language, understood that Watanjar was suggesting that Taraki and his comrades come to his residence, from where they would arrange security for the head of state.

While Gulabzoi was preparing tea in the kitchen and the unknown man in the pilot’s uniform ate nuts with a knowing look, Sarwari, without wasting a minute, began a conversation with Starostin.

“Comrade Valery, please forgive us for failing to meet with you yesterday. It was my fault. We went to your embassy in hopes of finding understanding and protection there, but we were mistaken. There was nobody to talk with, and nothing to discuss. Yesterday we were desperate to resolve this major political problem for us and, more importantly, for our country. Please understand that Amin intends to remove Comrade Taraki from his

path. We must do everything possible to avoid this outcome. We are here now, but in a few minutes it's possible that we'll all be dead. For us revolutionaries, life itself is not the most important thing. The most important thing is to reach our noble goal. This morning my assistant, Kasem the Lion, was murdered as he sat in the reception room of the AGSA awaiting my arrival at work. You must understand that Amin's people were targeting me and not Kasem. I am not afraid of death. I am afraid only of not fulfilling my duty to the Afghan revolution. I must strangle this American vermin Hafizullah Amin and then what will he be?

"We invited you here today, Comrade Valery, so that when you return to the Soviet embassy, you can describe everything that I'm now telling you in a message to Comrade Brezhnev in Moscow. Please emphasize the fact that no negotiations on unity will be successful between you and Amin, even if we are all killed. Amin is meeting with your ambassador, Comrade Ivanov, and other Soviet generals only because we still happen to be alive. Once we disappear, he will immediately move on to the next phase of his plan, to remove Taraki."

Starostin intuitively trusted what the Afghan was telling him. Sarwari was obviously in no position to exaggerate the degree of danger threatening the ministers and the head of state. "I will relay your precise words to our leadership," Valery said to Sarwari as soon as the Afghan finished his emotional monologue. "My leadership has a request of you as well: display as much common sense as is possible in this situation, and do not be dragged into any unnecessary provocations."

Valery understood how inappropriate these words sounded after everything he had just been told. But orders are orders. Ivanov had persistently requested that he relay the

message. That is why Starostin, despite his tormented conscience, continued to detail the Soviet position in an official voice, as instructed by the general. His last words were the worst: "I have one strict order from my leadership that I must relate to you verbatim: whatever happens, under no circumstances can you come to the Soviet embassy again."

"So you are leaving us for Amin to tear apart," stated Sarwari. "Then we will all be dead in less than two hours. They will kill us all. They will enter this apartment in broad daylight, in front of our Soviet neighbors, and execute us. That will mean that Comrade Taraki will be left without protection."

"My God, I must seem like a traitor in their eyes," thought Starostin. "Betrayal is everywhere. Everybody gives each other away, here and there, and they are all driven solely by political considerations."

"He knows where I live," Starostin said, pointing his finger at Gulabzoi, who was carrying a tray with a tea kettle.

Valery stood up, bid the Afghans farewell, and, with his sweaty palm gripping the handle of his pistol, exited the apartment.

A.M. Puzanov:

After Gromyko learned about Amin's defiant behavior from our dispatches, he ordered us to return to the negotiating table with the Afghan leaders in the spirit of yesterday's instructions from the Politburo. The same group accompanied me. Taraki received us in one of the rooms of his apartment, on the second floor. We asked if he knew about the executions that had begun. He replied that he knew. Then we suggested that we seriously discuss the developing situation again. We also asked him to invite Comrade Amin, if it was possible.

Taraki called Amin and spoke in Pashto. "He is on his way," he said. Suddenly, he began telling us of Amin's plans to take control of power in the country. I don't know what happened to him, but he began bitterly sharing with us things about Amin that we had tried in vain to tell him on numerous occasions. He said that Amin could not tolerate criticism, that he cruelly persecuted all of his opponents, and that his relatives had assumed key state positions. His young nephew Asadullah now held nine posts in state and party organizations. "It turns out that one family is ruling our country, as it was under the king and Daoud." Taraki's eyes were finally open, but it was too late.

Suddenly there was the sound of pistol shots and automatic weapon fire from behind the door. We jumped up and tried to stay close to the walls because the gunshots sounded close enough to pass through the thin door and injure us. Gorelov dashed to the window and shouted, "Amin is running towards the car!" Taraki was the nearest to the door, and I moved him aside. I asked Rurikov, the youngest among us, to cautiously check on what was happening in the corridor. Taraki's agitated bodyguards dashed into the office and told him something in Pashto. Taraki explained to us, "The head of my chancellery, Chief Aide-de-Camp Sayed Tarun, has been killed."

We saw Tarun's corpse lying outside the door to Taraki's office as we left the palace. He was lying face up with his right hand against his waist, as though he was shot while reaching for his pistol.

Later we tried to recreate in greatest detail what had happened. Prime Minister Amin, accompanied by three bodyguards, arrived for the meeting after his telephone conversation with Taraki. His car had parked beside our cars, both the one we had arrived in and the one driven by our guards. Our security detail consisted of three officers and Junior Colonel

Kabanov from the KGB Representative Office. Amin warmly greeted our officers and, leaving one of his bodyguards by the car, entered the palace with the other two. Tarun met him on the ground floor. Amin let him and one of his bodyguards walk ahead as he followed a few paces behind with another bodyguard. They began to climb the stairs to the second floor. The shooting began when the first two were upstairs. Who was the first to shoot? I think Tarun most likely wanted to push Taraki's guards away from the door, and reached for his pistol while threatening them. Taraki's bodyguards' nerves gave out and they started shooting.

But this is only one version of the events. The next day Taraki's bodyguards were arrested by the order of Amin. They disappeared without a trace.

Before leaving the palace I said to the general secretary, "It looks like we should stop by Comrade Amin's." Taraki didn't object. We said goodbye and within a few minutes we were in the General Staff building. Amin seemed to be sincerely glad to see us. He took me by the hands and I noticed blood on the sleeve of his sports jacket. "Are you wounded, Comrade Amin?"

"No. I was helping my guard. He was wounded."

I tried to explain that a mistake had occurred, that the bodyguards from both sides were to blame, but Amin interrupted me immediately. "No, Comrade Puzanov. That was an attempt on my life. I survived by a miracle." He then addressed Ivanov. "So now do you see that there is a plot against me? This blood can only be washed off by blood," he said, pointing to the sleeve of his sports jacket.

At that very moment, the blast of a tank cannon shot was heard nearby. One of the cars parked near the building blew up. It was clear that we needed to leave immediately. It was too dangerous to stay there. Besides, Amin categorically rejected our proposals for a peaceful

resolution. He was now in control of the situation. As we were saying goodbye he told us, "If you would like to see Comrade Taraki in the future, you should do it only through me," he smiled sarcastically as he looked right at us, "in order to avoid any misunderstanding between the bodyguards."

Dmitry B. Rurikov, Second Secretary of the Soviet Embassy:

Taraki was deeply shaken after the shoot-out. He looked pale. He must have decided that his end was near.

When I exited Taraki's office into the corridor at the request of the ambassador, I felt a thick curtain of gunpowder smoke. Tarun was lying on the stairs covered in blood. Taraki's security officer ran up to him, shook Taraki, and said, "They shot at us and we had to respond."

One important detail: judging by Tarun's wounds, the submachine fire was so heavy that Amin would not have been able to avoid getting hit had he been anywhere near the skirmish. I think Amin never went beyond the first floor so that he would remain out of the line of fire.

When we returned to the embassy after visiting Amin, Alexander Mikhailovich Puzanov, who had never smoked before, lit a cigar in his office. He was shaken as well, but work is work. Using special communication channels, the ambassador contacted the minister of foreign affairs and reported what had occurred. Gromyko immediately asked whether blood had been shed. "Yes, it was," responded the ambassador. "This is very bad," said Gromyko.

**Abdul Karim Misak, Member of Politburo of the Central Committee of the PDPA,
Minister of Finance:**

So, what happened then? Was it a real assassination attempt or was it staged? Even now, I cannot answer this question. This is a very murky affair. Nothing is clear. Amin himself gave me the following account of the incident. He called his friend Tarun before departing for the meeting with Taraki at the palace. Tarun had recently been appointed as the chief aide-de-camp to the general secretary and candidate to the Central Committee of the PDPA. Amin had a very close relationship with him for some time prior to the incident. Having called Tarun on the phone, Amin asked whether it would be dangerous to accept the invitation. Tarun replied that there was nothing to be concerned about because the Soviet comrades were also at the palace. "Tarun met me downstairs," said Amin. "He and my bodyguard Vazir Zirak went on ahead, while another bodyguard and I followed several steps behind. Having gone upstairs, we saw two officers armed with submachine guns by the doors to Taraki's office. Tarun ordered them to move aside, shouting that Comrade Amin was with him. They suddenly raised their submachine guns and opened fire. Tarun was killed immediately. Vazir Zirak, who shielded me with his body, was also shot."*

Amin managed to escape from the palace unharmed. He got into his car and drove away.

I think that in Moscow, Brezhnev and Taraki agreed to remove Amin from the political stage. He was perceived as the main obstacle to the unification of the party. Besides, Moscow was concerned by the overzealous "leftism" of our "second man." It remains a mystery why Taraki did not attempt to use peaceful means—why, for example, he didn't call a meeting of the Central Committee or the Politburo. Perhaps he was uncertain whether he would succeed

* The conversation with Misak took place in 1990, when, after a long prison sentence that he served as a Khalqi ally of Amin, he was released from prison by President Najibullah during the campaign of national reconciliation. He then became mayor of Kabul.

in an open power struggle. Or perhaps, not unlike Amin, he was inclined to scheme his way through the matter. It seemed to me that morality was irrelevant to them, and that neither really respected the party code. We won't blindly hypothesize who was to blame for the misfortune at the entrance of Taraki's office. We'll never know whether Amin arranged the provocation, Tarun fell victim to a misunderstanding between the bodyguards, or Taraki's bodyguards were targeting Amin. The fact is that, whatever happened, the incident played to Amin's advantage.

Detachments of the Kabul garrison that had been placed on high alert quickly mobilized and took control of the most important sites in the capital. Units of the special forces surrounded the Presidential Palace and disarmed any guardsmen deemed unreliable. Taraki instantly found himself completely isolated. All telephone lines were cut off. Nobody could see him without Amin's personal permission. One could say that the coup d'etat had taken place.

The coup, it must be said, was well organized. Amin had prepared well. He had compiled a list of people to be arrested in advance. These were mostly military officers suspected of disloyalty to Amin. They were thrown in jail that very day. The frontier affairs minister, Mazdouryar, was also arrested. He was one of the rebellious four, who, unlike his comrades, decided not to hide. He had been spending that day with his family in Paghman, in the suburbs of Kabul. All close relatives of "the gang of four" were imprisoned that day.

Valery Starostin, returning to Mikrorayon after the meeting with Sarwari and the ministers, decided to stop by his home on the way to the embassy. He told Tamara that it was possible that some Afghans led by Gulabzoi, whom she knew, might arrive. If they were to appear, she was to invite them into the residence without delay, then phone the embassy

and say, "Lunch is ready."

The resident was not in his office when Valery arrived at the embassy. Ivanov was also absent. Valery stopped by the office of Orlov-Morozov, who, as it turned out, had not been well informed of the unfolding events. Valery wrote a cable about the meeting at Gulabzoi's apartment, gave it to the deputy resident, and went home.

Starostin called his wife from the embassy's vestibule. He asked her how she was doing, to which she replied, "Lunch is ready. I asked the embassy staff member on duty to give you this message."

"I'll be right there," replied Valery, shooting an angry glare at the officer on duty.

When she heard the sound of Valery's approaching Volga, Tamara quickly opened the gate. A new white Toyota Crown was parked near the garage. "Looks like I have gotten myself into a situation," thought Starostin. "I suppose I asked for an adventure."

He entered the hallway. Assadullah Sarwari, dressed in his traditional Pashtun garb, was lying down on the carpet, sweating and having difficulty breathing—the heat was quite unusual for autumn in Afghanistan. To his right was a near-empty bottle of Borzhomi. A Kalashnikov was beside him. Watanjar sat on the couch near the coffee table, next to a red-painted wall. He was also dressed in Pashtun attire and had an automatic weapon with some extra ammunition next to him. Propped up by the bookshelf was a machine gun, the make of which Valery did not recognize. Gulabzoi, wearing Pashtun attire similar to his friends, was helping Tamara in the kitchen.

"They're well armed," thought Starostin. "They are not going to part with their lives cheaply. If they're discovered here and the house is surrounded, there will be a serious battle. What should Tamara and I do? Are the two of us going to be running ammunition for

the Afghans? Maybe we should just hide under the stairs, or try to escape through the old cemetery located behind the house and seek shelter with the neighbors. It is out of our hands—whatever happens, happens. But if we are captured alive by Amin’s people, we can always say that the Khalqis took us hostage.”

“Why did you leave the car in the open? You should have parked it in the garage,” said Valery, not bothering to conceal his irritation.

Sarwari jumped to his feet and approached the door with the keys to the car in his hand. “Give me the keys,” demanded Starostin. “I will park it myself. Even though I have an enclosed yard, you are well known and would be easily recognized by anyone passing by.”

Sarwari nodded in agreement and handed the keys to Valery. Starostin opened the garage and drove the Toyota inside. He locked the gate. As he entered his house for the second time, he offered his guests snacks and cognac while Tamara prepared lunch. The Afghans liked the idea of crackers and sandwiches, but rejected the alcohol outright. “Now, as never before, we need clear and sober minds,” Watanjar explained.

“What are your plans now? What will you do next?” Starostin asked.

“We have great hope in our Soviet comrades,” responded Sarwari without taking the time to think. “We hope that they will be able to resolve the complex and dangerous situation in which the revolution finds itself. We don’t know what to do in order for that to happen. We think it may be best to dispatch Soviet paratroopers to Kabul. As for our plans—believe us, Valery, we are prepared to leave our state positions behind. We’re prepared to leave Afghanistan. We are even prepared for imprisonment if we are found guilty of anything. But this will happen only if Taraki deems it necessary. If Amin removes Taraki and takes power, we will hide in the mountains and possibly make for Pashtunistan.

There, we will form armed brigades and begin a partisan war," Sarwari proclaimed solemnly.

"Comrade Valery, please understand—this is not about us," Watanjar heatedly interrupted. "You, our Soviet friends, must save Comrade Taraki no matter what. To us he is the symbol of hope and victory in a war against the enemy. If our symbol is preserved, our revolution will survive."

As he was listening to the Afghans, Valery realized that they had no concrete plans for the immediate future. They most likely wanted to hide out in his home for at least a few more days, at least until Amin's people called off the search for them in Kabul. Afterwards they would probably try to hide either in one of the Afghan provinces or in Pashtunistan. But where was the pilot who had been sitting on Gulabzoi's couch this morning? What if he had already met with Amin's people and reported his friends' plans?

"Why didn't your comrade come here with you?" Starostin asked Sarwari.

"Who? Mazdouryar?"

"No, the other one, the one in the air force uniform, who was present in Gulabzoi's apartment this morning."

"Are you thinking of Iqbal? He is at work, at his office. He is not in danger. Amin's people have no interest in him. They think he is far-removed from politics and are certain that he is neutral in this conflict."

"But he heard our conversation this morning. He knows you were planning to come to my house."

"He wouldn't tell a soul," said Sarwari, somewhat uncertainly.

Starostin gradually began to appreciate the magnitude of the political crisis that he

had helped create. It was clear that his actions would force his leadership into an unenviable position, in which they would face very grave and very complicated decisions. Suspects, state criminals wanted for questioning by the special services of a friendly, even brotherly, host country, found shelter in the house of a Soviet diplomat per his own invitation. The predicament had the potential to become a serious political fiasco. What would the intelligence leadership decide to do now? The incident would be reported to the very top, and from there any action would have to be considered by the Soviet Politburo. What kind of decision would its members come to? Would they sacrifice the rebels to appease state interests and satisfy Amin? Would they take advantage of the situation to break ties with the dishonest and ambitious political adventurer, who was unstoppable in his thirst for power? If that's the case, then I must reveal Amin's true character to the Soviet leadership and justify my brash action.

Starostin took out his notebook, sat on the couch beside Sarwari and Watanjar, and addressed them. "You all accuse Amin of collaborating with the CIA. This line of reasoning is corroborated by many aspects of his behavior and biography. Let me tell you confidentially that my comrades and I have written about this possibility to Moscow. But do you have any specific evidence of his allegiance?"

"We have this evidence," decisively declared the Afghans.

"So," thought Valery. "It's possible that today I will have an opportunity to receive confidential information from two ministers and the head of the national security services on the issue of the second-in-command's involvement with the CIA intelligence network. A cable to the Center containing this information could be earthshaking."

The guests began to cite a series of facts, all of which suggested that Amin carried out

anti-party and anti-state activities against Parchamis. They spoke of his secret collaboration with the Americans and his confidential ties with Kabul's criminal underworld. Starostin began compiling the text for his cable to the Center right then and there.

Historians who later studied the events of that period would title this document "Ten Points of Evidence of Hafizullah Amin's Involvement with the CIA Spy Network and Kabul's Criminal Underworld." In reality, the title of Starostin's cable was much shorter and less exotic. Referring to Sarwari and the ministers, the cable described Amin's secret meetings with a staff member of the American embassy in Kabul who was thought to be an undercover intelligence officer. A specific estate in Paghman, in the suburbs of Kabul, where the meetings had occurred, was named. Sarwari also mentioned that Amin had made an earlier attempt to assassinate his "great teacher." Specifically, on September 11, the plane that flew Taraki back to Afghanistan was to be "mistakenly" shot down by the air defense systems covering Kabul airport. Sarwari had personally arrested the traitors then. Watanjar described how Mir Akbar Khyber, the prominent PDPA activist, was murdered in Kabul by notorious bandits connected to Sadyk Alemyar, a member of the PDPA Central Committee and loyal friend and ally of Amin. Amin had ordered the assassination personally. Khyber, who was highly respected among party members, had taken upon himself the role of "buffer" in the relationship between Taraki and Karmal. Not only did he mediate their relationship, but also his general presence had a very calming effect on the PDPA leaders. Since the day Amin joined the party, he operated with the goal of driving a wedge between the leaders and preventing Karmal's rise to prominence. The ministers also described an intimate but little-known friendship between Amin and pro-American

activists.

After he drafted the cable, Valery read the text back to his visitors in Dari. He asked if he had described their allegations properly.

“All three of us can sign it if you need us to,” Sarwari responded.

Then Valery announced that he needed to go to the embassy immediately. His intention caused some tension.

“Will you take your wife with you?” asked Sarwari.

“Yes, she would be more secure at the embassy. After I return home we will send her over there. For now Tamara will finish cooking the chicken and rice so that we have something to eat.”

The cable was sent priority and immediately found its way to the top leadership of the USSR. It included a note from the KGB Representative Office and the Residency indicating that the information reported by Sarwari and the ministers was still unverified, as the sources had not presented any tangible evidence or documents to back up their claims. His colleagues in the Center later informed Starostin of the shockwaves his document had sent through the Kremlin. The cable arrived simultaneously with other alarming news from Kabul. There had been a shoot-out in the People’s Palace, Taraki had been de facto isolated, and Amin’s behavior had become more reckless. Collectively, these reports seemed to represent the last straw for the Soviet leaders.

While he sat in Orlov-Morozov’s office, Starostin drafted another cable, this one confidential, for the intelligence leadership only. He informed them of the arrival at his villa of the two outcast ministers and the head of state security services. He described the situation in the district surrounding his house as “calm.” He informed the Soviet leadership

of the fugitives' plans based on the conversation he had with his guests. He decided not to explain why the Afghans had arrived at his home instead of, say, Bogdanov's. Starostin decided he would make up some plausible explanation if the Center should become interested in the matter.

He deliberately withheld the information that he had invited the fugitive Afghans to his home, knowing that he had no right to issue such an invitation as a regular intelligence operative. It would appear to Moscow that he was taking blatantly inappropriate liberties beyond his position, which could result in most undesirable consequences.

Strangely, neither Orlov-Morozov, who sent the cable to the Center, nor the staff members at the Center inquired about how three members of the gang of four had found themselves in Valery's home.

The deputy resident did not have time to ask these kinds of questions and spend time logically piecing together the puzzle on the evening of September 14, 1979. He was busy trying to manage a barrage of events and developments. What to do with the Khalqis, who were basically holding Starostin's family hostage? What to do with Amin, who had committed a coup d'état and effectively removed from power the head of state and party, Taraki, who just four days ago was being kissed by Brezhnev? How were they to save Taraki's life? On that September day, the deputy resident appeared to have finally grasped the full drama of the situation for the first time. His face was pale and his lips trembled.

Stuttering slightly, the deputy resident asked, "Valery, are you going to go back there?"

"Of course, Alexander Victorovich. My wife is there."

"Let me stop by the house and pick her up after you return," offered Orlov-Morozov.

“No, thank you. I’d rather she go to the embassy on foot. It isn’t so far, only eight hundred meters or so. That way we would attract less attention from the neighbors and the *chowkidar*.”

As Starostin was leaving the deputy resident’s office, he was nearly knocked off his feet by an encryption officer who was sprinting to pick up the cables that were to be sent to the Center.

At about 8 p.m. on that very day, the customary group of Soviet representatives visited Amin. He appeared calm and confident as he shared the details surrounding Tarun’s death. According to Amin’s explanation, Tarun had been the victim of an attempt on Amin’s life. He claimed that the guards shot over a hundred rounds. He claimed he had been warned of just such an ambush. Only two days earlier he had been the target of an ambush at the airport during Taraki’s arrival from Moscow. It is possible that at that time Comrade Taraki didn’t want to have Amin assassinated in plain view of his Soviet allies. However, it is possible that he forgot to withdraw the order that he had made, and the guards had begun to fire upon Amin. According to Amin, the fact that he had purposefully lagged behind Tarun as he ascended to the second floor had saved his life. When the shooting began, he bent over, quickly ran downstairs, grabbed his wounded assistant Vazir, and ran to the car.

What could the Soviet comrades say? They once again expressed their deep condolences, appealed to Amin’s common sense, and called for preservation of party unity. Those had been their instructions, but what sort of unity was there to preserve now? Amin was clear in his response that from that day on, he would be the commander-in-chief of the

armed forces, as well as the head of the Afghan State. Taraki would be removed from all positions.

It seemed that the Soviet guests didn't exactly understand what Amin had told them. They responded to his proclamation by referring to the opinion of their leadership, which stated that everything was to remain at the status quo, with Taraki as the head of state and Amin the second man.

"If Comrade Amin has taken it upon himself to remove Comrade Taraki, his actions will not be understood," said Puzanov vaguely, referring to either Moscow or the PDPA.

"You Soviets are the ones responsible for everything in Afghanistan," Amin sarcastically replied. "That's why I am prepared to accept your advice and to realize it, even if I disagree. But in this case we cannot ignore the opinion of our party. The party knows that I was shot at over a hundred times. The party knows that our dear Comrade Tarun, as well as other comrades, has been killed. The party is indignant and demands revenge for the blood that has been spilled. This is why a plenary session of the Central Committee will be called in the next few days. Taraki will cite his poor health as an excuse for his abdication of the position of general secretary. He will, however, remain the chairman of the Revolutionary Council."

This was Amin's pretense of a compromise in regards to his Soviet friends' appeal. They persisted in attempting to convince him to keep everything as-is and took turns with different arguments: That unity was necessary to overcome a difficult domestic situation; that there was a need to demonstrate solidarity in the face of an intensifying counter-revolution; that any feud would reflect poorly upon the country in the international arena; that their enemies would take advantage of a perceived weakness; and that Taraki was the

recognized leader of the democratic movement and had just been warmly received by Brezhnev and Castro.

“Fine,” Amin said, using his favorite rhetorical trick. “If I leave Taraki as the acting general secretary, it will inevitably result in an acute party crisis. Who will then claim responsibility?” He pushed further after observing the silence of his guests. “I agree that in the past Comrade Taraki did a lot for the revolutionary movement in Afghanistan. However, he has long since been transformed. He usurped power, created a personality cult, tyrannized his own people, and finally, in the last few days, initiated a campaign of terror against the party.”

The representatives of the Soviet embassy left Amin’s residence in a somber mood. The only success they could report was Amin’s promise to allow Taraki to keep his position as chairman of the Revolutionary Council.

Upon returning to his villa, Starostin saw Sarwari walking with a portable radio in hand. The radio was tuned to AGSA’s communications frequency. Sarwari was listening for clues as to how the secret services were searching for him and his fellow fugitives. Watanjar was leafing through a coffee table book with photographs of various Soviet cities. Gulabzoi was helping Tamara set the table for lunch. Valery asked to speak to his wife in private.

“Pack up and go to the embassy,” he said. “You will stay there until our guests depart.”

“I am not going anywhere. I am not going to leave you here alone,” replied Tamara firmly.

“It’s not a personal request, but an order from the top,” Starostin added. Tamara did not budge.

“They may be your bosses, but they are not my bosses,” she replied.

“Do you understand what may happen?”

“Sure I understand. We might be killed.”

“What’s the point of both of us being killed?”

“I will not leave this house.”

Starostin, very familiar with his wife’s character, realized that any further debate would be fruitless. He would not be able to change her mind. Frankly, he was relieved that she refused to leave. He knew that no matter what happened, he would have to be courageous for both of them.

They began lunch. Only the men sat around the table. Tamara refused to sit. The conversation at the table stayed very general. Watanjar, after having looked at so many photos from the Soviet Union, asked Starostin, “Comrade Valery, in which Soviet city were you born?”

“In Leningrad.”

“I once visited Leningrad,” responded Watanjar happily. “I really liked that city.”

“Which sites do you remember best?”

“The Aurora. It has such extraordinary weapons; the 152mm cannon is just extraordinary.”

“Yes,” agreed Valery, somewhat surprised. Everybody sees what he wants to see in Leningrad, he thought. Some admire the city’s great architecture, some are eager to see the house of the old money-lender woman who was murdered by Raskolnikov, but Watanjar was most impressed by the large, 152-caliber cannon.

After lunch Gulabzoi helped Tamara wash dishes in the kitchen. Watanjar returned to

the couch to flip through the Soviet photo books. Sarwari fiddled with his radio, trying to locate the spot that had the best reception. He seemed to Valery to be growing increasingly anxious.

“What’s happening?” Valery asked Sarwari.

“I am listening in on the conversations between AGSA agents and central dispatch. There are already twice as many brigades hunting for us than there were just three hours ago. Three hours ago they were looking mostly in Mikrorayon, but now they are combing through the Soviet embassy’s district, where your home and the homes of other diplomats are located. Three or four brigades are very close to us,” explained Sarwari anxiously.

Tamara went upstairs to the second floor. About twenty minutes after his conversation with Starostin, Sarwari sharply jerked the radio from his ear and barked something in Pashto, most likely a military command, to his friends. Gulabzoi grabbed a machine gun and Watanjar picked up his submachine gun. Then Sarwari raised the radio to his ear with his left hand and gestured with his right index finger to wait silently. “Here we go,” thought Starostin grimly. The tense silence lasted for several minutes. Voices could be heard through the radio before dying down and ceasing altogether. Sarwari removed the radio from his ear and whispered, “They were driving along your street and, it seemed to me, may have stopped right by your house. Right now they are moving on to a different block. It appears that there are no other brigades in the vicinity at the moment.”

By evening everything had calmed down. Over a cup of tea, Valery cautiously broached the topic of Sarwari’s involvement in the crackdown and his personal responsibility as head of AGSA for the acts of repression: “Comrade Sarwari, please, do not be offended. I have heard a number of times that many Afghans label you an executioner of

the Afghan people, and have heard it said that your hands are stained with the blood of others. What is the truth?"

Sarwari seemed to have been expecting the question. "I am not offended," he replied. "It's true. My hands are completely covered with blood. However, all the crackdowns that were carried out by the security services were first ordered by the party leadership, first and foremost by Hafizullah Amin. Neither my staff members nor I would ever have arrested or executed anyone without an order from the top. To tell you honestly, I have no love for Parchamis and I wouldn't want to be their ally. Still, I would not touch any of them without the direct and explicit order of Amin, unless of course I had received irrefutable evidence of their actions against the state. Even though I think that reactionary Muslim clans are dragging our country back to the Middle Ages, I would not even interrogate any of Mojadeddi's relatives unless I had irrefutable proof of their terrorist actions. Until a certain point, I was convinced that my actions would benefit the revolution. I never concerned myself with political issues. Politics was the domain of Comrades Taraki, Amin, and members of the Politburo. My business was to carry out orders. Everything continued that way until I realized that the AGSA had turned into an instrument of terror in the hands of Amin. The rest—who Amin really is—you already know."

"My God," thought Valery, "this is all so similar to the history of the Soviet Union. Beriya also claimed that he was simply fulfilling the will of the party when he was arrested. We are all walking along the same circle."

It became dark. The tea had grown cold and the conversation had begun to wind down. News on the radio was reporting that Major Tarun had been killed in the People's Palace during an attempt on Amin's life. Then the broadcast said that Taraki was in the

custody of the Armed Forces of Afghanistan at his residence, “for his protection.” It reported that there had been personnel changes in the DRA’s leadership: Assadullah Sarwari would be replaced by his deputy Aziz Akbari as head of AGSA, Aslam Watanjar would be replaced by Faqir Mohammad Faqir as the minister of the interior, Sayed Muhammad Gulabzoi would be replaced by Mohammad Zarif as minister of communications, and Saheb Jan Sahrai would replace Mazdouryar as the frontier affairs minister.

This news provoked a strong emotional reaction from Starostin’s guests. They were happy to hear about Tarun’s death, saddened to learn that Amin had managed to survive the attempt on his life, and shocked to hear that Taraki was locked up in his residence. When the broadcast had finished, Sarwari, Gulabzoi, and Watanjar settled around the coffee table and began a conversation in Pashto. Starostin went upstairs to see his wife. When he returned to his guests a little while later, Sarwari suggested they discuss a few issues.

Sarwari stated categorically on behalf of all three of them that Taraki would be removed from all his posts the next day and would be murdered in a very short time. That would mean that the April Revolution was defeated. That was why Sarwari and his friends asked Valery, counting on his revolutionary solidarity, if he would participate in a joint operation to save Taraki. The plan was this: They would all get into Starostin’s Volga with their weapons. Gulabzoi would sit next to the driver and Watanjar and Sarwari would be seated in the back. Starostin would drive the car to Taraki’s residence. When stopped at the checkpoint, the Afghans would conceal themselves and Valery would tell the guards that he had an urgent message from the Soviet ambassador that he needed to relay to Comrade

Taraki. The guards would allow the car to pass, Starostin would drive up to the entrance of the residence, Sarwari, Gulabzoi, and Watanjar would jump out of the car, break into the general secretary's residence, kidnap him, and they would all return together to the Soviet embassy.

"They are out of their minds," thought Starostin, but said, "Comrades—I think that this operation will be impossible under the current circumstances. First, we will be unable to reach Taraki's residence. We will certainly be stopped at Darul Aman Road. Second, regardless of how hard you try to hide inside the car, I will not be allowed on the premises of the residence, and that's the best-case scenario. In the worst-case scenario, we will all be arrested on the spot, and you know what could be the consequences of that. Thirdly, even if we assume that with my help you are able to break into Comrade Taraki's residence, get to him, and bring him to the Soviet embassy, think of what Amin will say. He would say that the head of the Afghan state is a coward who ran away and is hiding on the territory of a foreign embassy. Will the Afghan people appreciate this? Is Taraki himself going to like this situation? Finally, how can I, a foreign diplomat, participate in armed action on another country's territory? It would be an international scandal!"

Gulabzoi looked at Sarwari with contempt and said something to him in Pashto. As far as Starostin understood, he agreed that Sarwari's plan was far from perfect. Sarwari then fell deep into thought, sitting in the armchair with the portable radio in his hand.

Afterward, Starostin began a conversation with Watanjar, who looked deflated. Starostin was trying to encourage him. He told the former minister of the interior that he needed to remain optimistic, that Taraki would soon return to his work and restore them to their former posts.

“I don’t think that will ever happen,” sighed Watanjar, and added, “You know, Comrade Valery, when I was in the Soviet Union, I was received by Comrade Schelokov, the minister of the interior. He gave me a model of the T-34 tank as a gift. The model was perfect, exactly like the real thing, only miniature. When I returned to Kabul, I placed the tank on the desk of my office and often admired it. And now Faqir, this nobody, will get my tank.”

“Oh my God,” thought Starostin again. “Are they crazy? One has a ludicrous plan to rescue the head of state and another is crying because his favorite toy was taken away from him.”

Night fell. Everybody was exhausted after the hot and difficult day. Sarwari began snoring in the armchair. Tamara arranged beds for the guests in three of the five bedrooms on the second floor. Valery suggested that the Afghans rest. They took their weapons and went upstairs. There, Sarwari said, “We will not sleep in different rooms. We will share a bed and will not undress.”

“It’s up to you,” replied Starostin.

After the guests had retired to the bedroom, Valery took his pistol and a bowl of dog food for his boxer Marhos, who had spent the entire day locked in the shed. The dog couldn’t be in the house because he scared the Afghans to death. Once he was outside, Starostin took out his pack of cigarettes to have a smoke. The moment he inhaled, he heard a suspicious sound, as if someone were trying to scale the wall from the side of the street. A moment later there was the sound of branches rustling in the bushes that lined the fence. Starostin put out his cigarette, grabbed his pistol, and crouched. He saw a shadow moving in the bushes. He recalled the advice that his father had given him when they were hunting

together: "Never shoot without a clear view of your target." The advice turned out to be very appropriate. All of the sudden a security officer from the Soviet embassy, Sergei Bakhturin, emerged from the shadows. Valery rose to his feet. "What are you doing climbing over my fence, Sergei? You might rip your trousers...Also, I nearly shot you."

"Are your guests in place?" asked Bakhturin.

"Yes."

"We've received an order from Moscow to relieve you of them."

"Where will they go?"

"To the Zenit villa."

"And then?"

"Then they will be flown to the Soviet Union."

"I want you to understand, Sergei Gavrilovich, that I am not asking for curiosity's sake. I will need to be able to explain it to them."

"These are Boris Semyonovich's instructions. I gave you his message."

"Alright, let's go."

Starostin went upstairs. He told the Afghans that Moscow had made a decision regarding their situation. He asked them to come downstairs, where he introduced them to Bakhturin and proceeded to explain the Soviet leadership's proposal to them. He referred repeatedly to Boris Semyonovich Ivanov, whom Sarwari knew well.

The Afghans were ambivalent. They took the news with both joy and skepticism. Sarwari asked Starostin, having taken him aside, "Assure me, Valery, that we will not be given up to Amin."

"I did not keep you here all day, risking my life and the life of my wife, just to hand

you over to Amin,” Starostin replied.

“I believe you, brother.” Sarwari took Valery’s hand emotionally. He used the Pashto word for brother, “*vrora*.”

The four men moved quietly in the moonlight. Two engines started on the other side of the wall. Bakhturin and the Afghans sat in the first car; armed Zenit operatives were driving in the second.

Early the next morning the Starostins were awoken by the sharp sound of their buzzer. Marhos, who had finally been fed at night and allowed back in the house, was barking. Valery pulled an Afghan robe over his pajamas and went to open the gate to the residence. There were two army jeeps parked in front of his house. Afghan soldiers, armed with submachine guns, sat in the Jeeps. A captain dressed in a new, well-ironed uniform stood at the gate. He asked quietly, “Who lives in this house?”

“I do. I am a Soviet diplomat, the third secretary of the embassy of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, Valery Starostin,” Valery replied with intentional pathos. “And who are you?”

“I am Captain Jan Mohammad.”

“What do you want?”

“Who else is in the house?”

“My wife and my dog.”

At that moment the door to the house opened. Tamara, uncombed, looked outside and Marhos, very aggressive after the previous day’s exile, jumped out from behind the door. “Get the dog!” Valery shouted to his wife. Tamara walked out of the house and grabbed the resistant dog by the collar.

“Anyone else?” asked the captain in a wavering voice.

“Perhaps you will be convinced that I am telling you the truth if we invite the Soviet consul and a representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan over here to help you conduct a search,” said Valery harshly, gazing straight into the captain’s gray eyes.

“No, no, that won’t be necessary. I am sorry to have bothered you.”

September 15

L.P. Bogdanov:

Early in the morning, Akbari, who had just been appointed as the head of security services, informed me of the following in as civil a tone as he could manage: “From now on, Hafizullah Amin is the sole ruler of Afghanistan. He is in charge of the state, the party, the armed and the security forces. There will most likely be a plenary session of the Central Committee, as well as a meeting of the Revolutionary Council, where all of this will be put into law. As for Taraki, he is isolated in his residence, without access to a telephone or any other communication with the outside world. The military guards commanded by Jandad have sided with Amin and obey only his orders.”

Akbari said that when he saw the recently removed head of state, he told Taraki that his only salvation would come in the form of Soviet intervention, which was highly unlikely, as the Soviets were reluctant to interfere and were unwilling to be accused of interference in the domestic affairs of Afghanistan.

Moscow appeared to be extremely alarmed by the situation. A meeting of the Politburo was called that morning to discuss the developing crisis. We received an order to meet with Amin immediately and, once again, insist that he not take any repressive measures against

Taraki, his family, or his allies. Our representatives went again to meet with Amin, and again they voiced the full range of arguments for a united Afghan leadership. Amin reassured us that, as a true friend of the Soviet Union, he would do everything in his power to fully follow Soviet advice, as well as promote cooperation between the USSR and the DRA. He further added that the departure of Taraki not only didn't harm the unity of the party, but on the contrary brought the party closer together.

Clearly, neither Puzanov nor the colleagues would leave without an explicit guarantee from Amin that Taraki would remain safe. They had to report the results of that conversation to Moscow immediately. Amin simply mocked them. He said that the PDPA Politburo members, at a meeting that took place several hours ago, voiced their desire to remove Taraki from all of his government positions. "But last night you promised to let him remain the chairman of the Revolutionary Council," Puzanov attempted to object. Amin shrugged his shoulders and responded that he would do everything in his power, but that the will of the party was law.

On that very day I reported my thoughts on the Afghan ministers who were still residing at the Zenit villa. Soon I received a call from the head of intelligence, who told me that the decision had been made at "the very top" to secretly evacuate the Afghans to the USSR. I immediately went to the villa in order to confirm their willingness to leave the country. Fortunately, I didn't have to spend much time convincing them that this was their only recourse. They understood that they would not otherwise survive.

Once the Soviet leadership in Moscow recovered from the initial shock of Hafizullah Amin's treachery, it began to consider military options to resolve the problem situation.

The KGB's special forces unit and the paratrooper battalion that had been guarding Bagram Airport were put on high alert. The order to free Taraki, however, was not forthcoming. The Center, in its evaluation of the balance of forces, found that the risk of failure was too great.

V. N. Kurilov, Special Forces Officer of Zenit, Foreign Intelligence:

We were mentally and operationally ready to take on the job of neutralizing Amin and freeing Taraki. We had studied the various approaches and entrances to Amin's residency and knew the location of all the rooms and corridors. We had developed a plan, but Moscow was slow.

The plan was that we would split up into three teams: a capture team, a protection team, and a reserve team. As we didn't have armored vehicles at the time, we would drive two jeeps and two trucks to the residence at night. The first truck would breach the gate, after which the operatives from that truck would open fire with machine guns and grenade launchers to neutralize the guards. The truck would then drive around the building and clear the area of possible hostile targets. The men would then establish a perimeter and block access to the residence. A jeep would quickly drive up to the entrance of the residence and drop off five soldiers, who would break into the building and capture Amin. We learned in advance that there were few security guards inside the residence at night. The operatives would break into Amin's bedroom on the second floor and pack him into a bag with his mouth gagged. The operatives from the second jeep would provide cover to those securing the building, and, if necessary, would counter any attempt of the Afghan military to intervene and assist Amin's guards. Operatives armed with machine guns and grenade launchers in the

second truck would monitor the intersection and control approaches to the residence. The whole operation would not take more than ten minutes to carry out.

The success of the operation was predicated on the element of surprise. By then we had studied the Afghan mindset, and we knew that they were liable to panic and lose control in unexpected situations. We were certain of success.

We would take Amin to the Bagram Airbase sixty kilometers from Kabul. A ready airplane would be waiting for us there. We would drive up to the airplane with our trophy and fly home to the Soviet Union.

As far as I know, the plan was approved by the Center. We were only waiting for the order.

Only after Moscow learned about the treacherous removal of Taraki from his position, as well as the threats to his life, did people in the Kremlin begin to make decisions. On September 15 we were put on high alert to carry out the operation to capture Amin. We had been prepared internally for the operation for a long time. It didn't take long for us to get ready.

Around 10 a.m. we received additional instructions and clarified some details. An old acquaintance of ours, Security Officer Bakhturin, the one who was so concerned about our morality, had arrived. He brought several bottles of vodka along with him. We drank some, as one should before a battle. Then we waited. Evening came, and still we waited for the order. I was later told that the issue had been decided "at the very top," with Brezhnev himself participating. It was a grave matter. KGB special forces would be attacking the residence of a prime minister of a friendly country in an attempt to capture him. Our senior leaders had a lot to think about.

The order to stand down came late in the evening. The operation had been cancelled. They could not bring themselves to take advantage of the opportunity. Too bad, I thought. I was certain that everything would have gone well, and that we would have been able to avoid many unpleasant consequences. It's possible that we would not have had to intervene militarily in Afghanistan at all had we captured Amin.

Before going to bed I tuned the radio to BBC. Immediately I heard news about Kabul. The broadcast declared that President Nur Mohammad Taraki had been removed from power due to poor health.

That night, we did not sleep. We were put on alert and stayed vigilant, ready to jump in case of an emergency situation. Rumor had it that some provocations were imminent; we had to be prepared.

In the morning, before leaving for work, Starostin passed through the gate to the garage and opened the door and the trunk of the Toyota Crown. He found a Miami-brand small-caliber revolver inside the car. Upon investigating the trunk he discovered a large package that was tied together with a woman's green shawl embroidered with a floral pattern. Valery untied it and saw that the package contained stacks of American dollars and Afghani held together by rubber bands. He left everything there and returned to the house to collect the weapons that his guests had brought inside. He left Sarwari's Pashtun wool beret ("pakol") for himself as a souvenir.

He closed the garage door tightly so that his servant Rustam, who was supposed to arrive at any minute, would not notice the strange car. Then he got into his own car and drove to the embassy. He reported to Osadchiy and Ivanov about the weapons and

currency. Boris Semyonovich ordered a commission to be put together to document the “inheritance” left by Starostin’s guests. The commission was comprised of Starostin, Osadchiy, and Bakhturin. They agreed to meet in Starostin’s house immediately after Rustam’s departure.

After lunch, once the servant had finished cleaning and left, the commission began their work. Once again, all three of them attentively examined the trunk and interior of the Toyota, which, according to Osadchiy, belonged to AGSA. The weapons were transferred into Bakhturin’s car. The pile of cash was brought into Starostin’s living room. Valery and Bakhturin sat on the carpeted floor with their legs crossed and began counting the bills. Bakhturin counted the dollars, which were in different denominations and showed signs of use, while Starostin counted the filthy old Afghani bills. Osadchiy decided against dirtying his hands and instead sat comfortably in an armchair, drinking Armenian cognac and providing leadership and moral support for his subordinates.

“You, Valera, would be better off taking this money for yourself,” he told Starostin sarcastically. “Share it with your friends, if it is too much for you alone. Imagine the nightmare that we and the PGU finance office will have to deal with now. There is no reason for the finance office to know about the origin of the money, but we must explain it anyway. How will we do that? Shall we tell them that we robbed a bank out of necessity?”

“Vilior Gavrilovich! I’ve lost count again,” Starostin was becoming frustrated. “Now I need to start from the beginning.”

Bakhturin was also finding it difficult to focus on counting the bills while being distracted by the resident’s outburst of humor.

“Fine, fine, I will remain silent,” Osadchiy calmed his operatives condescendingly.

When they finished counting, they found that the sum consisted of \$53,950 and 4,220,000 Afghani. They wrote an invoice and signed it before loading the currency into an empty vodka crate and covering it with apples. The resident took the crate along. They finished the cognac. Osadchiy and Bakhturin were ready to depart.

“Wait,” Starostin stopped them. “Let’s take the license plates off the car.” After the resident and the security officer had left, Starostin blocked the garage door. The car hidden in the garage didn’t seem to him a menacing liability anymore.

September 16

A.K. Misak:

Amin held a meeting with a small group of his close allies on the night of September 16. It was formally considered a meeting of the Politburo. A plenary session of the Central Committee was called in the morning. Twenty-six of thirty-one members of the Central Committee were present. Amin colorfully described the assassination attempt that he claimed Taraki had organized against him. “Candidate of the Central Committee,” Amin spoke with pathos, “dear Comrade Tarun had been murdered! I was to share his fate. Taraki decided to stage a coup in the party and the country with the help of four cowardly traitors, whom we kicked out from their offices several days ago. They lifted a sword against our revolution. Now they will be punished by this very sword.”

Amin was a first-class orator, a far more talented rhetorician than Taraki. He appealed to exclude Taraki from the ranks of the party, which meant his automatic removal from all the positions that he held.

The Politburo member Pandzhsheri and I proposed that Taraki be invited to the plenary

session so that we might hear his explanations. Amin got angry. "Taraki doesn't want to talk to anybody. He isn't answering his telephone. His guards are under orders to kill anyone trying to approach the residence on sight. If you, Comrade Misak, are so courageous, then go to Taraki and ask him to come here." I understood Amin's words correctly: if I decided to go, his people would kill me and Taraki's security guards would be blamed.

The plenary session took place in Delkusha Hall. Tanks and armored vehicles surrounded the building. There were National Guard and security service agents everywhere. Foreign Minister Shah Wali, who by then had been appointed to be the secretary of the Central Committee of the PDPA, chaired the plenary session.

Eventually, everyone voted to purge Taraki from the party. The formal statement read: "For the organization of an assassination attempt on a secretary of the Central Committee and member of Politburo, Prime Minister Hafizullah Amin, and for the murder of a member of the Central Committee, Sayed Daoud Tarun, among other unprincipled actions." Additionally, the plenary session labeled the four opposition members as "members of a terrorist group that acted under Taraki's leadership." Naturally, Amin was elected general secretary. Immediately after that, a meeting of the Revolutionary Council took place at which Taraki was removed from his position as chairman and replaced by Amin.

Lev Nikolayevich Gorelov, Senior Military Adviser:

One of the offices of our advisory mission was located in the same building where the plenary session was taking place. I don't remember exactly how long the meeting took—an hour or more—but I remember well that during that time, loud shouts of "hooray" reached our office many times. That was how enthusiastically the Politburo greeted their new leader. I

immediately thought of the April Revolution and how the Afghans, who had been kissing the ground beneath Daoud's feet just the day before, were equally eager to welcome Taraki's rise to power.

The former general secretary was removed from his position and expelled from the party for "terrorist activities such as plotting six separate assassinations, including an attempt to murder Amin, among other crimes."

The ambassador was sitting in our office, and we waited together for the outcome of the meeting. When we finally heard them leaving the hall, we went towards them. A radiant Shah Wali said to Puzanov, "Congratulate Comrade Amin. He is now the general secretary." What could Puzanov do? He congratulated Amin.

It is interesting that the decisions of the plenary session regarding Taraki were kept secret. Only a small number of Central Committee members and their trusted staff knew about it. The mass media published information stating that Comrade Taraki had been relieved of his responsibilities according to his request. It claimed that he was unfit to fulfill important party and state functions because of his failing health.

September 17

A reception for junior diplomats accredited in Kabul was to be held that day in Starostin's residence. At first Ivanov and Osadchiy doubted whether it made sense to bring the guests to the house while the Toyota Crown remained in the garage. However, they ultimately decided that it was highly unlikely that any diplomats would attempt to sneak around the garage. At the same time, the reception itself might throw off the possible suspicion of the Afghan special services that Starostin had been involved in the

disappearance of Sarwari and the former ministers.

About forty young diplomats from many embassies arrived at the villa in the evening. Only the Americans and British were absent. The street in front of Starostin's house was crowded with cars with diplomatic licenses.

The Iranian consul Iraj Deeba, a relative of the wife of the recently ousted Iranian shah, was the center of attention. He was sadly finishing the last days of his appointment in Kabul, waiting for the end of his term, and wondering whether he would move on to live in Europe or the United States once the Iranian authorities demanded his return home. He was eagerly discussing the first steps taken by Khomeini's regime. He didn't criticize the regime openly, though his stories depicted a grim picture.

The main topic of the night, however, was the latest news in Kabul, primarily the removal of Taraki and Amin's takeover of power. None of the diplomats tried to hide their skepticism about the official version publicized by the media, according to which Taraki left because of a serious illness. Some of the guests openly called the transfer of power a coup d'etat.

"What do you think about it, Mr. Starostin?" many diplomats asked the host. Valery had anticipated such questions. He prepared his answers in the style of Puzanov. He said that the recent developments in the country were Afghan domestic affairs, and the replacement of one leader by another, no matter what form it took, would not influence the development of traditionally friendly Soviet-Afghan relations. The diplomats smiled with understanding. Had they been in Starostin's place, they would have made similar remarks.

At the appointed time, as suggested by protocol, the diplomats began to depart in order that they could jot down the information they had gleaned from one another while it

was fresh in their minds. Only the close friends of the Starostins—the Vietnamese diplomat Comrade Ko, his interpreter Lian, a Bulgarian named Nikolai Popov, and his wife Martina—remained. Valery announced that whoever stayed the longest would be proclaimed the best friend of the Soviet Union. Comrade Ko stayed for a long time, but ultimately said his farewells before the Bulgarian. Nikolai was very happy about this; now it would just be him and Valery sitting by the fire with whiskey.

“You know, Valery, our ambassador thinks that Amin’s treacherous capture of power is not in the interest of the Afghan revolution or the international socialist movement,” the Bulgarian began carefully. “Besides, Taraki’s ouster cannot be considered fully legal. What happened in Kabul casts a shadow not only on Afghan communists, but on all socialist countries as well. Valery, share your thoughts about this with me as a friend.”

“Kolya, I will tell you sincerely, as a close friend. My thoughts are similar to those of your ambassador. I do not approve of the coup. I personally would not like to see the Soviet Union accept Amin as the head of the Afghan state. However, I think that there are very serious reasons—much more serious than mere personal sympathies—why the Soviet leadership will continue to promote cooperation with the Afghan regime. These reasons are conditioned by the objective geopolitical reality and the long-term interests of our country in the Middle East. I am also certain that Afghanistan will be unable to develop normally, regardless of the regime, if it does not remain both economically and politically linked with us.”

The Bulgarian took the conversation further. He turned out to be less simple than he might have appeared.

“If you’re planning on developing relations with Amin’s regime and don’t plan on

replacing him, why did you shelter and basically save the so-called 'gang of four'? Was it to have somebody ready to replace Amin in case something happens to him?"

"What makes you say we gave them shelter?" Starostin challenged the Bulgarian.

"Many foreign diplomats and well-informed Afghans with whom I've been talking in the last few days are certain that you have been hiding them in your embassy until the present time."

"It's possible that the foreign diplomats and 'well-informed Afghans' with whom you spoke know more than me, even though I work at the Soviet embassy, but I have not seen the ministers there," replied Starostin, not bothering to conceal his indignation. "Do you really think, Kolya, that the former head of security services, Sarwari, as well as the former ministers, don't have secret locations in Kabul and the surrounding areas where they could hide and wait out the hunt? Moreover, their hostilities with Amin have already lasted for a long time, and they certainly have had plenty of opportunities to create different contingency plans for different scenarios."

"Of course, I am also confident that they have such locations," Popov began backing off. "Please, don't be offended. I am only sincerely sharing with you what I've heard. If it isn't true, it isn't true. If you say so, I believe you."

September 18

The Zenit operatives lived under tremendous pressure throughout that week. They slept in their uniforms with their firearms under their beds. On the night of September 15 the four slightly fearful Afghans were secretly delivered to the villa. Dolmatov clarified that the three were prominent members of the PDPA who had a conflict with Amin and needed

serious protection. Valery Kurilov instantly recognized one of the Afghans. It was Assadullah Sarwari, head of AGSA, who had recently been inspecting the results of the Soviet instructors' training of his subordinates.

The Khalqis were given a windowless room on the ground floor, as well as three cots and three chairs. They were ordered not to go outside under any circumstances.

The Zenit operatives could sense that the Afghans were the targets of a search, as they were well trained to differentiate between traders of vegetables, regular passers by, and agents of the AGSA. Boyarinov had warned them that AGSA people were monitoring sites in Kabul where Soviet citizens resided. The houses of KGB operatives were under the most intense scrutiny. Afghan counterintelligence operatives monitored the Zenit villa around the clock and made a number of attempts to peek into the courtyard through the fence and gate. Zenit operatives had to undertake a number of additional measures for their protection. They installed an alarm system to secure the perimeter around their property.

As the guests gradually grew more comfortable in the villa, they began to speak louder, joke, and ask for toothbrushes, razorblades, and new underwear. Life was slowly becoming more normal.

Kurilov received a request to go to the resident's office. There was some obviously important figure in the office with the resident who wanted to speak with him. He was of average height, balding, and appeared very self-confident.

"We were told that you draw well."

"Yes, I can draw," agreed Kurilov. "Why?"

"If you can draw, your observation skills must be quite good," responded his

interlocutor, ignoring Kurilov's question. "We would like to ask you to compile a verbal description of the Afghan ministers who are hiding at the villa. Would you be able to do that? We would like the verbal portraits to be as comprehensive as possible, so they capture not only their facial features, but their manners, peculiarities of behavior and speech, and so on."

"We were taught how to do this during our training in Moscow. I will need to spend more time with the three of them in order for me to fulfill the task though."

"That's fine." The balding man looked at Junior Colonel Dolmatov and said, "You should provide him with what he needs to fulfill the assignment."

The assignment was an opportunity for Valery to get close to the fugitive ministers. Several times at night he and Sarwari took walks around the courtyard of the villa. Sarwari was neither pretentious nor condescending, but rather spoke eagerly and animatedly with the junior officer. He complained about Amin, called Amin an American spy, and said that there were numerous enemies around them who must be eliminated. Sarwari spoke decently in both Russian and English. Once he even admitted to Kurilov that his goal was to lose twenty pounds and that he had begun some popular Western weight-loss program to do so.

Gulabzoi was also eager to speak with the young Soviet operative. Gulabzoi still had his prized possession, a Soviet-manufactured pistol of recent origin that was reserved exclusively for the use of colonels and generals. He would retrieve the weapon and say to Valery, "Look, it's a gift from your minister of the interior. Did you know that Comrade Schelokov is a very close friend of Comrade Brezhnev? You don't think they would abandon us, do you?"

The third guest, Watanjar, remained recalcitrant, perhaps due to his poor Russian.

By the deadline, Valery completed his detailed character descriptions, as well as facial and figure sketches of the Khalqi ministers, and brought them to the embassy. He would only later discover the rationale for his assignment.

During this period, Kabul and Moscow were conducting intense, off-line negotiations under the codename "Operation Rainbow." The goal of the operation was to covertly extract Assadullah Sarwari and his friends from the Afghan capital. By then the KGB had a solid base in Afghanistan, but the risk factor of the operation still remained very high. The three Khalqi rebels were officially considered state criminals and were the targets of a national manhunt. If the operation failed, the attempt to get them out of the country would result in a huge international scandal.

After lengthy deliberations, the following plan was authorized. It took advantage of the fact that the end of the term of duty for some Zenit officers was approaching and there would therefore be new arrivals from the Soviet Union. These replacements would bring an assortment of cargo, ranging from weapons and ammunition to various technological devices. The same kind of cargo would return to the Soviet Union with the officers leaving Kabul. The cargo containers were marked "diplomatic," a label that did not necessitate disclosure.

In Balashikha, the suburban Moscow location of the special services training headquarters, three wooden cargo containers were produced for the purpose of smuggling out the fugitives. Each container was large enough to accommodate a person and had holes drilled for ventilation. The containers also had oxygen canisters and mattresses inside. On the outside, the containers were painted dark green so as to resemble typical military-

issued cargo boxes.

These preparations remained strictly classified. Colonel Glotov, from the Eighth Department of Covert Intelligence of PGU, which dealt with the most sensitive, top-classified operations, was appointed to oversee the implementation of the plan. Kryuchkov had warned him that in case of failure, the responsibility would fall squarely on his shoulders, as the PGU would disavow any knowledge of the operation. Vasily Stepanovich Glotov later recalled that he was unpleasantly surprised by that communication, though he refrained from voicing any displeasure. The head of General Staff, Ogarkov, ordered the minister of defense to allocate two airplanes for the operation. The primary IL-76 was to depart Moscow and refuel in Fergana, while an extra An-12 would be awaiting there in case the IL-76 encountered any technical problems. Ten Zenit operatives would fly to Kabul with Glotov. They were to replace their colleagues whose tenure in Kabul was expiring. There were also six agents from different departments within the KGB, who were all charged with different assignments. None of them knew the true purpose of the flight.

At about 4 a.m. on September 18 the heavy transport IL-76 departed from Moscow for the Bagram Airbase. A Gaz-66 truck was part of the aircraft cargo. The three special containers were mixed in with standard cargo in the bed of the truck. At the last moment, several officers of the KGB's Seventh Directorate joined Glotov. The Seventh Directorate officers were specialists in counterfeiting and disguise. They brought wigs, hair dye, and special makeup along with them in case the plan to transport the ministers in the special containers fell through. That was the rationale for Kurilov's secret sketches—to prepare the makeup and hair pieces in case the three fugitives had to alter their appearance.

A similar group of operatives was also formed in Kabul. The Kabul group consisted of

Security Officer Bakhturin, KGB Officer Kabanov, and Dadykin, the adviser to Bagram Airbase's head of intelligence, as well as four Zenit officers. At about eleven in the morning, the Il-76 safely landed at Bagram.

The stage was set for the decisive—and most dangerous—phase of Operation Rainbow.

Immediately after landing, the Kabul group awaiting the plane's arrival, as well as the newly-arrived "Moscovites," began to set about their duties. Boris Kabanov handed Glotov the diplomatic courier documents and the license plate for the truck. One of the Zenit operatives drove the truck out of the airplane, attached the license plate, and settled behind the wheel. The newly arrived officers boarded the embassy bus. The airplane was quickly unloaded and the auto group proceeded to Kabul without delay. Before he left the airbase, Glotov ordered the pilots, "We will return in about three and a half hours. Watch the entrance to the airdrome. As soon as you see the cars returning, start the engines and be prepared for immediate departure."

Nothing unexpected happened as the convoy left the airdrome. The Afghans guarding the base were accustomed to heavy cargo planes arriving daily from the Soviet Union and unloading all sorts of things. Usually no one bothered to examine the cargo. Whatever was brought into Afghanistan was perceived to be fraternal Soviet assistance.

It only took an hour and a half for the bus and the truck, accompanied by Bakhturin's sedan, to reach the gates of the Zenit villa. The bus was immediately driven inside the courtyard and the truck backed into the opening of the garage. The operatives quickly unloaded containers from the truck and brought them into the house. Sarwari squeezed himself into the snug container with difficulty. As Gulabzoi and Watanjar were more

compact, they faced less difficulty with their containers. The three each received a submachine gun and canteens filled with water, and were shown how to use the oxygen tanks in case they needed them. Then the heavy boxes were nailed shut and loaded back into the truck. To an uninformed observer they appeared to be just ordinary military cargo containers. The Zenit officers sat on the side benches of the truck, each with a weapon and two sets of ammunition. The back opening into the cargo section of the truck was tightly sealed. The Zenit members who were leaving Kabul boarded the bus dressed in civilian clothing. They agreed that if the procession were to be stopped by Afghans, they would explain that a group of specialists was returning to the Soviet Union and the truck was there to transport their service equipment and personal belongings. Three sedans driven by KGB operatives accompanied the bus and truck at some distance for additional protection.

Afghan security service cars joined the convoy as soon as it turned on to Darul Aman. The convoy managed to drive through the city without incident, but as they were leaving the city, they were stopped at a checkpoint. Parked at the checkpoint was one of the cars with Afghan security service people who monitored the Soviet motorcade after its departure from the villa.

Dolmatov was the senior officer in the truck. After receiving a radio transmission from the bus alerting him to the armed Afghan patrol headed directly towards the truck, he told his group to be prepared to fight upon his command.

Kurilov, sitting alongside the others on the bench, heard an Afghan officer approach the truck driver and inquire about the truck's cargo and destination. The driver's interpreter recited the previously agreed-upon story. The Afghan lieutenant then

approached the bus. The Soviet “specialists” generously treated him to cigarettes and invited him to visit them in the Soviet Union. Kurilov saw that the Afghan lieutenant was happy to receive the cigarettes, but wasn’t distracted to the point of forgetting the order of his own security service, which he could not dare ignore. Kurilov watched as the Afghan approached the back of the truck and began to open the cover in order to visually inspect the cargo.

“Alexander Ivanovich!” Valery anxiously whispered to Dolmatov. Dolmatov signaled back that he was aware of the threat.

The interpreter quickly hopped out of the truck to convince the Afghan lieutenant that the cargo was simply some equipment that was returning with the specialists to the Soviet Union. The officer continued to silently untie the ropes of the cover. Once they were untied he lifted the edge of the canvas, hoisted himself up onto the back of the truck, and began peering into the dark cargo hold.

Dolmatov, after signaling for everyone to remain where they were, immediately pressed his heavy boot against the Afghan’s probing hand. The Afghan opened his mouth in shock, looked up, and saw the dark pupil of a submachine barrel trained directly on him, with more barrels targeting him peeking out from the darkness.

Keeping a steady application of pressure on the Afghan’s hand, Dolmatov raised his finger to his lips. The gesture was clear: if you value your life, remain silent. The Afghan officer looked back. Just behind him, and very menacingly, stood the “specialists” who had treated him to cigarettes a minute ago. He sensed that they were prepared to strangle him without hesitation. Doomed, he nodded to Dolmatov as if promising not to utter a sound.

Then the Afghan lieutenant ordered his soldiers to raise the gate of the checkpoint

and the convoy continued its drive to Bagram. They reached the base without further incident.

The pilots roused the engines as soon as they saw the cars driving into the airdrome. The cargo bay of the IL-76 opened and the truck drove into the airplane. Once inside, technicians quickly secured the car in position with metal cables.

Dolmatov and his operatives descended from the airplane to the tarmac.

“Open the boxes immediately after takeoff,” he ordered Kurilov, who was to accompany the “diplomatic cargo” to the Soviet Union. “They must have suffered considerably in those stuffy boxes. Now you’re in charge of their lives.”

“Don’t worry, Alexander Ivanovich,” Kurilov reassured him as he took his hand to bid farewell. Dolmatov squeezed his hand so hard that tears nearly appeared in Kurilov’s eyes. It was unclear whether the tears were the result of him leaving Kabul or from the stress of having just avoided mortal danger less than an hour ago. He didn’t know at the time that in less than two months, he would return to see the mountains, Kabul, Dolmatov, and his friends again. He would return with a weapon in hand, this time to engage in battle.

The technicians sealed the airplane doors and the Il-76 roared off into the sky.

Once airborne, Kurilov anxiously began prying open the containers with the assistance of Glotov and his operatives. It hadn’t been more than two hours since the ministers had been sealed inside the containers, but it would be difficult for anyone to survive without air in such an enclosed space. Fortunately all three were alive. Sarwari, the heaviest of the three, his shirt drenched with sweat, had the most difficulty getting out of the container, but sprang to life as soon as he was back on his feet. He immediately approached the window of the aircraft and asked, “Where are we now?” He was told that

they were still flying over Afghan territory. Sarwari burst into an angry rant: “How is it possible to leave the motherland at such an important moment? I will be back,” he vowed. “I will be back to destroy that bastard. I will hang him personally.” His face grew red and sweat began to form on his brow. Valery got nervous. He didn’t want the Afghan to suffer a stroke. He gave Sarwari a canteen with water and tried to calm him down, but Sarwari continued to curse Amin and make colorfully worded vows of vengeance. He was only pacified when Glotov invited them for vodka with sausages and canned food.

The Il-76 was met by two Soviet fighter jets as it approached the Soviet border. The jets escorted the transport to the military airport Tuzel, near Tashkent.

The Khalqis settled in as VIPs in one of the closed residences of the Republican Central Committee of the CPSU in the capital of Uzbekistan. Their rooms were bugged with recording equipment and all of their conversations were monitored around the clock until they left Tashkent. Colonel Ershov, who had known Sarwari for a long time, specially arrived from Moscow. He and Officer Kitaev questioned the Afghans about a variety of issues. They were particularly interested in the situation within Amin’s immediate circle. Who was involved? Could the KGB establish secret contact with those who were dissatisfied with the way events had unfolded? At the same time, PGU bosses in Moscow were negotiating with Bulgarian colleagues in search of an asylum for the three ministers in some discrete location on the Black Sea coast. On October 14, the Khalqis, accompanied by Ershov and Kitaev, were flown on a chartered plane to Varna.

So concludes the story of “the gang of four.” There remained one insignificant detail to address—the Toyota that had been parked in Starostin’s garage. On September 18, Ivanov invited Osadchiy and Starostin for a meeting to discuss how to dispose of the car. Valery

suggested that he thoroughly clean the car of any remaining evidence, wipe fingerprints, attach a Soviet embassy diplomatic license plate, and drive the car to a deserted area in the Kutesangin region, where he would find a dry riverbed, remove the plates, and abandon the car. Then he would rendezvous with Bubnov, who would drive him back to the embassy.

Ivanov and Osadchiy considered the proposal too risky. The resident suggested a plan of his own.

“One of our trade representative staff members, someone named Baranov, owns a white Toyota Crown of the same model. I’ll make arrangements with him and we’ll drive our cars to Valery’s house by the end of the day. We’ll pretend that we are having a dinner party at your place. While that’s happening, we’ll switch Baranov’s license plate with the other Toyota’s. Then Baranov will drive the Afghan car into the Residency’s section of the embassy’s garage. I will follow him. Once there, I’ll pick him up, along with the license plate, and return to Valery’s, at which point we will pretend to resume our dinner party again after having brought the additional party stuff. At night Baranov will leave in his car and I’ll leave in mine. During the same night our technicians will dismantle the Afghan Toyota and bury the parts on the embassy territory adjacent to the garage.”

Boris Semyonovich agreed with that plan, but asked that they keep the “dinner party” cover-up low key. “Otherwise I would want to join you,” he joked to Osadchiy. “By the way, what sort of person is Baranov?”

“Just a regular member of the trade representative,” was Osadchiy’s vague reply.

“Will he agree to participate in this operation?”

“Of course he will agree. What choice does he have? We know too much about him. He would not decline to do such a small favor for us.”

“We need to make sure that he doesn’t guess the true purpose of this business with the license plate. Under no circumstances can he assume that it’s related to the disappearance of the ministers,” warned Ivanov.

That evening, the plan was successfully implemented.

Readers may be wondering, what kind of barbarians would bury a new Toyota Crown in the ground? The operative drivers who were tasked with dismantling the car wondered the same thing. That was why they removed everything that might be used in Soviet cars, to be taken to Moscow later. The rest of the car was gutted, cut into pieces, and buried with tears.

As for the destiny of the fourth rebel, the former frontier affairs minister, Mazdouryar, he was not immediately executed because Amin’s people hoped to use him as bait in hunting down his three associates. Mazdouryar was thrown into prison, where he waited for a decision regarding his fate.

The head of PGU, Kryuchkov, was very pleased to receive the report that the airplane carrying the three fugitives had successfully left Bagram. Kryuchkov rarely imbibed any alcohol and could not abide those who drank in excess, but that day he told Bogdanov over the phone, “Have a drink today. You deserve it.” The happy colonel responded affirmatively. Kryuchkov immediately went to Lubyanka to report the success of the operation to Andropov. The covert evacuation of the Khalqis had been discussed at the very top, and the final decision to go ahead with implementation was sanctioned by Brezhnev himself. Thus the Soviet Politburo had to know the results of the operation immediately.

As he drove from Yasenevo to Moscow, Kryuchkov pondered the next stage of developments in Afghanistan. The Soviet leadership’s approval of the extradition of the

opposition figures was an obvious expression of the low degree of trust they had in the new Afghan leader. Kryuchkov knew from his superior that the new regime would receive Moscow's official recognition. Tomorrow Amin would be congratulated by Brezhnev for his appointment to all of the major political positions. All of which meant nothing. Andropov was indignant about Amin's unpredictability, perfidious nature, and insincerity. The last cables from Kabul, distributed among all members of the Politburo, must have influenced their mood toward the new Afghan premier in a similar way.

"It is difficult to predict what decisions the leadership of the country will make," Kryuchkov thought to himself. "But we in intelligence must be prepared for any turn of events. We should receive permission from Yuri Vladimirovich to intensify our work with the émigré Parchamis, first and foremost with Babrak Karmal. They might be needed at any moment. We need to work quickly with Sarwari and the former ministers, as they may have to be engaged at any moment as well. Now we have a deck full of trump cards. We must decide which one to lead with when the time comes. I think the time will come very, very soon."

Andropov was especially welcoming to Kryuchkov. He was dressed in a knitted sweater and his tie was loose. He shook Kryuchkov's hand with a smile. "So, Volodya, weren't we correct in training the foreign intelligence special services in advance? They did a good job!"

"Yes, indeed, Yuri Vladimirovich. But, to be fair, Zenit wasn't the only unit involved. KGB operatives from both the Residency and Office of the Representative did a great job as well. I think it would be appropriate for them to be rewarded—some with government and others with professional awards. Our comrades took real risks out there."

The KGB chairman sat thoughtfully for a minute.

“Yes, you are correct—we should reward them. But how? If we submit a request for issuing the awards at the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, it will inevitably reveal some aspects of the operation. People will begin wondering as to the occasion behind such a large number of awards. They will want to know what the KGB folks have done. Let’s wait a bit with the awards. When we celebrate some anniversary, then you can include your operatives on the award lists. As to our internal awards, please prepare your proposals. We can give them all kinds of certificates and gifts. Agreed? Now, tell me the latest news from Kabul. What’s happening with Taraki, and how is Amin perceived among the Afghan people?”

They sat across from each other at a small coffee table. Kryuchkov described the situation to his boss. Taraki and his wife remained in isolation. There was absolutely no access to them. Nothing was known about Taraki’s health. Constant attempts by the KGB’s top people and the Soviet ambassador in Kabul to convince Amin not to take any repressive measures against the former general secretary continued. As to the situation within the leadership of the country, there was no obvious opposition to Amin at the time. There were members of the PDPA Central Committee and the Revolutionary Council who firmly and sincerely supported the new leader. There were those who supported him out of fear for their own lives. But one should know Afghans better. Dissatisfaction would percolate among Amin’s entourage as expectations of progress and personal gain began to fade over the weeks. There were some remaining military supporters of Taraki who might rebel due to the ousting of their former leader, but according to Kryuchkov, such acts would be disparate and easy to suppress.

“So Taraki’s time is over?” asked Andropov thoughtfully.

“Yes, Yuri Vladimirovich. He belongs to history now. But we cannot make peace in Amin’s presence. Even if he does not collaborate directly with the Americans, his actions will damage the revolutionary process and the PDPA tremendously. He also jeopardizes our interests in Afghanistan.”

“Wait,” Andropov said. “This is what you and I think. But such decisions must be discussed by our party’s Politburo. Are you sure that all Politburo members perceive Amin similarly?” Kryuchkov shrugged his shoulders. “I am not sure. As far as I know, the minister of defense receives a very different interpretation of the events. Andrei Andreyevich Gromyko will hesitate until the last moment. Ponomaryov? It’s possible that he has been deluded by Amin’s pseudo-revolutionarism and attachment to Stalin’s methods of resolving issues. So let’s not rush. My request for you is to collect the information and keep the situation under unceasing control. Report every meaningful development immediately, and let the CPSU’s recommendations guide all of your actions.”

Kryuchkov knew about those recommendations. They stated that one should, “take the real situation into consideration,” and not give up on dealing with Amin at this stage. It was simultaneously recommended to try to dissuade Amin from repressing the allies of Taraki and other disloyal parties by all means. The instructions said that any contacts made with the new leader should be used to clarify the details of his political persona and intentions. Military and other advisers were ordered to continue their work and avoid participating in crackdowns against those on Amin’s blacklist. The Soviet supply of armaments and military technology was to be “somewhat slowed down.” The mass media was to limit their publications to just the facts, without interpretation or comment.

September in Moscow passed with government officials surveying the new political landscape. Alarming information from Kabul arrived daily and was fed into the analyses for the CPSU Central Committee, the KGB, the Ministry of Defense, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Memoranda were written, proposals were formulated, and classified meetings were held behind closed doors. No strategic steps related to regime change were yet taken, but the time for such action was fast approaching.

On September 21 Andropov personally conducted a meeting of the KGB leadership in which he sharply criticized Amin's actions during the takeover. However, he appealed to all personnel of the security services currently working in the DRA to continue their work with the regime and to avoid any provocations. "We should take the objective situation into consideration," said the chairman diplomatically, "and we should take all necessary measures to maintain our cooperation with and our influence over Amin."

Senior Military Advisers Gorelov and Zaplatin were summoned to Moscow to present their reports on the situation a week later. Epishev, the head of the Main Political Directorate, Ogarkov, the head of the General Staff, Ustinov, the minister of defense, and Ponomaryov, a secretary of the Central Committee, took turns listening to the advisers' reports. Gorelov and Zaplatin were constantly asked about Amin's real persona, whether he could be trusted, and how sincere his loyalty was to the USSR.

The generals remained loyal to their prior positions. They spoke very highly of the new Afghan leader's business qualities, remarked on his tendency for the theatrical, recalled his Pashtun nationalism, and did not deny his cruelty towards political opponents. As to his "Sovietism," both Gorelov and Zaplatin assured their interlocutors of Amin's reliability and loyalty. "He has two most sacred holidays a year, November 7 and May 9,"

said Zaplatin emphatically. Ustinov, having heard these accounts, gloomily advised his generals to work more closely with the KGB operatives upon their return to Afghanistan. A hint of the minister's irritation was captured in the advice he gave: "The KGB and GRU are sending us somewhat different information. You cannot agree amongst yourselves, but we, here, are the ones who have to make the decisions." The principled Zaplatin opened his mouth to complain about Bogdanov and his team, saying, "Once they start drinking less, you will receive more objective information," but the minister was not interested in such a rebuke. The advisers were immediately dismissed in response.

Gorelov, along with Ivanov and Puzanov, was invited to a meeting of the Politburo Commission on Afghanistan, at which the possibility of Soviet intervention in Afghanistan was discussed for the first time. Puzanov, as was his custom, or perhaps at the behest of his superior Gromyko, responded vaguely and formulaically—"On the one hand, on the other hand." Ivanov did not exclude Soviet military intervention, though he clarified the circumstances under which it would likely occur. Gorelov was the only one to insist that Soviet military presence in the DRA should not be strengthened. He held that the Afghan armed forces were capable of resolving their tasks on their own.

Contacts at the highest level between Afghan and Soviet leaders had not yet been frozen completely, but they were put on hold. The only Soviet Politburo member to meet a representative from the Afghan Politburo was Gromyko. He spoke with DRA Minister of Foreign Affairs Shah Wali during a meeting of the General Assembly of the United Nations in New York. Andrei Andreyevich asked his Afghan colleague to describe the situation in Afghanistan.

"Things are calm now in Afghanistan," Shah Wali assured his Soviet colleague.

“However, certain difficult problems continue to confront the revolution, and they have been exacerbated because Taraki was developing a personality cult. He formed a group of cronies around him who were inexperienced and unreliable. The law was repeatedly broken. State security arrested scores of innocent people without any basis. When Taraki recognized that the party leadership didn’t support him, he devised a plot, the goal of which was to assassinate Amin.”

“How did you find out that this plot was taking place?” asked Gromyko.

“The assassination plan was discussed in the headquarters of the security services. A comrade loyal to the party warned Comrade Amin.” Then Shah Wali informed the Soviet minister about the details of the incident in the palace when Major Tarun was killed. He specifically emphasized that when Ambassador Puzanov spoke to Amin on the phone prior to the meeting, he had assured him that there was no danger to his life whatsoever.

“So, do you think that it was organized intentionally for the Soviet ambassador to be there, without a clue as to what was going on?” asked Gromyko gloomily.

“What happened was that Amin went only after the Soviet ambassador assured him that there was nothing to fear, but he brought along his own guards.”

Gromyko changed the unpleasant topic. “And where is Taraki now?”

“In Kabul,” replied Shah Wali vaguely.

Then Gromyko inquired about the mood of the party members, the situation in the provinces, and military affairs. Shah Wali assured him that the situation had improved on all fronts in the last month. After Comrade Amin became the minister of defense, the government troops managed to garner a number of major victories. In particular, they liberated several districts in the south of the country from the rebels.

“This is good. Please tell me, what is the United States’ reaction to the latest events in Afghanistan?” asked Gromyko, having in mind the takeover of power.

“The media writes a lot about us, but we feel that the Americans have not yet made up their minds.”

“Yes,” Gromyko mumbled, “we are also under the impression that the Americans are hesitating, that they cannot draw conclusions.”

It is true that the coup in Kabul came as a surprise to the United States and further complicated an already complex situation. Declassified documents from the period reflect confusion among diplomats and intelligence operatives. Although these documents (cables from the embassy and analytical papers from special services) contain rather comprehensive information about what transpired, they are very cautious in their analyses and even more careful in their prognoses. On September 17, Amstutz, referring to his conversations with diplomats and well-informed Afghans, reported to the State Department that “the Soviets are not terribly enthusiastic, but they realize that at this point in time, there is no alternative to supporting the ambitious and cruel Amin...Now Amin is all they have left...He is the only weapon that will allow Russia to defend the ‘brotherly party’ and preserve the ‘progressive revolution.’”

The next day, the charge d’affaires dared to issue a prognosis in a cable to the U.S. secretary of state. “The crisis is not over,” he wrote. “It is quite possible that a civil war led by Taraki’s allies or other anti-Amin elements may begin between major military detachments of the DRA. Yesterday an Afghan official, in a conversation with an embassy staff member, confidentially called the leadership a ‘bunch of scorpions intent on delivering

deadly bites to each other.” Speaking about Amin, Amstutz unexpectedly used a undiplomatic expression: “I consider his chances of dying in his own bed due to old age equal to zero.”

History would prove the American diplomat’s prediction correct.

In late September, Amstutz notified Washington of some signals originating from Amin’s entourage that suggested Amin’s desire, “to improve relations with the United States government.” Washington’s special services’ sources informed the capital of the same.

American analysts working for the CIA, as well as other major U.S. intelligence agencies, prepared a secret memorandum in which they attempted to predict future developments in the Middle East and possible steps the Soviet Union might take. Despite the memo’s cautious tone and some vagueness in the document’s wording, it indicated directly that, “Soviet military presence would increase in the very near future.” However, the next sentence of the same report somewhat contradicted that statement: “We don’t see any signs that the Soviets are preparing ground forces for a large-scale intervention in Afghanistan.”

Had Soviet generals intercepted the report, they would have been puzzled. On the one hand, it warned that the Soviets had already brought in a battalion of paratroopers and positioned it at the Bagram Airbase, and authorized their military helicopter and tank crews to participate in military actions. On the other hand, the document stated that, “We don’t believe that Moscow will use its troops to fight the rebels.” Then the document assumed that the leaders of the USSR were, “very well aware of the endless military and political complications that Afghanistan holds in store for them in case of a large-scale

military intervention.” But it also observed that, “it’s obvious that the Soviet interests in Afghanistan are more ambitious today than before the coup in 1978. The establishment of a Marxist state in Afghanistan is now considered by Moscow as an important factor in confirming its strategic and political interests in the region.”

The ambiguity of the document created the impression that the intelligence analysts who worked on it were protecting themselves in case of different outcomes as the situation evolved. It was obvious that they were uncertain as to Moscow’s likely behavior in the foreseeable future.

That was not surprising, as Moscow itself lacked such clarity.

It was also obvious from the memorandum that the CIA operatives did a good job of tracing KGB contacts with the Parchamis who lived in Western Europe. The authors of the document report that Soviet representatives attempted to convince the opposition members to return to Afghanistan, where they were promised support in organizing a military coup. It is possible that some of the Parcham leaders who lived in exile had, willingly or otherwise, provided Americans with this information.

Formally, the United States was on friendly terms with the DRA. They continued to provide Afghanistan with modest economic assistance. The last major American politician who visited the country was Deputy Secretary of State Newsom, in July. He signed an agreement for the construction of an irrigation complex in Gilmand with U.S. assistance, as well as provision of American assistance for a wheat production program. But behind the veil of official politics, America’s secret strategy of supporting armed opposition was rapidly unfolding. The Islamic radicals they armed and nurtured would become the chief enemies of the United States only two decades later.

The genie was out of the bottle.

Not much is known about the last days of the founder of the PDPA. According to some reports, it didn't take long for Moscow to accept the loss of Taraki. No documents or oral testimonies exist that indicate any serious planning to forcefully free Taraki. It is most likely that the KGB considered him a lost cause. Immediately following the coup d'etat on September 15, the Politburo of the CPSU sent a secret cable to the first secretaries of the Central Committees of the Communist Parties of the union republics and regional party committees titled "On the Situation in Afghanistan."

The cable stated the following in particular: "For some time, serious disagreements between the allies of N. Taraki and H. Amin have occurred, which turned into a de facto struggle for power within the party-state leadership of Afghanistan. In connection with such developments, on behalf of the Politburo and L.I. Brezhnev personally, we urgently and persistently appealed to Taraki and Amin to request that they put aside their disagreements and stand together...Both Taraki and Amin declared that they were sympathetic to our appeals. However, the reality of the situation took a sharp turn for the worse...Now the leadership of the security services and the ministry of the interior have been replaced. The commanders of the military detachments are currently being replaced. Everything is leading to Taraki's dismissal from the positions that he occupies.

"It should be stated that the chairman of the Revolutionary Council and the general secretary of the Central Committee of the PDPA, N. Taraki, had been displaying extreme indecision in recent days. The advice and recommendations given to him by the Central Committee of the CPSU went largely unheeded, despite the verbal agreement he typically

expressed.

“It is now clear that we will have to deal with the new leadership of Afghanistan, headed by H. Amin, who has been issuing statements that he will preserve the regime currently existing in the country.”

The phrase about Taraki’s “extreme indecision” effectively meant that the Soviet leadership had given up on him. His widow, Nurbibi Taraki, later disclosed what had happened to the founder of the PDPA. One of the authors of this book met with her in December 1989, in her light-filled two-story villa, located in an affluent sector of Kabul.

Nurbibi Taraki, widow of the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the PDPA:

On the day my husband last received his Soviet comrades, I was in the bedroom, which was located not far from the general secretary’s office. Suddenly I heard shooting behind the door. I ran out of the bedroom and saw Tarun lying in a puddle of blood. It seemed that he had been shot once in the head and once in the side. The guards said that Amin’s people had done it. Besides Tarun, one other person was wounded. Dr. Azim, who was bringing tea, was caught in the crossfire and shot in the shoulder.

This all happened around 4 p.m. The Soviet comrades left immediately. Afterwards, Taraki called Amin and asked him why he did it. I don’t know what Amin said in response. Taraki asked Amin to take Tarun’s corpse from the palace and see that he be given a proper burial. “Tomorrow,” came the response. The head of the General Staff and the commander of the guard, whom Taraki addressed with the same request over the phone, reacted similarly. Then all connections with the outside world ceased. All the telephones were silent. Nobody

came to us.

But my husband was initially not too concerned. He thought that common sense would prevail and that everything would return to normal. He believed that his Soviet friends would not allow Amin to do anything stupid. He didn't want bloodshed or violence, and hoped for goodwill and the power of camaraderie. It was true that he loved Amin very much and considered him to be his most loyal, dedicated, and capable pupil.

The next day a note arrived from Amin: "Order your guards to put down their weapons." Two bodyguards stayed with us: Babrak and Kasem. At first they both firmly refused to obey Amin's order. Taraki attempted to convince them: "Revolution means order; this is why you have to obey."

"Don't believe Amin," the bodyguards objected. "He will kill you in cold blood, like he did yesterday when he set up his friend Tarun. He will go all the way."

"No, comrades," Taraki objected softly. "You are not correct. This is not possible. We are old, loyal allies. I have given my whole life for the revolution. I have never had any other goal, and everybody knows it. Why would I be destroyed?"

Then Babrak and Kasem agreed to kill each other in order to avoid giving up. Taraki tried to talk them out of it again: "You shouldn't do this. They will think that you were plotters and decided to do this in order to avoid just punishment." I also tried to convince them not to take their own lives. We both believed that everything would turn out fine.

So Babrak and Kasem surrendered and turned themselves in. We watched with horror as Amin's executioners dragged them off, as if they were goats being carried to buzkashi. People are dragged like this only before they are executed. And it was true—they were killed almost immediately.

We were left untouched for the next three days. We lived under house arrest without any connection to the outside world. Taraki's brother, with his two children his niece, was with us. The cook and servants also remained. Then all of the relatives and staff were taken somewhere. Only the cook, Nasim, remained with us. Several days later, we were awakened by officers from the security services in the middle of the night. "A decision has been made to settle you in a different location. Pack up quickly."

The palace complex has a very modest house that stands aside from other buildings, named Samte Djuma. This is where we were brought. Except for a bare, rough bed, our room was absolutely empty. The floor was covered with a thick layer of dust. It looked like a prison cell. I asked Taraki, "Have we committed some crimes?"

"Nothing," he responded in his usual philosophical tone. "Everything will be okay. This is a regular room. I know that soldiers lived here before. Now we will live here."

I cleaned up the dust. We spent eight days here. My husband behaved absolutely calmly. However, he asked to meet with Amin every day and kept repeating, "The revolution was my life. I have pupils who will bring my work to completion. I have fulfilled my duty." He was sixty-two years old. He was not ill, but his hair had turned completely gray.

Later, I was warned that I would be taken to a doctor. It is true that I wasn't feeling well; my blood pressure was very high. An officer and a doctor came in the middle of the night. "Why do you want to take her at night?" asked my husband. "If people see her in the afternoon, there will be unnecessary rumors."

I was brought into another house, also on the Ark Palace territory. That house was called Kotai-gol. I saw the other members of our family there. "Why did you bring me here?" I asked the officers. "You promised to give me medical treatment."

“Wait until morning. We will be back soon.” They did not come in the morning, nor afternoon, nor evening. I never saw those people again.

I felt very poorly. I asked for some medication. The response I got was rude: “Where are we to get medication for you? The people have nothing, and you are demanding medication.” If any of Amin’s people appeared, I begged them to send me back to my husband, but they only grinned in response.

Then one night we were all transferred to the Puli-Charkhi prison. There I learned about my husband’s death. Only three months later, after having been freed, did I learn about the circumstances surrounding his death. I was told that three officers of the Palace Guard—Iqbal, Ruzi, and Hodud—entered Taraki’s room late at night. He stood before them in his robe and was calm. The officers told him to accompany them to a different location. He asked for something to drink. “Not now,” was their response. Taraki then understood it all. He gave the officers a small box filled with money. It contained about 4,500 Afghani, or about one thousand dollars. It was all that he had managed to save during his life. He asked them to give that box to me. Then he took his wristwatch off and got his Communist Party membership card out of his pocket. “Please give these to Amin.” The officers tied up Taraki, threw him on the floor, and smothered him with a pillow. Later, the commander of the guard, Jandad, personally certified the death. I don’t know where my husband was buried.

Later I asked why the Soviet comrades didn’t help. The ambassador and the generals all had been promising to help. Nobody could give me an answer.

Chapter 8:

Death Sentence

“The city of Kabul is sun and bullets...”

The Nobel laureate Rudyard Kipling probably did not foresee these lines as being relevant one hundred years after he wrote them.

As before, a blinding sun shines over Kabul. It rolls out from behind the mountains early, promising the blue of the sky, sudden warmth, and a certain intrinsic and indescribable joy that the morning brings.

As always, it is a rare day without gunshots. The whistle of bullets is less surprising to the ear than hearing a birdsong in the Afghan capital.

Time in Afghanistan seems to have stopped according to some unknown will. Widespread poverty and calls for prayer have not changed for centuries. The royal regime was replaced by a republican regime. Then came the local communists, backed by the Soviets. Then the Mujahadeen, followed by the Talibs. Then a puppet government, controlled by the Americans. All around there remained the same hopeless poverty, medieval darkness, and backwardness.

The overthrow and assassination of Taraki did not come as a particular shock to Afghan society. Residents of the country, who were more or less familiar with Afghanistan's bloody history, seemed to have grown accustomed to the fact that their rulers would be either violently overthrown or cruelly murdered. Since the early twentieth century, not one leader retired voluntarily.

In 1919, Habibullah Khan was betrayed and killed in his tent during a hunting trip in Jalalabad. His son Amir Amanullah Khan, who was a progressive reformer and friend to Turkish president Kemal Atatürk, was overthrown by Bache Saqaw. He managed to escape from Afghanistan before dying in Italy. In the 1960s, King Zahir Shah ordered Amanullah's remains to be brought to Kabul to be given an honorary burial. The next monarch, Nadir Khan, was shot on September 8, 1933 by a student-revolutionary. As mentioned earlier, his son Zahir Shah was overthrown by Mohammad Daoud. Zahir Shah quietly lived out the rest of his days in Italy as a political immigrant. Mohammad Daoud was killed by a Khalqi officer. Now it was Taraki's turn.

Most probably, the millions of Afghans who live in mountain settlements never even learned about the political changes in Kabul. Overwhelming illiteracy, lack of electricity, the absence of passable roads, and poverty doomed them all to a life identical to the one lived by their ancestors one hundred, two hundred, three hundred years ago. But because these Afghans never experienced or even heard of any other life, they have been content with their meager existence. They do not look miserable. They accept this life, full of challenges, with an astonishing humility, and moreover, they enthusiastically thank Allah every day for the grace bestowed on them. Smiles on their faces can be seen much more often than traces of suffering.

Could this all be because of the relentless sunshine?

But the shooting also never ceases.

On October 14, 1979, Kabul was shaken once more by the roar of tank cannons and machine gun fire. This time, it was officers from the Seventh Infantry Division who moved forward in support of Taraki. Of course, they already knew that their leader was no longer

living. They knew that the armed forces were fully controlled by Amin, and they had little chance of receiving support from other military detachments. Their assault was more an act of desperation than a well-planned operation.

By the evening, several tanks had demolished the division headquarters and then began to advance on Kabul. Nobody could say what the purpose was behind their movement, but the Soviet embassy was alarmed. At a Soviet ambassadorial meeting, an anxious General Gorelov reported that the Tarakist rebels had the capacity to destroy half of Kabul, potentially leading to casualties among the Soviets. "I have already given the order for aviation to hit the rebels from the sky," Gorelov said.

"According to our information, these tank commanders advanced under the slogans 'Long live Taraki' and 'Long live the Soviet Union,'" Bogdanov told Gorelov. "Are you planning on killing friends of the Soviet Union? We shouldn't interfere," he argued. "Let them figure it out for themselves."

It is possible that the KGB representative secretly hoped that the rebels would somehow pass through the city, take control over the People's Palace, and destroy Amin. It was certainly against the odds, but who could tell? On April 27 of the previous year, Watanjar also had begun his assault against Daoud's regime with just a few tanks, yet he succeeded. Just in case, Bogdanov called Kryuchkov and described his position to his superior, who did not object.

But Gorelov would get his way—he and the other military advisers gave the orders to suppress the assault, and some even directly participated in subsequent battles against the pro-Taraki rebels.

A secure telephone was in a windowless room adjacent to the ambassador's office. Puzanov overheard some conversations with Moscow through the door that had been left slightly opened. Deputy Minister of Defense Pavlovsky was speaking with Ustinov, and provided his version of events. The next minute, KGB Representative Bogdanov called Kryuchkov and reported a completely different version of what had transpired. Tension from an underlying rivalry between the Soviet agencies in Kabul reached its peak during those days.

Gorelov was convinced that the KGB was responsible for the armed assault against Amin. He was so confident in his assessment that when he saw a staff member from Bogdanov's office sitting in the reception area for the ambassador's office on the following day, he couldn't resist a snide remark. "What, are you here to mourn your failure?" The obviously perplexed staff member asked, "What are you talking about?" By then the military detachments loyal to Amin, assisted by Soviet advisers, had completely defeated the rebels.

The same could not be said about the situation in other regions in Afghanistan. Taking advantage of the chaos that followed the shift in power in Kabul, detachments of the military opposition considerably expanded their spheres of influence. In some northern and southern provinces of the DRA, the opposition controlled up to ninety percent of the territory, including highways and regional centers. Provincial cities remained under Kabul's nominal control. At the end of each day, the arrival of darkness ushered in the authority of rebel movements.

The organs of local power, which were weak to begin with, were now subject to new purges. Remaining underground Parchamis and anyone suspected of sympathy to Taraki

were expelled from local authorities. Amin, when addressing the masses, would dedicate significant amounts of time to talking about violations of law that were happening with the blessing of the former leaders. He condemned the repressions and terror against innocent civilians. He went so far as to rename Afghanistan's internal security service as KAM, translated as the Organization of Workers' Counterintelligence. However, the name change did not help prevent the murders of innocent civilians. The acts of repression intensified.

Aziz Akbari's tenure as the head of security services did not last long. The new Afghan leader did not believe that Akbari was completely loyal, and soon demoted him to his former position as the head of counterintelligence. Asadullah Amin, Amin's nephew, was appointed KAM chief. This young man, who a year and a half earlier was working as a medical technician, now occupied several key posts. In addition to his new post as KAM chief, Asadullah Amin became the first secretary of the Kabul City Committee of the PDPA, was chairman of the Society of Afghan-Soviet Friendship, a Central Committee member, a member of the Revolutionary Council, and remained deputy minister of foreign affairs. He was very good at fulfilling all of Hafizullah Amin's wishes, and eager to please his uncle out of gratitude for his rapid career growth.

During those days, the KGB office sent a number of cables to the Center regarding the intensifying repression. In one of the cables, Osadchiy informed the Center that, according to a trusted source, Amin had ordered that preparations be made to eliminate three hundred political prisoners, among whom were prominent PDPA leaders such as Keshtmand, Qadir, and Raffi. Amin's plan was to blame AGSA for the repression and use the media to inform the public that the prisoners had been executed under Taraki. Amin thereby planned to kill two birds with one stone: to deliver a final blow to the opposition

within the party, and to compromise the former leadership. The KGB resident's cable contained the recommendation to "task the Soviet ambassador to visit Amin for a conversation about the matter, taking precautions to avoid compromising the source of the information."

A mind game thus evolved between the Afghan leader and the Soviet special services. The difficulty was to avoid rousing Amin's suspicion as to how the Soviets had ascertained information regarding the planned massacre. Soviet intelligence surrounded Amin and monitored his every step. Amin, in turn, successfully manipulated his Soviet "friends" by utilizing his KGB-trained security services. Recording equipment was installed in many places where the Soviets convened. Bogdanov's people even discovered a bug in a skirting board on a wall in the guesthouse reserved for Soviet VIPs during General Pavlovsky's stay there. Bogdanov's team decided not to remove the equipment, opting instead to use it as a channel for disinformation.

Amin also issued an order to organize a special group of operatives who were particularly loyal at KAM. Those operatives would pay daily visits to sensitive sites where Soviet specialists worked and question their agents about conversations among the Soviets, and about their activities. Amin received detailed reports from such visits every evening.

But the Soviet "friends" were not sitting idly either. Osadchiy's operatives, sixty officers from Bogdanov's group, scores of Zenit members, and hundreds of military specialists and advisers, as well as an agent network, all worked to collect information about Amin. Bogdanov managed to significantly reinforce his office staff to better track Amin. In August, there were one hundred seventy five positions in his shop. By December, the number had swelled to three hundred fifty. The position of the KGB representative was

soon considered to be equivalent to a general's rank. Outside of the USSR, only the German Democratic Republic was home to such an extensive network of KGB operatives.

The intelligence operatives paid particular attention to every development dealing with the Afghan leaders' interactions with contacts from the USA, China, and Pakistan. However, there wasn't much to report. All meetings with the Americans took place officially, with the approval of Soviet representatives (usually Safronchuk). As for attempts to improve relations with Pakistan, they were undertaken according to recommendations from the CPSU Central Committee and the Soviet Foreign Ministry. It was in both Kabul's and Moscow's interest to suppress any anti-Afghan sentiment in Islamabad and Washington. Trying to improve relations with Afghanistan's southern neighbor, Amin even declared his consent to postpone resolution of the Pashtun issue, a move that had been recommended to him for a long time by his Soviet "friends." However, Islamabad didn't express any particular joy in its response. It was conducting its own game, with the Americans pulling the strings. The United States' response to Amin's offer to normalize bilateral relations was reserved and inconclusive.

In October, Amstutz was replaced by a diplomat named Archer Blood. During a meeting with Blood, Amin asked to resume American economic assistance to Afghanistan. However, Blood, who had received specific instructions from the U.S. State Department, responded coldly. "We will be prepared to consider your request only when we receive a satisfactory explanation regarding the murder of Mr. Dubs." Later, Amstutz wrote in his book, "Amin didn't have any pro-American sentiments. Having been deputy prime minister and minister of foreign affairs, prime minister, then finally president, Amin undertook few efforts to gain the trust and support of the United States."

Having disassociated himself from his predecessor in many respects, and having immediately banished Taraki's name from public discourse, Amin, as before, continued to pester Moscow with requests for military intervention. His demands ranged from a battalion for his personal protection to reinforcements to fight the rebels in the north of Afghanistan. He received varied responses to those requests, but the essence remained the same: it was not possible to send troops. Amin himself would have to take care of the situation using available resources.

Did Amin understand that he would not be forgiven for his ruthless murder of Taraki, and that the Soviet leadership would be unable to resume relations on the same terms as before? Obvious signs emerged of cooling relations with Moscow. He could sense this in Puzanov's and Safronchuk's eyes.

Amin tried to undertake efforts to re-establish the Kremlin's trust. However, if he had become a parricide in the eyes of the Moscow leadership, he personally did not perceive his actions as any sort of transgression. He was hardly tormented by his conscience. On the contrary, he sincerely believed that by removing and killing his "teacher," he had acted in the best interests of Afghanistan. He considered his actions as an extension of a centuries-old tradition in which the ruler would be overthrown and mercilessly destroyed. None of this had been Amin's creation—he was merely the son of his people, a Pashtun, and acted according to those unwritten laws that he had inherited through his mother's milk.

But the fact remained that Moscow obviously didn't trust him as they had trusted his predecessor, and he felt this mistrust in subtle details of subsequent developments.

In the middle of October, military advisers Gorelov and Zaplatin received an order to report to Minister of Defense Ustinov and the head of the Tenth Chief Directorate of the Ministry of Defense, Colonel General Zotov. That directorate was in charge of international military cooperation. They informed the ambassador about the forthcoming trip, and then both of them met with Amin before flying to Moscow. Amin was in a good mood, told many jokes, and asked about the details of the advisers' prior military service over dinner. As he bid the advisers farewell, he asked, "What would you say if I wrote a personal letter to Comrade Leonid Ilyich Brezhnev?"

"That's fine," Gorelov responded for both generals.

"And could I ask you to deliver this letter to Comrade Brezhnev?"

The generals exchanged glances. Never before had a head of state asked them such a favor.

"We can't promise to deliver it to the general secretary personally," responded Gorelov tentatively. "But we will certainly pass it along to those who can."

"Excellent," said Amin with a smile. Then, addressing Zaplatin, he added, "Tomorrow, Comrade Iqbal will deliver the letter to the plane."

When the advisers left the People's Palace, Gorelov became overwhelmed with doubt. Did they do the right thing, having agreed to fulfill such a delicate task? Was there a possibility of negative repercussions for them? "Let me talk it over with the ambassador just in case, Vasily Petrovich," said Gorelov.

Although it was quite late, Puzanov received him immediately. As he did regularly in such cases, he also invited the KGB representative. Bogdanov later recalled that having ascertained the situation, he thought that the letter surely contained a request to the Soviet

leadership for the recall of Ambassador Puzanov from Kabul. The ambassador himself voiced a different opinion. "Amin is addressing Soviet leadership with the request to receive him in Moscow officially as the head of state. Only if such a reception occurs will he feel confident in his position."

"You shouldn't have agreed," Bogdanov told the chief military adviser. "You are not a diplomatic courier. There is an accepted protocol for the transfer of such materials. There are official channels, for example the Afghan embassy in Moscow."

"I couldn't refuse the head of state," Gorelov objected.

"He'll be ordering you around soon," said Bogdanov.

"And you would only prefer an obedient and convenient head of state," responded Gorelov with irritation that bordered on anger, adding, "so that he would be tipsy starting in the morning, like Taraki?"

Such exchanges between KGB and Soviet military representatives became fixtures during Amin's reign. Gorelov was determined not to join the common anti-Amin line that was becoming increasingly obvious in private conversations and cables sent to Moscow. But this time, Puzanov intervened. "Do you think, Leonid Pavlovich," he said, addressing Bogdanov, "it would be possible to discreetly open the package to familiarize ourselves with the contents?"

"Technically it is possible, but only under the condition that we receive the package in advance, so that we have sufficient time."

"Let's do our best," pleaded Puzanov, who strongly disliked the idea of secret correspondence. He did not expect anything good for himself to come of this episode.

The next morning, Bogdanov's people arrived at the airport long before the flight departed. They were to familiarize themselves with the contents of the package before returning the letter to the Moscow-bound generals. But Amin was one step ahead. All of the passengers on the Aeroflot flight took their seats on board before the courier arrived. The generals could wait no longer. They were the last ones up the gangway. At that very moment, a sedan screeched to a halt beside the plane. Iqbal Waziri, the head of the Political Directorate of the Afghan army, emerged from the car. He caught up to the advisers and handed them a wax-sealed packet. Soon the cabin doors closed and the plane lumbered down the runway.

Inside the airplane, Zaplatin examined the thick packet, and handed it to Gorelov. "You will see the head of General Staff before me. You should give this to him."

The package was handed to Marshal Ogarkov that day. Nobody knows what happened to the package. Nobody ever mentioned if Brezhnev read Amin's letter, or could say with certainty what the letter was about. Was it about an official visit to the Soviet Union, or about recalling Ambassador Puzanov, or perhaps an explanation of the rationale that led to Taraki's overthrow?

Amin had also sent requests for an official invitation from Moscow using alternate channels. However, that was not the extent of his accomplishments as head of state. Whatever was later said of Amin, the hundred days of his rule were filled with activity in all directions. A ten-year program for developing the national economy and a five-year plan to implement the program were developed and approved with his direct participation. As before, he dealt intensely with international affairs, in particular trying to find a compromise in relations with Pakistan. That compromise, however, was never found. He

received consent from the Soviet side to assist in creating an Institute for Party Scholarship. He signed an agreement to build a Center for Soviet Science and Culture in Kabul. His involvement ranged from personally conducting military operations against the rebels to organizing a campaign against locusts.

Under Amin, a Constitutional Commission was formed. The commission was tasked to prepare and present for discussion a draft of the constitution of the DRA by January 1, 1980. Several prominent specialists on state law, including a staff member of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR and the deputy directors of two major institutions, were sent from the Soviet Union to assist the commission. These scholars had difficulty interacting with the Afghan leader, who passionately desired to contribute personally to the Afghan constitution. For example, he sought to establish the political structure of Afghanistan as a socialist state in the constitution. He suggested emulating the Soviet example by creating four socialist republics: the Afghan Socialist Republics (ASR) of Pashtunistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Hazaristan. Only with great difficulty was Amin talked out of such wishes.

After Amin received official congratulations in honor of his election to the top party and state positions, Alexander Mikhailovich Puzanov decided that everything would eventually return to business as usual. "Taraki himself is to blame for what happened," the ambassador would tell his confidantes. "He had resigned to being the nominal leader for a long time, but in reality, Amin pulled all the strings."

“We ought to serve,” the ambassador would say. “There is a head of state who is recognized by the Soviet leadership, which means we are obliged now to behave accordingly.”

But it is doubtful if Puzanov was personally sympathetic to Amin or would place his bet on him. It is also doubtful whether Ambassador Puzanov felt anything personal toward Amin; if he did, those personal views were deeply concealed, far from the surface of anything expressed by this very mature diplomat. Alexander Mikhailovich, who remembered the time of Stalin’s persecutions and dangerous intrigues among the party and Soviet *nomenklatura*, played according to the rules. He saw how decisively and craftily Amin cleared his path towards the summit of power, claiming loyalty to Marxist-Leninist ideals all along the way. He respected Amin’s business qualities, his contribution to the construction of military and security forces, and his success in establishing international ties. As a bureaucrat of the old school, he held Comrade Amin’s personal participation in the development of revolutionary theory in high esteem. It was Comrade Amin who wrote a number of works providing the April Revolution with an ideological foundation. So, the “Second Man” of the party had surpassed the “First Man” in every respect. Only the blind would fail to see this fact.

In the cables that he sent to Moscow, Puzanov, as a very experienced diplomat, avoided any categorical evaluations and judgments that might be used against him in the future. He stuck closely to facts. In the circle of leaders who were in charge of affairs in Kabul, the ambassador had solidified his reputation as Hafizullah Amin’s close ally. However, he was not the only official with this reputation. Generals Gorelov and Zaplatin continued to heap praise upon Amin. Deputy Defense Minister Pavlovsky also joined this

camp. Minister-Counselor Safronchuk, who knew Amin well, would often remark on his extraordinary business qualities.

The ambassador visited the new leader almost daily in order to discuss current issues, including writing the country's constitution, issuing mass amnesty for criminals, and developing new projects within the framework of the Soviet-Afghan cooperation agreement.

Then the unexpected happened.

In early October, Alexander Mikhailovich received a call from the senior military adviser, who asked him to meet urgently. Judging by his tone of voice, the reason for the meeting was most ominous. Puzanov invited Bogdanov to the meeting. Ivanov was away on a business trip to Moscow.

Having entered the office, Gorelov immediately handed the ambassador a slim brochure written in Dari. Judging by the smell of ink, the brochure was fresh off the press. It had been printed in the publishing house of the Political Directorate of the Afghan armed forces, he explained. The document was titled "The Truth about Taraki's Failed Assassination Attempt on Comrade Amin."

"Here, read it," said Gorelov. "It narrates the most interesting version of events." Puzanov immediately summoned an interpreter, who began to read the text. According to the text, on September 14, the day that Tarun was killed and Amin miraculously avoided assassination, it was the Soviet ambassador who, through an interpreter, called Amin to summon him to the palace immediately and gave a guarantee for his absolute safety. In other words, the brochure directly accused an official Soviet representative of organizing an assassination attempt on the current head of Afghanistan. Puzanov, having listened to

the translation, was shocked. It was clear to everybody that this brochure was not the result of an independent act of the Political Directorate, but rather a document designed by the head of state himself.

“We must report this to Moscow immediately,” said Bogdanov.

“Lev Nikolayevich,” began the ambassador, who looked as if he’d seen a ghost. “This is a lie. You were there yourself—you know what happened.”

Gorelov himself looked astonished. “Yes, it is very strange,” he responded uncertainly.

The next day the situation took a turn for the worse. Shah Wali, the minister of foreign affairs and a member of the Politburo, called the ambassadors of socialist countries and read to them “The Truth about Taraki’s Failed Assassination Attempt on Comrade Amin.” Safronchuk represented the Soviet embassy at the gathering because Amin had called for a meeting with Puzanov for some insignificant reason. After Shah Wali finished reading, the diplomats turned to Safronchuk. What was that? What did that mean? A wish to remove the current Soviet ambassador from Kabul? The beginning of Amin’s next intrigue? Or was the new leader demonstrating a newly found independence, some kind of a new political course, to Moscow?

“Were you personally present at this so-called assassination attempt on Comrade Amin’s life?” Safronchuk asked the Afghan foreign minister.

“No,” he responded, “but these are the findings of the investigation that we conducted.”

The meeting was hastily adjourned. The ambassadors left the meeting at a loss. This wasn't how things were done in countries in the Soviet camp. What happened was obviously against the rules.

Gromyko sent a telegram expressing his irritation to Puzanov, with instructions to visit Amin to register his protest. The recommendation was for Puzanov, Pavlovsky, Gorelov, and Bogdanov—in lieu of Ivanov—to visit the Afghan leader together. However, Bogdanov thought that Amin might perceive such a heavy-handed visit negatively, and offered to go to the People's Palace alone. Puzanov rejected that suggestion. "It says here in plain Russian that we should all go together!"

Bogdanov's concern proved to be accurate. The leader of Afghanistan, having been confronted with such a hefty delegation, realized that something was amiss and grew tense. The guests approached the issue cautiously. At first, Puzanov asked for Amin's opinion regarding samples of the new Afghan medals that had been minted in Moscow. "Yes," confirmed Amin, temporarily relieved. "I've already ordered their approval." Then the ambassador decided that he could move to the main purpose of the visit.

"We have a directive from Moscow. Comrade Rurikov will read it out loud for us."

Amin's face dropped upon hearing the note from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the USSR. He decisively pushed his cup of tea away, and began, "Everything that is written here is untrue."

The Soviet representatives were silent. It was unheard of for the general secretary of a friendly party to call a note signed by a Soviet Politburo member a lie. This was an inexcusable offense, and completely out of order. Then Amin decided to adopt a softer approach.

“May I speak to you not according to protocol, but as a comrade and brother? I will expect the same from you.”

“Certainly, Comrade Amin,” said the guests.

“What Shah Wali narrated to the ambassadors of socialist countries is our position, which was presented earlier to the Politburo and the plenary session of the Central Committee of the PDPA. Almost a month has passed since that fateful day when Taraki committed this criminal assassination attempt on my life. So why wait until now to speak? Why did none of you come to us, to advise us on what to do or to say?”

“But Comrade Amin,” Pavlovsky protested, “all of us were present then in Taraki’s office, and we know what actually happened.”

“I’m telling you that things happened exactly as our document has described,” Amin rudely interrupted. “I had Afghan comrades in the same room with me who can confirm that it was Comrade Puzanov who, through an interpreter, invited me to the People’s Palace and guaranteed my safety. But I had already been warned about the threat and for this reason I arrived with guards. Now, as we all know, this was not an unnecessary measure. Certainly, it is possible that I am mistaken,” Amin walked out from behind his desk and theatrically marched to the center of the room. “Perhaps you believe that my mistake is hurting the world communist movement? If this is what your Politburo believes, then I will do everything that the Soviet comrades ask me to do. But then you ought to take into consideration that I will be the only one to blame, because it was I who narrated events the way that they actually happened.”

Amin was completely in his element during this exchange. He reveled in such demagogic maneuvers.

“You insist that I gather my comrades to tell them that everything I said before is untrue. Is this what you want? Of course, I deeply respect you all and am prepared to do just that—but I ask you, is this the appropriate course of action? Would it be wise to recall the brochure titled ‘The Truth about the Failed Assassination Attempt on Comrade Amin,’ which has already been distributed to every army detachment? Wouldn’t that damage our party and sully my name as its general secretary?”

“Shah Wali’s statement has already damaged Soviet-Afghan relations,” Puzanov was quick to point out.

“Don’t worry, Comrade Ambassador. Nothing can damage our friendship. Our enemies have no chance of this happening. I give you my word: we are moving forward on the socialist path step by step. This is the essence of the current moment.”

“And we value this highly,” Bogdanov volunteered. “But now we are talking of something else. Moscow expects you to somehow correct this misunderstanding.”

“Misunderstanding?” Amin interrupted. “But this misunderstanding is simply your attempt to denounce the truth! This is not according to communist or Leninist principles. Certainly, you have the right to question our position and to point out our mistakes. For example, you can say that four Afghan ministers, on the eve of that incident, did not arrive at the Soviet embassy, and did not attempt to mobilize the military detachments against me.” Amin looked solemnly upon his guests, whose faces had darkened. “No, you’d better not insist on refuting the facts. Refutation would reflect poorly on the party and country. They will say that it was done under pressure from the USSR. I am offering you a different option. You may inform the ambassadors from the socialist countries about your version of events, and we will not object to that.”

In concluding his speech, Amin said that if the Soviet comrades insisted, he was prepared to obey them. However, this would mean that the head of the PDPA and the Afghan state was acting against his will and conscience, and against the truth.

“This would mean my political suicide,” concluded Amin. “Do you want my suicide?”

If the Soviet comrades received this idea favorably, they kept it to themselves. They parted unemotionally. Each was considering the excuses they would have to make to their superiors the next day. Ambassador Puzanov was already mentally packing his suitcases.

Three days after that meeting, Soviet agents from Amin’s entourage reported that Amin, when speaking with his closest allies, referred to Puzanov disrespectfully and cursed while describing the Soviet ambassador. All of that was within the context of his story about the failed assassination attempt. “I have no desire to meet with him or speak with him,” Amin declared angrily. “I cannot fathom how such a dishonest and tactless person could be the ambassador here for so long.”

A cable with this information was signed by Bogdanov and immediately sent to the Center. It is possible that this could have been part of the calculations of the Afghan leader’s master plan all along. He knew that there could be only one reaction to such a cable from the Foreign Ministry, and the reaction would be implemented immediately.

Soon Puzanov received a message from Gromyko: “Taking into consideration your many requests regarding permission to leave your post as the ambassador to Afghanistan, you have been transferred to another position.” Certainly, Puzanov never voiced such a request. To the contrary, he held onto his position with all of his might, understanding that at the age of 73, no positions with comparable clout would be forthcoming.

On October 27, Alexander Mikhailovich visited Shah Wali, the one who had embarrassed him in front of all the ambassadors of the socialist countries. This was the final act of Puzanov's personal drama, and he had to play it to the best of his ability. Looking past the Afghan minister, he pronounced a statement that he had prepared in advance:

"In response to my request, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the USSR has made the decision to relieve me of my responsibilities as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Soviet Union to the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan."

Shah Wali was stone-faced. He nodded respectfully, acknowledging that he had received Puzanov's message.

"I was also asked to inform you," Puzanov continued in a bleak, official voice, "that Comrade Fikryat Ahmetjanovich Tabeyev was recommended for the ambassadorial post. I would like to request your *agrément*e to the appointment of Mr. Tabeyev."

He listed Tabeyev's biographical information, placing emphasis on the fact that he worked for nineteen years as first secretary of the Tartar Regional Committee of the CPSU, that he was a member of the Central Committee, and a deputy and member of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR.

Then it was Shah Wali's turn to speak. He also said exactly what was customarily spoken in such cases.

"Your message is unexpected to us," he lied without batting an eye. "You've made a great contribution to strengthening the friendship between our two countries. One can responsibly claim that the attitude of the Afghan people to the Soviet Union underwent a significant transformation over the last decade. We acknowledge your enormous personal

contribution to this transformation. As for the *agrément* for Comrade Tabeyev, this request will be relayed to the government without delay.”

They continued to speak about current affairs. Puzanov informed the minister about the agreement of the Central Committee of the Communist Party to accept two hundred fifty Afghan heads of local authorities to study in the USSR, that new courses of Russian language taught by professors from the USSR were to be developed in Kabul, and that new films from Soviet studios were opening in Kabul that very day. Puzanov invited Shah Wali and his wife to a reception at the embassy commemorating the sixty-second anniversary of the October Revolution.

“Thank you,” said the minister, placing his right hand over his heart. “I will surely be there. This is the most important holiday for us as well.”

On that very day, Vasily Safronchuk visited Amin to request the *agrément* for the new ambassador, Tabeyev. Unlike Shah Wali, Amin did not need to put on an act, and voiced his obvious satisfaction with the news. He surprised Safronchuk by immediately proclaiming his consent to Tabeyev’s appointment and asking Moscow to confirm the appointment immediately.

“But, Comrade Amin,” Safronchuk attempted to reason, “this is not the way things are done. You should at least formally inform the members of the Revolutionary Council, the government, and the Foreign Ministry to secure their agreement. The existing international protocol recommends a period of time between the request for *agrément* and its approval.”

“That’s what happens in normal situations,” responded Amin. “Don’t forget that here, we have revolution and we have war. We cannot waste time. I will give the order to

issue an official note today. I think that one week will be sufficient for Comrade Puzanov to deal with all formalities related to his departure. What do you think?"

Safronchuk, who was by then accustomed to such a provocative manner, did not respond, and simply shrugged his shoulders.

By the end of October, representatives of Soviet foreign intelligence in Kabul (Ivanov, Bogdanov, Osadchiy) clearly sensed in which direction the wind was blowing. It was clear that Amin's days were numbered. In cables sent from Kabul to the Center, emphasis was placed on anti-Soviet discourse that became increasingly apparent in the new leader's entourage. One source reported that there were some suggestions made regarding the need for Afghanistan to become more independent from the Soviet Union. The Soviet model of socialism was criticized, characterized as impoverished and hopeless. It was suggested that Afghanistan would be better off following Egypt's example by orienting itself towards the Islamic world and rejecting large-scale military assistance from Moscow. The other cable detailed hostile acts of Afghan special services toward Soviet citizens who worked in the DRA. Claims that Soviet citizens had been followed, that compromising material had been collected, and that some Soviet citizens had received direct threats began to mount. Another report stated that Amin's people were attempting to establish a dialogue with representatives from the counter-revolutionary movement—religious extremists—and had made promises in the name of the Afghan leadership to expel Soviet specialists from the country. A conclusion had been reached. Amin and his closest allies would lead to the defeat of the revolution and the collapse of the party.

It was clear that the Center had to react somehow to these alarming signals. And react it did. Intelligence operatives were sent to European countries to conduct consultations with representatives of the opposition, including Karmal, Sarwari, Gulabzoi, and other prominent PDPA members living in exile. Those exiled politicians sent a letter to the Central Committee of the CPSU. The letter read, "We are prepared to return to Afghanistan at any moment in order to begin an uprising against the treacherous, anti-popular regime."

In early October, Moscow continued to cling to its former position of rejecting requests for direct military intervention. The exiles' letter maintained the illusion that the Afghans could solve the problem themselves, without the need for military interference by the USSR.

Kryuchkov had been preparing to work personally with Babrak Karmal in Czechoslovakia before Andropov unexpectedly cancelled the scheduled trip. "It's too risky to expose you," said the KGB chairman. "Who knows how the situation will evolve?" Kryuchkov's persona at the time was top secret. As a result of this cancellation, the very same Alexei Petrov whom the Parchami leader had known for a long time went in Kryuchkov's place to the meeting.

Karmal learned of Taraki's death through a BBC broadcast. That morning at breakfast he commented ominously: "I warned him. And, mark my word, this is only the beginning. The death toll will continue to rise." When Petrov arrived to see him, he realized immediately that there would soon be major changes in his life. The foreign intelligence officer and Karmal held a confidential meeting in one of the four rooms that had been allocated to the family of the disgraced politician. The next day, Karmal announced to his

relatives that he was leaving. He didn't say where he was going, or for how long he would be away. His farewell was brief and reserved. Karmal, accompanied by Petrov, left the sanatorium. Karmal's family was almost immediately transferred to the Slovak town of Banska Bistritsa. They settled in a comfortable mansion with a security detail. It was apparent that Babrak Karmal's status was rapidly changing.

In early November, the future leaders of Afghanistan gathered at one of the secret KGB *dachas* in the Moscow suburbs. The group included Babrak Karmal, Anahita Ratebzad, Assadullah Sarwari, Sayed Gulabzoi, and Abdul Vakil. Under the guidance of their handlers, they began to make preparations for the seizure of power in Afghanistan. They made lists of future power structures and future prisoners. They distributed government positions and developed plans to take over the most important sites in the country. This military revolutionary committee accepted the recommendation from the Central Committee of the CPSU and unanimously elected Babrak Karmal as its leader. Karmal in those days displayed a great activist temperament, constantly pressing Soviet comrades: "We must act quickly, before Amin finds out about our preparations. The revolution is in grave danger." Not without reason, Karmal feared that Amin would learn about everything at any moment, and would then strike first.

In order to establish reliable ties with the underground in Kabul, Karmal suggested covertly moving Gulabzoi to Afghanistan. Ershov, who spent those days together with the Afghans, liked the idea. However, surprising everyone, Gulabzoi refused to be deployed, instead nominating Watanjar for the position. This caused fiery debate among the Afghans. The KGB operatives quickly dropped all illusions that the Khalqis and the Parchamis would ever forget their past disagreements and begin to cooperate in the face of life-changing

circumstances. All conversations of the Afghans at the *dacha* were taped. It was clear that the level of animosity and jealousy had not subsided, and that the revolutionaries had simply been biding their time for an opportunity to slit each other's throats.

It was the Parchami Abdul Vakil who was the first to be secretly transferred to Afghanistan. Before his insertion, specialists worked thoroughly to alter his appearance to the point that his own mother would not have recognized her son. The color of his eyes was altered by contact lenses, his customary expression amended, and he was given a limp, governed by special lining inside his boot. During the final stage of his preparation, Vakil was transferred to officers of the Eighth Department of the "S" Directorate, which, as mentioned above, was in charge of handling super-sensitive foreign affairs. Colonel Glotov, who was responsible for sneaking the Khalqis out of Kabul, was now training Vakil on how to use a handgun with a silencer and in hand-to-hand combat. Vasily Glotov assumed command of the most vital phase of the operation, which was transporting Vakil to Afghanistan. The decision was reached to once more utilize a wooden container that would normally be used to deliver mechanical parts for Soviet jeeps. The container was lowered into a transport, which then drove into an An-12 cargo plane. Once aboard, the cargo traveled safely from a military airdrome in the Moscow suburbs to Kabul. In the Afghan capital, there was no customs inspection, and the jeep was driven to the villa where the Zenit group resided. Once there, Vakil reported to Osadchiy. He settled at the resident's villa and started to make forays into the city under protection of darkness to establish contacts with other party activists. Contact with the head of the Parcham military branch was the first to be established.

Documents that were later declassified revealed that diplomats and secret service agents from Western countries were monitoring the situation in and around Afghanistan with particular attention in the fall of 1979. In early October, the British embassy informed London that the Russians were conducting covert work in Europe with leaders of the Parcham faction, who were regarded by the Russians as the leaders of a future “alternative” government.

Bearing in mind the absolute secrecy of that operation, one can conclude that the leak to the British occurred as a result of a double game played by one of the Parchamis or “comrades” from Czechoslovakia.

In late November, the British military and air force attaché wrote with alarm, “The assault against the rebels conducted in the second half of October was highly successful. The main goals of the assault were to secure the territory and communications near the Pakistani border, as well as to deliver a blow to the enemy. Both goals were met. The air force played a primary role in achieving this success. Mi-24 helicopters were particularly successful in incapacitating the rebels. In the long term, as I foresee, the rebels are doomed, because the tactics and equipment of the government troops have improved considerably. The partisans remain politically divided and their strategies uncoordinated.”

Further, the attaché emphasized that the number of Soviet military advisers had increased significantly among government troops, and, in his view, they were the ones planning the above-mentioned operations in Paktia province and leading the Afghan troops in those campaigns. The situation with Amin remained complicated. However, the report established that the Afghan leader enjoyed support from the armed forces. “Besides,” the

attaché reported, “Amin managed to garner support even from his former opponents, by confidentially informing them that when the right moment arrives, he will get rid of the Russians.” For now, according to the opinion of the military intelligence officer, there would be no immediate changes in Afghanistan. The Russians had little choice but to support Amin—that was why his future was bright. “In any case,” concluded the Brit with a dash of sarcasm, “he will remain in power at least until the next round of Palace ‘elections.’”

Those documents demonstrate that it was not only the KGB who knew about the new Afghan leader’s dual loyalties. Rumors of Amin’s plans (“When the right moment comes, we will get rid of the Russians”) reached the ears of Western diplomats and intelligence operatives. It was only the conclusion of the British cable that was wrong. In November, when the cable was sent, Amin did not have a bright future in front of him. His fate had already been sealed.

Opportunities for the CIA to maneuver on Afghan territory were limited. However, American special services continued to expand their activities in neighboring Pakistan. Those activities ranged from the collection and analysis of information arriving from Afghanistan, organization of training camps for mujahadeen, and financial and other assistance to leaders of Islamic parties and movements that were working to undermine Kabul. In addition, American emissaries began working to form a coalition of different countries that were prepared to support Afghan radicals in their struggle to combat Soviet influence. Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and China expressed readiness to partake in this effort. Communist China in this case cynically ignored class-based ideology and joined the reactionary mullahs to counter the growth of Soviet influence in the Central Asian region, as they were apprehensive about the Soviets strengthening their position there.

Did the Americans know about the military preparations underway in the USSR? They certainly had gathered substantial information. In the cables of American diplomats and CIA operatives, rather accurate estimates of the numbers of Soviet specialists and advisers working in the DRA were cited. A bit later, the American sources supplied objective data about increasing military concentration near the Afghan border, intensification of aviation activities, and calls for reserves to bolster the military. But if this was the case, why didn't the United States make more noise about these developments? Why waste such a clear opportunity to launch a widespread anti-Soviet propaganda campaign? Did they really choose the tactic of letting the Soviets be drawn into the Afghan trap, as some analysts would later suggest?

This is entirely possible. It is said that all is fair in times of war.

After Taraki's overthrow, the Commission of the Politburo on Afghanistan became noticeably more active. It began holding weekly meetings. Having learned about the murky circumstances around the murder of the former Afghan leader, Brezhnev, normally good-natured and reserved, became outraged.

"This is Comrade Taraki. We embraced him, promised him protection, and now, forgive my rudeness, some adventurist goes and suffocates him! So, what happens now? There is no faith in our promises? The words of the general secretary of the Central Committee of the CPSU have become meaningless!"

That fall, Leonid Ilyich was not feeling well. Doctors recommended that he rest more, avoid overloading on work, and avoid stress. The general secretary, who was always very attentive to medical advice, could not control his smoking habit. Unbeknownst to his

doctors, he continued to smoke his favorite *Novost'* cigarettes until the end. All of the other recommendations he fulfilled precisely. It was rare for anyone in his entourage to see Brezhnev irritated or anxious. Members of his inner circle were trying to protect the general secretary and his family members from bad news that could have a negative impact on his health. And here was this disastrous story with Amin. There was no way to keep such a story, which involved the leader of a friendly country, away from Leonid Ilyich. A decision on how to proceed in this situation would have to be made by Brezhnev himself; nobody from his entourage would be able to assume responsibility for such a decision on his own. Brezhnev needed to be informed. Despite not feeling well, he had to try to grasp the situation. Unfortunately, the more he understood, the worse his mood became.

What was happening? In the meetings, Afghan comrades gave oaths of fealty to the socialist ideal, emphasized their unwavering friendship with the USSR, and called themselves younger brothers of the Soviets. The reality was that they couldn't care less. "We are paying for thousands of advisers to work there, in every outlet of the Afghan state. We are providing economic and military assistance worth many millions of rubles, which alone should give us the right to control the situation in the country, as we control the situation in other socialist countries," thought Brezhnev. And here arises this unsavory situation. Some decision needed to be made, but what sort of decision should it be? Leonid Ilyich was accustomed to decisions being made by others on his behalf. Those decisions took form as thoroughly prepared documents placed on his desk for him to sign, without thinking too deeply about their content. And now all eyes were on him, waiting for him to take the lead on making such an important decision. Nobody dared to assume responsibility for the resolution of the situation.

“Yura,” he addressed Andropov. “You promised me that not a hair on Taraki’s head would be harmed. You told me that your people are in control of the situation. Would you care to explain to me why all of this is happening?”

“We have underestimated this Amin, Leonid Ilyich,” professed Andropov quietly. “He turned out to be more insidious than we imagined. He played us very well. He would declare one thing to our comrades, while behind our back he plotted his evil deeds.”

“We congratulated him on his election to the top positions in Afghanistan,” Gromyko reminded his colleagues. “Now our ambassador informs us that Amin wishes to come to Moscow on an official visit as the head of state and the party.”

Leonid Ilyich furrowed his famous brows and looked increasingly severe. “What, will I have to kiss this adventurer now?”

“He cannot be received in Moscow under any circumstances,” responded the minister of defense with an executive air.

“We can tell Amin that the schedule of state and working visits for this year is filled up, and there are no opportunities to receive him in the near future,” suggested Gromyko. “He can come next year. We will wait and see what happens in the meantime.”

“Yes, the situation in Afghanistan is complicated,” nodded Brezhnev gravely. “Let’s make a decision on how to proceed. I understand, Yura, that your shop doesn’t trust this Amin too much?”

“Yes, we have some alarming information,” said Andropov, shuffling a stack of papers in front of him. “I’ve already reported to you before that Amin has committed grave offenses. He has conducted acts of repression against prominent party members. He is an overt Pashtun nationalist. There are rumblings of possible ties with American special

services, which we are currently investigating. This person, I repeat, is insincere, treacherous, and cruel. To have such an ally means to be sitting on a mine that is liable to explode at any moment. It is possible that Amin is considering the possibility of siding with our enemies and betraying us.”

Andropov didn't have to continue. All of them remembered the accounts of recent betrayals very well. Those stories stuck like splinters in their minds. They all remembered how Egypt, once considered to be a loyal ally, took a sharp turn towards the West. They remembered how the Somali leader Barre had switched sides to ally with the Americans two years earlier, and, to serve his new masters, immediately began a war against Ethiopia, which was then loyal to the Soviet Union. Once a loyal communist, he became an extreme anti-communist overnight. Enemies were working tirelessly against the Soviet Union on all fronts. Who said that the Third World War had yet to begin? It had been going for many years, since the mid-forties, and had not stopped for one single day during all of these years. All of these stories about détente, the reduction of nuclear arms, and mutual trust should be reserved for ordinary public discourse. The nature of the situation was that we defeat them, or they defeat us. There was nothing else. It was entirely possible that Amin had been collaborating with the Americans for a long time, but even if this were to be proved false, he could not be trusted, and would surely betray the Soviets eventually.

“He would not turn to the enemy on his own,” asserted Ustinov. “He would drag Afghanistan behind him. That's where the problem lies.”

“That would be a big problem for us,” agreed Gromyko. “We cannot afford to lose Afghanistan.”

In front of the minister of foreign affairs lay a report about the situation in Asia that had been prepared by his experts. The situation was not evolving in the Soviet Union's favor. Relations with China had worsened. A year ago, it had reached the point of military clashes on the border. Then Chinese troops were diverted to Vietnam, which maintained pro-Soviet politics. Though the Chinese were beaten there, there was no indication of their stopping. The United States was actively pushing them against the USSR. The United States resumed diplomatic relations with Beijing and began to supply China with arms. There was absolutely precise information suggesting that China, as well as the USA, was actively assisting Afghan rebels. Khomeini's regime, which came to power after the Islamic Revolution in Iran, had also positioned itself as anti-Soviet and supported the Afghan partisans. Almost all Arab countries were prepared to sponsor the Afghan resistance. So, if we lose Afghanistan, either the Americans and NATO or radical Islamists will take over, introducing an Islamist cancer that will spread towards the north, into our Central Asian republics. However, unlike Andropov and Ustinov, who leaned towards military intervention more and more, Gromyko was internally against the direct participation of Soviet troops in the conflict. To him, this represented a failure of all the efforts of détente that the Foreign Ministry had strived towards for the last decades. He realized the impossibility of explaining this step that they were being forced to take to the world. He realized that his ministry's efforts, along with all of Soviet foreign policy, would be damaged irreparably.

"We cannot lose Afghanistan," repeated Gromyko. "However, I would appeal for our actions to be measured. Any mistake will cost us dearly."

“We’ve heard this before, Andrei,” said Brezhnev impatiently. “It is clear that we cannot lose Afghanistan. It is not in our national interests. What are your specific suggestions?”

“Before we go any further, let’s pause. Let’s consider what Amin has actually done. Let’s make an attempt to force him to return to Lenin’s model of party leadership. This would mean giving him an opportunity to release the Parchamis, allow the opposition leaders to return from exile, and put an end to factionalism in the party. If other strong figures from Parcham and Khalq could appear around Amin, it would be easier for us to harness him. In addition, we should continue to strengthen the Afghan armed forces. For our part, we will apply diplomatic pressure to the countries that have been supporting the rebels.”

“Is it realistic to force Amin to give up his dictatorial habits and hope he makes amends with the opposition?” Brezhnev asked, turning to Ponomaryov.

“We applied so much effort, Leonid Ilyich,” lamented Ponomaryov. “You know, I personally visited Kabul twice, to no effect.”

“It’s unrealistic,” confirmed Andropov. “Things have gone too far in Kabul. It’s possible that Amin will agree verbally with our advice, but in reality he will do the opposite. According to our information,” continued Andropov, “having eliminated the Parchamis, Amin has turned against his Khalqi colleagues. Everyone who Amin suspects is disloyal has been blacklisted. As you know, the leaders of the opposition, who have been living in exile in European countries, have expressed their readiness to step forward against the existing regime, and to bring the party and the country back to the norms of law and democracy.

When I speak of the opposition leaders, I mean prominent figures from both factions. We are working in this direction.”

“What does this mean, to ‘step forward against the regime?’” Brezhnev’s interest was piqued. “They are in Europe, aren’t they? How do you imagine this would ever happen?”

“Well, Leonid Ilyich...” began the KGB chairman. He didn’t want to overload the general secretary with routine details of the preparation for the coup d’etat. “Even in exile they maintain close ties with their allies in Afghanistan. When the time is right, we will assist them, transfer them to Kabul, and provide additional support as needed.”

“So, Yura, you are trying to tell me that the healthy elements in the party can resolve this problem by themselves?”

“They can, Leonid Ilyich,” Andropov asserted, before adding, “with a bit of assistance.”

“Well, this is very good!” Brezhnev cheered up. “Let’s work more actively in this direction. By the way, whom would the Afghan army support? Dmitry Fedorovich,” he addressed Ustinov, “why are you so quiet?”

The minister of defense had no intention of remaining silent. On the contrary, he was tracking the arguments mentally and waiting for his turn to speak. He had plenty to say.

Throughout his life, Ustinov had been at war. At the age of thirty three, he became the people’s commissar of armaments. He fought against the Nazis and was in charge of providing armaments for the Western front. Later, when the Cold War began, he fought the Americans by building up an adequate Soviet response to U.S. development of the atomic

and hydrogen bombs. He was the minister of armaments and the minister of defense industry, then the vice-chairman of the Soviet government and a secretary of the Central Committee of the CPSU. Three years ago, he became the minister of defense. Wherever he worked, he was always in charge of weapons, armaments, defense, and the security of Soviet borders, as well as of the socialist bloc in general. Like Andropov, he was well aware that a life lived peacefully is a fiction and an illusion. The reality was that war was constant, and would continue always, until one of the fighting sides annihilated the other. Ustinov lived his whole life with his finger on the trigger. Andropov had the First Directorate of the KGB, which worked around the clock to report to him about any suspect rumblings from the "main enemy." Ustinov was also provided with first-hand information. He was in charge of the Main Intelligence Directorate of the General Staff (GRU), with eyes and ears positioned around the world to watch the enemy day and night, and to immediately report anything suspicious.

It was possible that the next world war could be avoided, but Ustinov's mentality, habits, and character conditioned him to be prepared not only to deter any attack from the enemy, but to deliver a strike preemptively if need be.

The latest intelligence reports were alarming. American military vessels had entered the Persian Gulf. It appeared as though they were preparing to deploy their paratroopers in Iran. If they followed through, the balance of power in the region would shift against Soviet interests. It would be catastrophic to allow the Americans to gain a foothold in Afghanistan. A contiguous noose formed by Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, and China would begin to tighten. The entire territory of the USSR would find itself in the crosshairs of American missiles.

“Our comrades, including the commander of the infantry, General Pavlovsky, report that the armed forces of the DRA are fully focused on deterring rebel attacks,” said Ustinov dryly. “They are engaged in constant battle. It is difficult to see whose side they would take in a potential conflict with Amin. According to our information, Amin has very good standing with the army. He cleaned out the officer corps in advance, and removed Parchamis and other unreliable elements. I’m afraid that the problem may be more serious than we estimate. Most probably, we will not be able to resolve it without the direct participation of our military.”

“Are you suggesting, in other words, Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan?” asked Gromyko. “We should realize the consequences that such a step would entail.”

“I am not suggesting anything, yet,” responded stone-faced Ustinov. “I am only stating the facts. Without our active support, the healthy elements will find it difficult to gain the upper hand in the PDPA. If we agree to support the opposition, then we will surely have to engage every resource, from the KGB and our military. If we initiate this action, we had better be prepared to secure a successful outcome.”

“Dima is correct,” Brezhnev confirmed. “Failure for us is not an option. But Andrei has also voiced a useful perspective. We need to consider all of the consequences of such actions. Of course it would be desirable to avoid Soviet military presence in Afghanistan and leave the situation in the hands of our Afghan comrades, but if such a plan is unrealistic, then let us prepare concrete suggestions in regards to a military intervention option by our next meeting.”

The Politburo members recognized that the general secretary was obviously fatigued, and quickly adjourned the meeting.

The results of the discussion were reflected in the protocol for the Politburo meeting of October 31, 1979. A grim evaluation of the actions of the new Afghan leader was given at that meeting. It was mentioned that Amin had expanded the scale of repression, that he was preparing to eliminate a group of PDPA Politburo members, and that he was losing the trust of his Khalqi colleagues:

“Signs of Amin’s attempts to establish contacts with representatives of the Muslim opposition and anti-government tribal leaders are disconcerting. There are indications suggesting that the new leadership intends to conduct ‘better balanced politics’ regarding Western states...”

“Amin’s behavior in the sphere of relations with the USSR demonstrates his lack of sincerity and hypocrisy more and more distinctly...”

“Not only does Amin make no effort to curtail anti-Soviet discourse, he de facto encourages it...”

It was concluded at that Politburo meeting that the Soviets had to deal with the power-hungry, cruel, and treacherous leader. The scenario of Amin taking a step towards changing the political orientation of the regime for the sake of preserving his personal power was not excluded.

The Politburo document suggested maintaining the following course of action:

- 1) To continue working with Amin and the current leadership of the DRA without giving Amin reason to believe that we do not trust him and would rather not deal with him. To use contacts with Amin in order to apply pressure on him and simultaneously gain insight into his true nature.

- 2) Taking into account our general tactics in regards to Amin at this current stage as well as his desire to visit Moscow on an official visit to meet L.I. Brezhnev and other Soviet leaders, we should respond positively in principle to his wish to visit, without proposing specific dates...
- 4) To instruct operatives from all Soviet establishments in Afghanistan to intensify monitoring of the situation in the country, as well as to watch closely its leading party and state activists, army commanders, and security services.
- 5) Military assistance to Afghanistan should be provided on a limited scale... Further supply of heavy armaments and military technology should be suspended for the time being.
- 6) ...Not to satisfy Amin's request to send Soviet military detachments for his personal protection...

...

- 11) The Soviet embassy in Kabul, the KGB, the Ministry of Defense, and the International Department of the Central Committee of the CPSU should study the political and practical actions of Amin and his entourage towards Afghan internationalists, patriots, the cadres who were educated in the Soviet Union and other socialist countries, reactionary Muslim clerics, tribal leaders, and towards foreign policy ties between Afghanistan and the West, the USA and China in particular.

If facts indicating a change in Amin's attitude towards the Soviet Union were to emerge, additional proposals regarding measures to be taken by the Soviet side should be introduced.

In essence, if it wasn't an official death sentence, then it was a preamble to it. The document set the stage for the final act of the tragedy of the "First Stage of the April Revolution in Afghanistan."

At the onset, it was imperative that the Soviet Union disguise its strategy for dealing with Amin. The next day, the Soviet ambassador received instructions to inform Amin that Moscow had received his request to visit the Soviet Union with understanding. The Soviet leaders would be prepared to receive Amin in order to exchange opinions about issues that were of interest to both sides in a friendly and business-like manner as soon as the opportunity arose.

Meanwhile, the tenure of General Pavlovsky and his group of operatives in Afghanistan had reached its end. In his reports to Moscow, the commander of the infantry continued his line of interpretation of events. He indicated that the situation in the armed forces of the DRA was quite stable, and that their military capacity would allow them to successfully deter rebel assaults. He was aware that his interpretation was not well received by Marshal Ustinov. The minister expressed his dissatisfaction over the phone on numerous occasions, but Pavlovsky was one of those rare generals who put the truth (as he saw it) above his career ambitions. He returned to Moscow on November 3, and began the wait for the summons to give a final report to the minister. To his surprise, the wait lasted two weeks. When the marshal finally made time to listen to his special representative, who

had been studying the situation in Afghanistan for over two months, he summarized their conversation as follows: “You didn’t understand anything there. You should not have gone to Amin.” He ceased communication with the general for a long spell thereafter.

Pavlovsky, who was shocked by Ustinov’s reception, attempted to seek answers from an unsympathetic Ogarkov. “The minister doesn’t seek my advice on Afghanistan either,” said Ogarkov. “He has other sources of information.”

Ogarkov, who was sometimes present at meetings of the Politburo Commission, knew by then what those sources were. He understood why his reports were a source of irritation for the minister. The decision to remove Hafizullah Amin from the political stage in favor of his successor, even if it required the possible participation of the Soviet military, was close to being reached at the very top of the Soviet leadership.

A few documents from those autumn days, reflecting the mood of the upper echelon of the Kremlin and the evolution of the decision to invade Afghanistan from an initial policy of military non-interference, have been saved. But it is a fact that by the end of December, after the military intervention and Amin’s assassination, most of the foreign intelligence documents were destroyed according to Andropov’s direct orders. It is likely that the GRU’s and the Ministry of Defense’s archives shared a similar fate. This is why the few remaining documents, in addition to conversations with surviving participants of those events and their memoirs, had to suffice for the purposes of writing this book.

In the fall, the closest entourage of the Soviet minister of defense felt that Ustinov was displeased with his envoys to Kabul, wanted Amin’s blood, and was considering sending some military units to Afghanistan to finalize the destruction of the counter-revolutionary forces and to establish the needed stability in the region. However, the

minister understood the difficulties in implementing these ideas. He knew that both the head of the General Staff and his deputies did not share his enthusiasm for intervention, and he kept his plans secret until the appropriate moment. Judging by his various remarks, Ustinov's entourage could guess that tough times were about to arrive in Afghanistan.

In a very small group, Brezhnev, Ustinov, Andropov, Gromyko, and Ponomaryov discussed how best to realize a return to "Lenin's model of party leadership" in the PDPA. The potential for participation of the opposition leaders from Parcham and the offended Khalqis was taken into consideration. The First Chief Directorate emerged as the primary party to carry out this task.

General Ivanov, who returned to Kabul from Moscow on November 10, privately informed his colleagues Bogdanov, Osadchiy, and Chuchukin that the Soviet leadership has taken a confidential decision to "assist the healthy elements" in the PDPA.

"This means that Amin will be replaced at the top of the Afghan government," clarified Boris Semyonovich, adding, "it's possible that Babrak Karmal may return to power. You must keep this a secret—the three of you are the only ones who know this for now; nobody else does."

Given this new development, the participants of the meeting identified the next objectives that the KGB resident's and representative's groups needed to pursue. Ivanov made them swear to absolute secrecy once again as the meeting adjourned, adding that not even the Soviet ambassador was to find out about these plans.

Boris Semyonovich returned to Moscow as the newly appointed head of an advisory group to the chairman of the KGB. General Kirpichenko, the former head of the top-secret "S" Division (Covert Intelligence), was appointed in his place to become the first deputy

head of the PGU. Most informed officials interpreted these changes as a bureaucratic victory for Kryuchkov. Ivanov, who was highly respected but too independent for Kryuchkov's taste, was removed from the operative branches of intelligence. The consultants to the chairman of the KGB were jokingly called the "group of paradise." In reality, this was the position of honorable exile. As to the rise of Kirpichenko, the near future demonstrated that his appointment was very appropriate in light of Andropov and Kryuchkov's plans to carry out military intervention in Afghanistan. It was precisely the "S" Division that was given the most sensitive tasks to activate the political shift in Kabul.

The next step was the recall of the senior military adviser, Gorelov, from the DRA. In October, Gorelov was invited to report at a meeting of the Politburo Commission on Afghanistan. Lev Nikolayevich arrived in the Kremlin accompanied by Marshal Ogarkov, the head of the General Staff. Gorelov's report regarding the military-political situation in the country and his detailed description of the Afghan military were delivered in a precise and succinct manner. According to him, the Afghan armed forces were quite capable of deterring any rebel threat.

"Currently, the Afghan army consists of ten divisions. Its air force has three hundred planes. The armed forces have six hundred tanks," stated the military adviser confidently. "Its firepower makes it one of the most menacing armies in the Asian region. It is capable of managing the most complex tasks. The issues that still require resolution are as follows: a lack of means of communication, military and transport helicopters, and weak military training of soldiers and officers. But we are working on these issues."

“We can bring in some of our troops to assist you in your efforts,” offered Brezhnev congenially, expecting gratitude in response from the adviser. To his surprise, Gorelov objected to Brezhnev’s suggestion.

“This step makes no sense,” Gorelov replied. The Politburo members listened to the proceedings with their faces directed downwards toward the documents before them.

“So, is it your belief that the Afghans are adequately equipped to deal with the threat of the mercenaries who are being deployed from Pakistani territory?” asked the general secretary, raising his thick eyebrows. “Without our assistance?”

“Yes, I am certain of it, Leonid Ilyich. This is both my personal conviction and the opinion of General Pavlovsky, who has been examining the state of affairs in Afghanistan for a significant amount of time. The Afghans can resolve the situation by themselves. Our troops should not be brought in.”

“But, why?” Brezhnev looked around the room, astonished. The general secretary obviously did not anticipate such a turn in the discussion. He had recently been told that the April Revolution was hanging by a thread in Afghanistan. He also was told that Gorelov was a wartime general, a paratrooper, and a participant in the successful suppression of the counter-revolution in Czechoslovakia. He obviously didn’t expect such a “pacifist” report from this general.

“There are a number of reasons why we should abstain from military intervention. First, as I have already stated, the Afghans are capable of defeating rebel attacks by themselves. They require some assistance in strengthening their border troops, as well as supplies of additional means of communication and military helicopters. Secondly, the Americans will certainly take advantage of our military presence to openly and generously

arm and finance rebel groups. This means that we will face a unified effort in response instead of the current uncoordinated resistance. Finally, it seems to me that the Soviet army is not trained to fight in such mountainous terrain.”

“Nobody gave you the right to speak on behalf of the whole Soviet army,” Marshal Ustinov said sternly, lifting his head from the papers in front of him.

“Dmitry Fedorovich, this opinion is based on my conversations with the Soviet officers who were arriving to serve as military advisers from different military districts. None of them have any idea how to fight in the mountains. Nobody trained them for that. There are a number of reasons that appear significant to me. Military intervention in Afghanistan would require colossal expenditures. In addition, it is a dangerous misjudgment to believe our troops will enter the country to form garrisons there. The reality is that they will be engaged immediately in military action. This means losses among our military contingent and among the population. It is inevitable. Therefore we ourselves will create many new enemies in the region.”

Ustinov again shot the senior military adviser a menacing stare. The other members of the commission remained silent.

“Is this all you have to report?” asked Brezhnev with a hint of irritation. “In that case, you’re free. Why don’t you have a cup of tea in the next room while we listen to the KGB representative?”

About an hour later, Marshal Ogarkov walked out of the meeting room. Gorelov accompanied him to his car. The head of the General Staff was in a grim mood.

“This is it, Lev. We’ve lost.”

Having returned to Kabul, Gorelov soon realized that he also was in line to pack his bags. One of his colleagues mentioned to him that a group of officers headed by General Gus'kov, the deputy commander of the airborne troops, had been working in Afghanistan for about a week. According to protocol, Gus'kov was to introduce himself to Gorelov, the senior official from the Ministry of Defense, immediately upon arrival in Kabul. Besides, they were friends who had once been in charge of airborne divisions, so even informally, their rendezvous was inevitable. Now Gus'kov had arrived with the goal of conducting a survey prior to a potential military intervention. Most probably, it was not recommended for him to communicate with Gorelov, who was suspected of sympathizing with Amin. This was an ominous sign.

Several days later, he received a call from the General Staff. "Your successor is arriving in Kabul. Prepare to relinquish your position."

Colonel General S.K. Magometov had been sent to Afghanistan from his former position as deputy commander of the Zabaikaliye Military District to replace Gorelov. Shortly thereafter, General Vasily Zaplatin, an admitted Amin sympathizer, was removed from his post. His recall to Moscow occurred in a somewhat mysterious manner.

One December day, Zaplatin was speaking with officers at the Afghan Military Academy. Suddenly, in mid-lecture, he was informed that he had to leave immediately for an important conversation with the General Staff over a secure phone line. Zaplatin apologized to his audience for having to interrupt the class before dashing to the Askari Club. There, he was immediately connected to the deputy head of the Tenth Chief Directorate of the Ministry of Defense, Lieutenant General Oshurkov.

“Listen to me attentively, and don’t ask any questions,” said General Oshurkov on the other end of the line. “Your daughter appealed to the Central Committee of the CPSU requesting to meet with you, her father. Her request is being granted. You should leave for Moscow immediately. Is everything clear?”

“Nothing is clear!” exclaimed Zaplatin in astonishment. “What does anything have to do with my daughter? What’s wrong with her?”

“I warned you—no questions.”

“But the Aeroflot flight for Moscow has already left. There won’t be another for two days.”

“This is none of your concern. You will arrive at Bagram Airbase by 18:00. A plane has been chartered to pick you up.”

Completely dumbfounded and tormented by fear for his daughter, Zaplatin put down the heavy telephone receiver and went to the embassy, wondering if they might have additional information for him. Ambassador Tabeyev received the general sympathetically, but said that he hadn’t received any information regarding his daughter. So what might have happened? Knowing his daughter well, Vasily Petrovich could hardly entertain the thought of her going to the Central Committee with any request. Besides, he wasn’t such an important person that the Soviet leadership would send a special plane to retrieve him. What was behind this sudden concern about some general whose daughter wished to speak with him? Something seemed amiss. He placed another call to Oshurkov from the ambassador’s office.

“Is my daughter alive? What’s the matter with her?”

“She is alive. Don’t ask any more questions. You will find everything out in Moscow.”

The helicopter brought Zaplatin to Bagram in twenty minutes. The plane from the Soviet Union was four hours late, and took even longer to refuel. Zaplatin didn't leave until the early morning hours. Once in Tashkent, he boarded a military Il-18. He was the only passenger on board. From the airport, he was driven to *GlavPUR*, the main Political Directorate of the Soviet army and navy, where he was received by General Epishev. He asked Zaplatin all sorts of questions about Afghanistan for two hours, dutifully taking notes in his notepad. Not once did he mention his daughter. He then said, "I must attend a meeting in the Central Committee. Wait for me here."

Taking advantage of the pause, Zaplatin called his daughter.

"Is everything okay with you?"

"Yes, everything is fine, why do you ask?"

The next morning, Epishev brought Zaplatin to the minister of defense. Ustinov entered the reception room together with Ogarkov. He was wearing an overcoat.

"First, you should report everything to Comrade Ogarkov; then, when I return, I will invite both of you to the meeting," said the minister.

It seemed to Zaplatin that Ogarkov had treated his analysis with sympathy and understanding, although he did not volunteer his opinion. Then the minister returned from the Central Committee. He asked Ogarkov, "Have you discussed the situation with Comrade Zaplatin?"

"Yes. All of the issues have been discussed, but Comrade Zaplatin remains fixed in his opinion against military intervention."

Ustinov turned to the adviser and looked at him with a heavy gaze. "Explain why," he ordered.

Zaplatin repeated what he had already said and written many times before. He noted that the Afghan army was entirely capable of resolving the issues that it faced, that Comrade Amin's positions were correct, that Amin remained loyal to the Soviet Union and had to be trusted more. Having heard this, the minister grew flushed.

"Do you remember what you promised to me last time? You said that not one hair on Taraki's head would be harmed. Do you remember saying that? What, then, are your words worth? Here—read this," he said, and handed over a cable from Kabul that had been signed by Bogdanov.

The cable was brief. The issue about possible military intervention was implied, though not directly mentioned. The situation in Afghanistan was described as absolutely hopeless.

"I would not have signed this cable," said Zaplatin firmly, returning the document to the minister. "It contains an inaccurate interpretation."

"Wrong?" The marshal seemed beside himself. "Their very heads are at stake to provide us with accurate analysis."

"If only those heads were sober..." started Zaplatin before Ogarkov issued him a kick under the desk to interrupt the general before he got himself into trouble. The adviser ceased. He almost had tears in his eyes, failing to understand why the minister trusted the KGB more than his own generals. Ustinov again glared at the adviser before shifting his gaze to Ogarkov and Epishev. "There is nothing else to discuss," he waved his hand. "It is late. Too late," he repeated, as if to himself.

Many years after, Vasily Zaplatin discovered that it was on that particular day that the Soviet Politburo members came to their final decision about the Soviet military

intervention in Afghanistan. Ustinov received Zaplatin then, having just returned from a Politburo meeting.

In those December days, Zaplatin was kicked from office to office, first sent to Odessa, then to L'vov, under the pretext of studying the moods of the Afghans who had been trained in Soviet military schools. Once, in the corridor of the ministry, he bumped into the very same general who had lied to him about his daughter over the phone. The general was embarrassed. "It wasn't my idea," he said. "My bosses told me what to say and I said it, verbatim."

Zaplatin never returned to Kabul. The rumor in the Afghan capital among the advisers was that Vasily Petrovich had been expelled from the Communist Party and retired from the army. That was untrue. He served for a long time in the Soviet Union, but without any hope of advancing his career.

Fikryat Ahmetjanovich Tabeyev was appointed as the Soviet ambassador to Afghanistan. There was an understandable degree of excitement in anticipation of his arrival in Kabul. The appearance of a new ambassador is always an important milestone in the life of any diplomatic mission. All "clean" diplomats, particularly the senior ones, were preparing for Tabeyev's arrival. Both residents and the KGB representative were strategizing how best to construct their relationship with the new ambassador, specifying what they ought to share with him and what they should keep to themselves. Particularly anxious were the accountant, the property manager, the cook, and the gardener. They wanted to know how deeply Tabeyev got involved in financial and business affairs, what sort of food he liked, and what his attitude might be regarding the vegetable garden, with

its rows of cucumbers and carrots, that his predecessor had developed on the embassy grounds.

The property manager went to see Ravil' Musin, a TASS correspondent. After a long and painful prelude, he turned to the real purpose of his visit.

"I know, Ravil', that you are a Tatar," began the manager.

"Yes, I am a real Tatar," agreed Musin.

"So tell me then, what kind of *banyas* do Tatars like? Do you think Tabeyev will like our embassy's sauna?"

"I've never been to this sauna myself," confessed Musin. "I was never invited. However, I can tell you almost certainly that Tabeyev will not like it. We Tatars like to go to real Russian *banyas*, with a hot steam room and fresh birch twigs. By the way, what you call a 'Russian *banya*' is in fact a Tatar *banya*. The Russians borrowed this from us long ago."

The manager had little interest in the historical precedence of the Russian *banya*, but he had gotten the information he needed; it was imperative that the sauna be rebuilt.

"Ravil', our cook is going to come by to talk to you. Could you talk to him a bit about Tatar cuisine?"

"Have him come, although I confess I know very little about cooking. I know the names of Tatar dishes and can recognize the taste, but how they're made is another question."

Kabul buzzed with rumors in anticipation of Tabeyev's arrival. Some informed people recalled that he became the head of the Tatar regional party organization at the age of thirty two. He was the first to become a party leader at such a young age in the post-war

Soviet Union. The first secretary of the *Komsomol* Regional Committee was a year and a half older than the first secretary of the Regional Communist Party Committee.

Tataria during Soviet times was considered to be one of the key industrial regions. Tabeyev was awarded five Orders of Lenin. He was a member of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, as well as of the Central Committee of the CPSU, one of the brightest stars in the *nomenklatura* sky. After nineteen years serving as the head of the region, he was suddenly appointed to his post in Kabul. Some suggested that it represented a sort of exile, and was simply Brezhnev's way of getting rid of this influential person in Kazan' who had become overly independent. Others said that Tabeyev's appointment was due to his "Muslim origin."

Later, Tabeyev told one of the authors of this book that comrades from the Central Committee made offers to a number of other prominent figures before considering his candidacy. All of the candidates refused to serve in Afghanistan under different pretexts. The Central Committee was seeking a prominent party member of Oriental origin, according to Amin's insistence. When Tabeyev was invited for an interview, the secretary of the Central Committee, Suslov, warned him right away that the situation in Afghanistan was very complicated, and that he, a very experienced politician, was being asked to serve there to sort things out, supposedly not for long.

"It's not easy to scare me," responded Tabeyev. "If the party believes I should do it, I'm prepared to fulfill the order."

"Well, you are a well-known politician, and the Afghan leadership will likely respond favorably to such an appointment."

Tabeyev was given no time to prepare for his trip, and was told to depart immediately. He was not even allowed a general briefing on the situation in the country and was told that he would “learn everything upon arrival.” Brezhnev gave him the following advice at his farewell meeting: “Don’t rush to conclusions. First, figure out what is going on and familiarize yourself with life in Afghanistan. Then give us your analysis.”

Following this advice, Tabeyev did not sign one cable until the end of 1979.

The new ambassador arrived with his wife in the Afghan capital on November 26, and submitted his credentials to Amin within a few days. Puzanov had left five days prior to Tabeyev’s arrival. He felt disgraced upon his return to Moscow. He received no gratitude from Gromyko or his deputies for his distinguished career in diplomacy. Nobody ever asked for his opinion about the situation in Afghanistan. Puzanov was led to believe that the bosses were dissatisfied with the results of his tenure in Kabul. He retired and lived out the rest of his days quietly in Moscow.

The day after Tabeyev submitted his credentials to Amin, Tabeyev visited him again to inform him that Moscow had agreed to receive him in the Soviet Union as the head of state of Afghanistan. The reality was that Moscow had already signed Amin’s death sentence, but this remained unknown to the ambassador. Tabeyev and Amin discussed the program for Amin’s trip, including the agenda, schedule of meetings, and the cultural program.

It didn’t take long for Tabeyev to realize the complexities of his situation. He had known nothing about the schism within the PDPA. He had not heard the words Khalq or Parcham, had no idea of the intrigues or nuances of the personal relationships between the Afghan leaders, and was clueless as to the circumstances surrounding Taraki’s murder.

Collectively, all of those factors determined the situation. Only at the end of December did Fikryat Ahmetjanovich learn that the representatives of the opposition, namely Karmal, Gulabzoi, and Sarwari, were waiting in Moscow to return to Afghanistan. It was then that Tabeyev first caught wind of the plans to assassinate Amin, which had been discussed within the KGB since the late summer. He would continue to discover the essence of the fabric of Afghan political and social life over the length of his tenure.*

Tabeyev tried to keep his distance and behave strictly according to protocol when meeting with Amin. The Afghan leader also was in no hurry to get too close to the Soviet ambassador. Only once did he say something resembling a threat: "I hope you will draw the right conclusions from the actions of your predecessor."

Tabeyev gave the general secretary a look of nonchalance from the full height of his commanding stature. It seemed as though he might have reacted with an emotional outburst in response, but his party training kept him from taking it personally. "We will live, and we will see," he replied dryly.

On a November day, Lieutenant Valery Kurilov, who worked as a KGB operative in the Orlov region, was summoned by the general presiding over the regional KGB office. It was against protocol for the general to communicate with a junior officer like Kurilov. Typically, he would only speak with deputies, department heads, and leaders of the city and district units, but this was an exceptional case.

Having asked some perfunctory questions, the general handed the lieutenant a cable with instructions to dispatch Kurilov to Moscow immediately for an assignment abroad

* F.A. Tabeyev remained the Soviet ambassador in Afghanistan for seven years, longer than any of his predecessors or successors.

that would last up to six months. Certainly, the general would have liked to know where his operative was going, but he suppressed his curiosity and simply wished him success.

Kurilov shook the general's hand and headed to the accounting office to receive the allowance for his trip.

He understood immediately that he was bound to return to Afghanistan. He welcomed the news with something like a sense of relief. He had gotten the bug of that country's magical pull after having been a witness to and a participant in that summer's events. His life and the mundane work in the Soviet Union paled in comparison to the unpredictable nature and thrill of lingering danger in Afghanistan. The urgency of the coded message indicated that something quite serious was about to happen.

The only problem arose before Kurilov's departure. His wife Tatiana, as if sensing something was wrong, declared, "You're not going anywhere." When she understood that she had no say in the matter, she stopped talking to Valery.*

Once he arrived at Balashikha, he was immediately surrounded by his fellow "saboteurs" with whom he had trained and graduated earlier. His friends had come from all over the Soviet Union and discussed excitedly where they might be sent. The name Afghanistan was uttered repeatedly.

The next day, the head of the school, Colonel Boyarinov, confirmed their guess. "We are going to Afghanistan. Everybody stay here on permanent high alert." Within a day, the "saboteurs" boarded a bus and were driven to the PGU headquarters in Yasenevo for further instructions. The first deputy head of intelligence, Kirpichenko, told them that as part of the elite Zenit group, they were to fulfill a special task of great importance to the

* Valery Kurilov would be seriously wounded during the operation to overthrow Amin on December 27, 1979.

state. They would be informed as to the nature of the task at a later point in time. The group was divided into sub-groups. Kurilov was a member of the sub-group that was reinforced by experienced officers, specialists on Afghanistan from the PGU, and military counterintelligence officers. Colonel Alexander Titovich Golubev, the head of the group, was introduced to his team. Golubev was a calm, thoughtful Belorussian whom Valery took an instant liking to. He gave him useful advice on what to take along and how to dress. Kurilov was impressed by his obvious reliability and seriousness.

There wasn't anything specific mentioned about the forthcoming mission. However, much was said about the great responsibility placed on the squad, as well as the trust that the party and government had invested in them.

Lastly, the general at the presidium table stood up and addressed the audience. "The assignment that you have been asked to fulfill presents a possible risk to your lives. For this reason, this group is being formed on a volunteer basis. I emphasize," the general raised his voice, "that any of you can refuse to participate in the operation without any consequences for yourself. Think hard about this, and weigh your abilities, the possibilities, and potential consequences. I repeat, the leadership will understand those who, for whatever reason, may consider an assignment in Afghanistan as undesirable. Is there anyone who wishes not to go?"

The silence in the auditorium was palpable. Nobody raised his hand, and nobody stood up.

"Nobody?" The general paused, seemingly relieved. "In that case, I wish you all luck."

“Here you were saying that everything that we were being taught would never be applied in real life,” a neighbor told Kurilov on the bus ride home to Balashikha. “Turns out that we may actually find it useful!”

“Yes, it’s quite possible,” agreed Kurilov. “Our time seems to have arrived.”

“Shut up, guys,” said a voice from the darkness. “Relax. We will arrive in Kabul and we’ll have to protect the embassy people again.”

In several days, the detachment was transferred first to Tashkent, where everybody had to change into a regular soldier’s uniform, and then to the Afghan aviation base in Bagram. According to the cover story, the Zenit members, led by Golubev, were the engineering-technical group that was supposed to assist a detachment of GRU special forces that would be labeled by history as a “Muslim” battalion. The detachment had been on standby in Bagram for a while.

“If you are minesweepers, then why don’t you have any equipment with you?” asked the befuddled special forces operatives.

“It will be brought in later,” explained Golubev, who bore a sergeant’s markings on his sleeves. On occasion, he would leave somewhere for a long time. Every day, cargo planes arrived at the aviation base, filled with people, ammunition, and armored vehicles. The Balashikha graduates had been summoned from all over the Soviet Union to be sent to Afghanistan. It was obvious that a major operation was about to begin.

Two weeks had passed since that memorable meeting at Ivanov’s, when, having sworn the participants to secrecy, the general informed them that the decision had been reached “at the very top” to “align with the healthy forces within the PDPA.” However, no

additional specific instructions had arrived from Moscow. Bogdanov knew that the end was near. Many signs supported his suspicion. More and more new people were arriving in Afghanistan from the Center: special forces operatives, counterintelligence officers, some mysterious generals from the Ministry of Defense. It was clear that a major campaign was in the works, but what would this campaign be like? Who would carry it out? The opposition forces? Or would the Soviets do the dirty work? The Center remained mum, leaving Bogdanov and Osadchiy to proceed without authorization to deploy their operatives around Amin. They decided that they needed to be prepared for any turn of events. Whatever would happen, they felt, would happen soon.

The newly arrived Zenit members were oriented towards surveillance of the important sites in Kabul—the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of the Interior, government buildings, communications centers, radio and television centers, prisons, and the airport. They studied possible approaches to these buildings, taking into consideration tactics to storm and capture them, as well as ways to retreat.

It became increasingly difficult to gain access to Amin. However, there were several Soviet specialists in his entourage who were not affiliated with the KGB, namely the dieticians who consulted the head of state and the members of his family on issues of nutrition. They could not be trusted with more sensitive matters relating to unfolding events. Bogdanov and Osadchiy limited conversations with them to trying to find out about Amin's gastronomical preferences, his perceived weaknesses, and his daily schedule. The conversations with the dieticians took place when they arrived at the embassy, so as to allay any suspicions. The dieticians in Amin's circle were supposed to be joined soon by a new cook from Moscow.

There was one other person who was working closely with Amin: Major Yuri Kutepov from the Ninth Directorate of the KGB. Kutepov served as the adviser to Major Jandad, the head of Amin's personal guard. However, because Kutepov didn't receive any instructions from his immediate leadership in the Ninth Directorate (he could not receive those instructions because everything was highly classified), he continued to provide security for Amin as earnestly and conscientiously as possible. That was the only instruction that Kutepov could fulfill—nothing was to threaten the man under his protection. It made no sense to address him with sensitive requests that would lead him to believe that something could threaten the subject of his protective custody.

That secrecy would play a cruel joke on many of the actors as the drama later unfolded*.

The transfer of the head of state's residence from Ark Palace to the edge of Kabul, where Darul Aman Road ended, was planned for December. There, removed from the city dwellings, the majestic palace—almost a castle—which had previously been used as a base for the Kabul garrison, sat perched on a hill. The building had undergone fundamental reconstruction immediately after the revolution, with the help of German specialists. It was supplied with everything necessary for the life and work of the head of state. No expenses were spared. The palace was decorated generously with granite, marble, and onyx. Beautiful crystal chandeliers lighted its rooms, and the wooden floor had been laid by hand.

The site had one significant drawback: whereas the Ark Palace was located in the very heart of Kabul and surrounded by two thick fortress walls, the Tajbeg stood alone atop

* Major Kutepov, who would not receive any instructions from his bosses regarding Amin's "death sentence," was bound to suffer from this cloud of secrecy, as he would remain loyal to his assigned duty until the final moment.

a hill, and was comparatively vulnerable from the point of view of security. But for some reason this did not concern Amin. He prepared actively for the move, personally inspecting different designs and furnishings for his family's residence, his office, and the official palace halls.

In late November, Bogdanov met with the commander of the guard, Major Jandad. He had recently been in charge of protecting Comrade Taraki's life. However, he made a politically timely shift, and during the September revolt not only gracefully took Amin's side, but also demonstrated his loyalty to Amin by assuming a direct role in the murder of the general secretary and founder of the PDPA.

"Comrade Jandad," Bogdanov addressed him through an interpreter, "we would like to inspect the future residence of the head of state. Has everything been taken into consideration from the standpoint of security? Our leadership in Moscow has expressed concern, especially considering the recent rise in action from rebels and terrorists. We would never be forgiven if anything were to happen to Comrade Amin."

"Certainly, certainly," the major assured the KGB representative. "I am prepared to accompany you for an inspection of the palace at your convenience."

The next day, Ivanov, Bogdanov, and several other KGB officers, accompanied by Jandad, went on a tour of the Tajbeg. It was roughly three kilometers away from the embassy, a short trip down Darul Aman. The road led directly to the palace complex, which consisted of two beautiful, separately standing buildings.

"This is where we will place the Ministry of Defense and the General Staff," explained the major.

Then the road veered to the left and was blocked by a gate. A well-reinforced checkpoint was located nearby.

“The restricted zone begins here,” said Jandad, “about one kilometer away from the Tajbeg. Here, only cars with special passes will be permitted. There is no other road leading to the palace.”

The KGB representatives managed to inspect the future residence of the Afghan dictator in great detail. They combed it from the basement to Amin’s personal quarters, with its bedrooms, baths, and bars. The officers, who had received instructions in advance, noticed every minor detail, including the location of doors and windows, flights of stairs, elevators, niches in the walls, service rooms and closets, halls, and vestibules. The palace was examined both from the standpoint of an armed assault and of potential opportunities for surveillance and covert infiltration. All features were described in great detail and, on the same day, floor plans and notes were compiled and locked in a safe.

The leadership of the Center, having found out about the “field trip” via a cable, expressed reserved praise, and recommended that the agents continue their work to probe for potential approaches to the “person in question.” And then, luck smiled upon Bogdanov.

While he was working as the KGB resident in Iran, Bogdanov received an intern from the “S” Department, a future undercover intelligence officer by the name of Mikhail T. Having finished his internship, the individual expressed his desire to celebrate his departure to the Soviet Union with a farewell dinner. Obviously, no restaurant would be an appropriate venue for this celebration; as it turned out, the first profession of the undercover officer had been that of a cook, and Mikhail T. suggested that he personally serve dinner at his supervisor’s apartment. The evening was a great success. Mikhail

performed culinary miracles, particularly of Azeri cuisine. Since then, Bogdanov had heard nothing of Mikhail T.

Suddenly, the two met each other in Kabul. Bogdanov, on his way out of Kabul, wanted to be accompanied by armed Zenit operatives, as had become the custom in Kabul during those last few weeks of 1979. Special forces officers arrived at the embassy in a Volga. They waited for their boss to emerge from the embassy. Bogdanov was about to take a seat in his Mercedes when suddenly one of the Zenit officers called him by name. Leonid Pavlovich turned and, to his shock, saw the former intern with whom he had worked in Tehran two years ago. It was surprising that the future undercover officer would be exposed in Zenit. Normally these agents would be protected even within their own "S" Division. Bogdanov suspected that something had not worked out in his assignment as an undercover agent. It was likely that he had fallen victim to some sort of betrayal.

"Misha, how did you get here?"

"I was sent to Kabul because of my knowledge of several Oriental languages, including Dari. They seem to think I may be useful here."

Bogdanov realized immediately that he would be very useful indeed. He started hatching plans for his former intern straight away.

Later that afternoon, having returned from the trip, Bogdanov sent his proposal to the Center. The real cook, who was preparing to leave Moscow to serve Amin and his family, was to stay behind. Mikhail T., the Zenit operative, was to be sent in his place. When General Ivanov learned about Bogdanov's plan, he approved it without delay.

"Excellent, Leonid Pavlovich. You must carry out your plan. I understand that your undercover operative can take over Amin's kitchen within three days."

“No,” objected Bogdanov. “His back story must be airtight. He should fly from Bagram to the Soviet Union covertly, without anyone knowing. There, he should receive documents from GKES* so that he can make a “clean” return to Afghanistan, with pots and pans and dietary recommendations as to how Comrade Amin should be fed.”

“We are going to lose time,” Ivanov countered, but eventually agreed with Bogdanov’s arguments.

Several days later, a female dietician who had met Bogdanov by accident at the embassy happily informed him, “We have a new addition to our team. Remember, I told you that we were expecting a cook to join us? He has arrived. He has been given an apartment in Mikrorayon, and we are helping him get settled. He seems to be a capable specialist, although a bit shy. He doesn’t even feel like going outside.”

“Shy? Good for him,” thought Bogdanov. “He should pretend that he is in Kabul for the first time. Everything should seem strange for him. Better for him not to appear in the streets unnecessarily, in case any of the Zenit guys see him. That could compromise the entire operation.”

The next day, Bogdanov managed to establish a reliable connection with Amin’s “personal cook,” who began to transfer the necessary information regarding Amin’s schedule and diet, location of the rooms at the residence, and the sorts of guests who were visiting. No other tasks were given to the cook as of yet. His hour had yet to arrive.

Other options for the elimination of the Afghan leader, besides employing the “cook” as a “deadly weapon,” were being considered. Demolition experts from Zenit were

* The State Committee on Foreign Economic Relations; arrangements for business trips for civilian specialists who were to live and work abroad would be processed here.

consulted about ways to install powerful explosive devices. Bogdanov learned that there was a good sniper among the Zenit operatives, and asked to meet with him personally.

“I can hit a target from two kilometers,” the sniper assured Bogdanov.

“With what sort of accuracy?”

“In daylight, one hundred percent.”

On December 3, General Kirpichenko, recently appointed first deputy head of intelligence, arrived in Kabul. That was an obvious signal that important events were beginning to unfold.

In early December, Ogarkov, his deputy Akhromeev, and the head of the Main Operational Directorate, Varennikov, made one more attempt to convince the minister of defense not to begin military intervention in Afghanistan. Ogarkov spoke at length and with great detail, and listed all possible arguments against the intervention. Having listened to Ogarkov, the minister asked the head of *GlavPUR*, Epishev, who was also present, to outline his view on the matter.

Epishev, who by then had studied the mood and the balance of forces in the ministerial leadership, declined a direct response, just to be on the safe side.

“The General Staff always has its own opinion,” he said.

“Well,” said Ustinov, looking around at nobody in particular, “I will take the opinion of the General Staff into consideration.”

“We bestow great hope on you, Dmitry Fedorovich,” uttered Ogarkov, almost pleadingly, in a very personal way. Ustinov did not reply.

On December 8, Ogarkov was invited to a meeting of the Politburo Commission on Afghanistan. For some reason, Suslov had replaced Ponomarev at the meeting. Brezhnev was not present. The head of the General Staff was given another opportunity to present his arguments. Then the members of the commission discussed variants of how to proceed at length. They continued to address Ogarkov with questions. Amin's destiny was not discussed at that meeting. It had likely already been determined. The discussion revolved around the potential consequences of losing Afghanistan. How would the loss of Afghanistan impact the situation in the Soviet Central Asian Republics? Would American Pershing missiles be stationed there? What would Pakistan and Iran do? Having allowed Ogarkov to excuse himself from the meeting, the Politburo members made the decision that KGB forces should be engaged to remove Amin from Kabul and bring "the healthy forces in the PDPA" to power. If for some reason this proved to be impossible to achieve, then the Soviet military should get directly involved in the operation.

"A limited contingent," clarified Ustinov, who had been silent throughout the meeting. "This is how we will describe it: a 'limited contingent' of Soviet troops."

The next day, when Ogarkov again attempted to convince Ustinov that military intervention made no sense, the minister of defense shouted at the marshal, "Don't lecture Politburo members. Just fulfill the order."

"The General Staff cannot step aside when such pivotal decisions for the country are being made."

"How far will you go?" snarled the minister, rising to his feet. "Will you sabotage the leadership of the country and the will of the party? I have been noticing for some time that

you are constantly engaged in intrigues behind the minister's back. Enough is enough! Fulfill the order." He turned his back dramatically, effectively ceasing the conversation.

Having left the minister's office, the head of the General Staff called Kosygin, the chairman of the Council of Ministers, and Korniyenko, the first deputy foreign minister. Both of them shared Ogarkov's position.

"There is nothing to be done about it," lamented the marshal. "Ustinov has no interest in listening to me. He insists on his position."

So how did it happen that Politburo members who had so recently and categorically objected to a military intervention in Afghan affairs changed their minds completely, and were suddenly prepared to invade Afghanistan? This question has long mystified historians and analysts. Alas, it will be impossible to give a precise answer to this question, because all of the participants in this fateful decision-making process are dead, and most official documents pertaining to the situation have been destroyed or classified.

Still, a thorough examination of the documents that survived, as well as analyses of articles, books, memoirs, archival materials, and interviews, allow for the following conclusion: this decision resulted from the confluence of a number of serious concerns and circumstances. The influential personages who pushed the decision through were Minister of Defense of the USSR Marshal Dmitry Ustinov and Chairman of the KGB of the USSR Yuri Andropov. These two officials were the ones who managed to convince the general secretary, as well as the Politburo, that there was no other way out of the situation. All other options would likely lead to the loss of Afghanistan, which would represent a major failure in the ongoing standoff with the West.

Intelligence information that was delivered to Andropov objectively described Amin as an unreliable, morose, and capricious person, inclined to unpredictable behavior, who was beyond their control. Amin was issued a de facto death sentence in October, after details of his involvement in Taraki's assassination emerged. Only one question remained in this regard—how to proceed technically to physically eliminate Amin? Initially, the most popular approach was to mobilize the figures within the PDPA who were either in overt or concealed opposition to the Afghan dictator. Later, when it became clear that they were too weak and uncoordinated, the possibility of a combined approach to the execution of the task was studied: Afghans would step forward with the support of the KGB and GRU's special forces. At some point, however, it became clear that even those resources could turn out to be insufficient to ensure success, and it was feared that the planned operation would result in too many casualties. It was only then that Andropov agreed to the military operation.

Did he himself propose it, or merely agree to it?

In a memorandum sent to Brezhnev in early December, the KGB chairman evaluated the situation in Afghanistan as critical. He repeated his concern about Amin's secret contacts with representatives from radical Islamic opposition and perceived secret meetings with American representatives. It was suggested that the Afghan leadership was mulling over a decision to modify their exclusive orientation towards the USSR. Criticisms of Soviet politics and actions against Soviet specialists and advisers working in the DRA were cited as evidence for such a shift. Andropov again confirmed the readiness of the opposition leadership (Karmal, Sarwari, and others) to combat Amin. However, referring to those Afghans' intentions, he pointed out that the success of such a campaign would be

possible only under the condition of Soviet military assistance. At that time, Yuri Vladimirovich thought it sufficient to involve the forces and means of the KGB and Ministry of Defense that were already stationed and available in Afghanistan. In order to ensure success, he proposed creating a military group in the areas bordering Afghanistan that could be engaged, if necessary, from the other side of the Amu Darya.

It is known that during those days, Andropov often met and had long conversations with Ustinov.

It is also known that Andropov was in a state of strong spiritual anxiety and stress. He was tormented by uncertainty, and he was obviously doubtful of the success of the forthcoming operation*.

As to the minister of defense, he most likely did not need to be convinced of the need to extend “international assistance” or to “restore Leninist principles in the Afghan leadership.” By that time, he himself had come to the conclusion that a military scenario with the direct participation of Soviet troops in Afghanistan was inevitable. He also had strong arguments in favor of such a scenario.

For many years, the minister of defense had gradually expanded an arsenal that included nuclear warheads, fighter jets, submarines, missiles, military bases, conventional armaments, and reconnaissance stations so as not to cede strategic advantage to the United States. Relative strategic parity existed for a period of time. The other difficulty for the Soviet Union was maintaining strategic parity under circumstances of a colossal imbalance in its economy, which was tilted towards the needs of the military-industrial complex. Military expenditures devoured up to eighty percent of the GDP. However, by the late

* The memoirs of the chief Kremlin physician, E.I. Chazov, refer to this particular state of mind during the period in question.

1970s, the “main enemy” of the USSR had begun to surpass its rivals. This advantage was due in large part to the quantity and quality of the American nuclear arsenal and modern conventional weapons that were produced using the most modern and advanced technologies. The General Staff reported that during the last twenty years, the number of nuclear warheads on United States strategic carriers had grown from four thousand to over ten thousand. There were seven thousand such warheads on European territory. In addition, nuclear warheads had been deployed around the entire perimeter of the Soviet Union. Ustinov was primarily concerned about the high-precision, long-range cruise missiles, twelve thousand of which the Americans planned to direct against the Soviet Union. It was obvious that such missiles, as well as intermediate-range conventional missiles, presented a major threat. In a matter of hours they could paralyze the USSR’s entire defense system by knocking out military headquarters, control centers, and communication centers.

When Ustinov asked the leaders of his military staff if the Soviet means of air defense were capable of identifying the launch of Pershing-2 missiles within two minutes of their launch from Western Europe, he received a negative answer. The minister immediately ordered the development of effective missile defense systems, regardless of the cost.

The General Staff was tasked with developing a plan for preventive offensive operations in Europe that would begin upon the discovery of the first signs that NATO forces were mounting an offensive. This plan involved tens of nuclear strikes using tactical nuclear weapons against targets in Europe, with a simultaneous advance by tank brigades deep into enemy territory along a broad front.

To make a long story short, by the beginning of the 1980s, the world was again on the verge of global catastrophe. Both sides were deeply suspicious, if not paranoid, in regards to each other's military activities. These suspicions were triggered by the smallest shift in the geostrategic balance of forces. This is why the situation in the Middle East caused Ustinov understandable anxiety.

There was another important consideration of concern to the minister. While ordinary citizens might be convinced by Soviet propaganda that the country's armed forces were capable of deterring any aggressor and winning any future wars, Ustinov himself harbored great doubts about the actual infantry and naval capabilities of the Soviet Union. He was aware that during the last military exercise, many tanks and armored vehicles were unable to leave their bases because of technical conditions related to their poor upkeep. Many of the tanks that did manage to leave their bases never made it to their targets due to problems with both technology and personnel. The rockets that were launched did not hit their targets, paratroopers landed in wrong locations, means of communication were obsolete, coordination among the military detachments failed, readiness to mobilize was at a very low level, and military personnel of different ranks were engaged in stealing and drinking.

At the same time, the Americans, who had created a professional army, had far surpassed the Soviets in the arenas of military readiness, training, coordination, and discipline. They had ample practice in Vietnam, as well as in other local conflicts. They were highly mobile, were equipped with satellite reconnaissance technology, and displayed great confidence and occasional arrogance in military operations around the world. That's why Ustinov considered Afghanistan an opportunity to test the Soviet army and its arsenals, and

to flex its muscles in the field. If the army passed the test, they would also achieve the political goal of eliminating Amin and delivering a decisive blow to the rebels, before returning home to receive military honors.

The marshal had no doubt that the campaign would not last longer than six months. Then, after having achieved its objectives, the army would depart, possibly having established two or three stationary military bases in Afghanistan.

The minister of defense's rationale was fully supported by the chairman of the KGB. However, many of his close allies disagreed, first and foremost Nikolai Ogarkov, the head of the General Staff. Nikolai Vasilievich, unlike his boss, who perceived the world from a global planetary perspective, had thoroughly studied the specifics of the situation in Afghanistan. He familiarized himself with the sad experience of British military expeditions to that country, and consulted with the few experts on the Middle East who worked in the Central Committee of the CPSU, Foreign Ministry, and various academic institutions. He requested several analytical papers to be prepared by scholars and experts, in which they considered the option of Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan. The conclusion was grim. Such a scenario would mean further escalation of military activity with the inevitable participation of the Soviet troops, which would give the West reason to considerably expand their assistance to the armed opposition. Such a step would be difficult to explain even to friends from the socialist bloc. The prestige of the Soviet Union would suffer in the international arena. The military option was concluded as likely to result in more setbacks than gains.

Ogarkov made several attempts to explain all of this to his minister, and to cite more and more new arguments. At first Ustinov listened silently, and occasionally a shadow of

doubt flickered across his face. Sometime in December, the minister's mood seemed to change. He began to flatly reject any counterarguments to the scenario of military intervention.

The mood of the minister of foreign affairs changed noticeably as well. After his visits to the Central Committee, Gromyko appeared grim, irritated, and refused to respond to cautious questions from his closest colleagues. The minister's position regarding military intervention has remained unclear, although Gromyko always voted "correctly," that is, according to Brezhnev's wishes.

Babrak Karmal and his closest allies had been living for over a month at a secret PGU base in the Moscow suburbs. It had been a long time since they had received their instructions, agreed on their new appointments, and put together the necessary documents. Karmal's address to the Afghan people, which was to be broadcast over the radio after the planned regime change, was recorded on tape. Lists of the new members of the Revolutionary Council, Politburo, and government staff were agreed upon. Karmal held the top positions in all of the state and party structures. They discussed who of Amin's closest allies deserved capital punishment and who was to be imprisoned.

The mute question "When?" could be gleaned in Karmal's eyes every time he met his Soviet intelligence handlers. All of the waiting was exhausting him. Alexei Petrov was his most frequent visitor.

"The situation should ripen," he would say. "Be patient for a little while longer."

Sarwari, Gulabzoi, and other opposition activists who had been brought together from all over the world were the first to move south towards the border in late November.

On a certain gray December day, Petrov announced, "Tomorrow we are leaving for Tashkent, and then, depending on the circumstances, for Bagram."

Karmal's dark face lit up. He embraced Alexei, and turned towards Anahita Ratebzad with a radiant smile. "I always believed in justice, and knew that evil would be punished. Along with us, hope will return to Afghanistan."

"*Inshallah*," smiled Anahita in response. "This is God's will. This is good news. We will continue our struggle."

Karmal couldn't sleep during the night before the departure. He was reliving the events of the past months over and over again: the April Revolution that happened so suddenly, the humiliation of the Khalqis, the disgrace that led to his exile in Prague, threats from Amin, alarming news from Afghanistan regarding repression against his comrades, and the perfidious murder of the founder of the party. Now everything would change. The party, with the assistance of Soviet friends, would cleanse itself of enemies and be back on a righteous course. The Afghan people would finally rid themselves of the tyrant. Karmal was not a simple-minded idealist. He knew very well the complexities of the problems facing his country—constant attacks by Islamic radicals instigated by foreign enemies, mass desertion from the Afghan armed forces, a huge deficit in the state budget, hunger, poverty, total illiteracy, and a lack of doctors, teachers, and engineers. But now, in Moscow, getting ready to take upon himself responsibility for the country, he believed with certainty that these and other problems would be overcome because power would be transferred to honest and responsible people, true patriots of their motherland, who would undoubtedly find support among the masses.

Karmal's faith in popular support was such that he even wrote a memorandum to the Soviet leadership. The essence of it was not to waste any time moving forward against Amin, because Amin would fall under the pressure of the masses as soon as he, Karmal, and other party members openly appealed to people to rebel.

Only one thing was of concern to Babrak Karmal in those days. "Comrade Vladimirov," as Kryuchkov was introduced to Karmal and his friends, once came to their secret *dacha*. The guest mentioned in passing, over a cup of tea, the possibility that if circumstances require, some Soviet troops would enter Afghanistan. "In order to support 'the healthy forces' of the party in their struggle," explained "Comrade Vladimirov" vaguely.

Karmal, who figured out that their guest was a representative of top KGB leadership, attempted to object. "We are capable of dealing with this task ourselves. I sent a memorandum to the Central Committee where I explained that as soon as the signal to begin the uprising is given, Amin will be swept away by our comrades who are currently in hiding and by the broad masses that deplore Amin. You don't know Afghans well. I assure you, our people are not able to tolerate this tyrant any longer."

"There is no doubt about this, Comrade Karmal," said the guest, humbly bowing his head. "I would like to emphasize once again, that we will take such extreme measures only if we have serious reasons to doubt that the forces currently available will be able to fulfill this task. Secondly, if any Soviet military detachments are brought into Afghanistan, they will stay there only as long as it takes to transfer power. Once the situation is stabilized, the troops will return to their permanent bases in the Soviet Union right away." Having noticed that the future leader of Afghanistan turned gloomy, "Comrade Vladimirov" decided to make reference to the highest authority: "Believe me, Comrade Karmal, the Soviet

leadership has thoroughly and comprehensively studied the situation, and concluded that any failure will mean the failure of the April Revolution, the loss of Afghanistan as our ally, and the inevitable appearance of imperialist forces in Kabul. All of that calls for such a decision as ours.”

“Do you realize how the citizens of Afghanistan will perceive me if I become the head of state at the same time as your tanks appear?” Karmal’s gaze was fixed sternly upon the visitor.

Kryuchkov seemed to feel uncomfortable, and gave Alexei Petrov, who was interpreting their conversation, a disapproving look. Alexei Petrov shrugged and quietly said, as if speaking to himself, “Yes, in such a case, he will not gain popularity among the Afghan people.”

Kryuchkov was not prepared for such a turn in conversation and tried to adjourn it. “Let’s hope that we will not have to settle for such extreme measures. Judging from the information that I have, everything is ready for the action in Kabul. I only arrived here to wish you good luck, and to assure you on behalf of the Central Committee, our party, and its Politburo, that we intend to fully support your efforts to re-establish Lenin’s norms of party life and to cleanse your party of traitors and adventurers.”

“Thank you,” said Karmal, gently taking Kryuchkov’s hand in both of his.

Now that only a few hours remained before the departure, Karmal’s mood was darkened by a vague anxiety. This anxiety was unrelated to the forthcoming danger or the possibility of Amin ordering their plane to be shot down before it landed, or simply arresting them upon arrival. No, he was disturbed by the possibility of becoming an apparent puppet of the Kremlin by appearing on the throne accompanied by Soviet tanks.

Babrak Karmal was an educated and intelligent man. He knew the history of his country and the mentality of his people well. He knew Afghans would never forgive him for this.

While the campaign for the forthcoming transfer of power in Kabul was kept secret, the operation for the physical delivery of the future head of state into Afghanistan was shrouded in impenetrable secrecy.

Kryuchkov invited officers from Special Detachment "A," headed by Major Izotov. "You will be in charge of guarding the leaders of a friendly country. If anything happens to them, you will be court marshaled. Is that clear? You depart from Moscow tomorrow."

There were two people to guard: a man of average height, with dark complexion and an aquiline nose, and a dark-skinned Oriental woman with a regal posture and a welcoming expression on her face.

Izotov's officers were not informed who these people were, or where they were supposed to travel. Just in case, the major armed his group, which consisted of four people, to the teeth. They were joined at Vnukovo Airport by two foreign intelligence operatives, Petrov and Chicherin, neither of whom spoke a word. Only before the departure were some things clarified. Andropov's personal pilot, Colonel Naganov, reported to the guests on board the Tu-134: "Comrade Babrak Karmal, the crew is prepared to leave from Moscow to Tashkent with the following connecting flight to Bagram."

The man with the dark complexion, who was named Babrak Karmal, warmly shook the pilot's hand and walked into the front section of the plane after Anahita Ratebzad. Petrov followed him, while Izotov took advantage of the pause and asked Chicherin, "Can you at least explain to us in what country Bagram is located?"

Chicherin glanced at the protection group with surprise. "What do you mean? Weren't you told? It is in Afghanistan."

The colonel from the KGB branch in Uzbekistan, who met them when the plane landed in Tashkent, informed them that their departure to Bagram was postponed for now. "We have received an order to take you to the *dacha* of the first secretary of the Communist Party of Uzbekistan.

The group quickly boarded three Volgas with curtained windows and drove to Rashidov's country residence. They waited for their flight to Afghanistan for several days. During those several days, the guards surmised that they were protecting the future president of Afghanistan and his loyal companion. The members of the group, including Anahita Ratebzad, were given soldier's fatigues without epaulets or distinguishing marks.

Rashidov's *dacha* was well protected by Uzbek KGB operatives. That was why Izotov and his team had no particular cause for concern. They entertained themselves by fishing in a nearby pond. Naturally, the subjects under protection were watched constantly. Once, Misha Golovатов, a young lieutenant, accompanied Karmal during his walk around the *dacha's* fenced territory. A local security operative, riding a bike, suddenly appeared from behind a curve of the alley. Seeing the Afghan, he immediately jumped off the bike, fell to the ground, and covered his face with his hands until the guests walked away. Such was the degree of secrecy around the operation.

Once they finally received the go-ahead to leave, this secrecy nearly cost the group members their lives. Andropov's personal plane landed in Bagram late at night. However, in order to conceal the landing, the airdrome's lights were turned off. The airplane had to engage its parachute brake, which barely kept it from overshooting the landing strip. Only

thanks to the pilot's skill and professionalism did they avoid catastrophe. When the Tu-134 stopped in the most remote corner of the airdrome, Izotov's commandos disembarked and secured the perimeter. Jeeps carrying the KGB officer who was in charge of Bagram's military counterintelligence and the deputy commander of the air force, General Gus'kov, approached the plane within a minute. All of the passengers and their luggage were quickly loaded into cars and driven to an area where the so-called Muslim Battalion was stationed. Karmal and Anahita were allocated a concrete bunker where there was electricity but no heat. It was terribly cold there. Winter had arrived early that year in Afghanistan. The thermometer often read minus twenty degrees Celsius on those December nights.

"You should be on full alert. We are moving into Kabul at night," Petrov instructed the officers before disappearing into the dark.

Marshal Ogarkov made another desperate attempt to convince the members of the Politburo to abstain from military intervention in Afghanistan. Before that, he consulted the commander-in-chief of the infantry, Pavlovsky, his deputy Akhromeev, and the head of the Main Operational Headquarters of the General Staff, Varennikov. Pavlovsky, who hadn't forgiven the minister for his refusal to consult with him, coldly enumerated what his previous reports contained. "To conclude," he emphasized, "the majority of Afghans will perceive the arrival of a foreign army on their territory negatively. It is against their nature to welcome our forces. This means that they will take up arms and face us in combat. And, at the same time, they will revolt against the Afghan revolutionaries who have forced our hands. All of this will amount to deterioration of the situation there."

“Any military action will result in full-scale war,” confirmed Varennikov. “The modest number of troops that we have planned to introduce will be incapable of dealing with the Afghan reaction, which means that we will have to increase our military presence to bring in additional forces. According to our estimates, we will have to allocate more than 200,000 troops in order to control the situation, which is absolutely unrealistic, given our current resources.”

“But the leadership has a very serious argument,” remarked Akhromeev. “There are concerns about possible betrayal by Amin. Andropov’s shop is convinced that he is secretly collaborating with the Americans. It looks as though Amin is living out his last days at the top positions in the Afghan government, and our comrades in the Central Committee are worried about the transfer of power. Whom would the Afghan army support? Would the rebels take advantage of the situation in order to strengthen their positions? You know the position of the KGB better than I do,” he turned to Ogarkov.

“I am aware of it,” he nodded.

Pavlovsky waved his hand in frustration. “This means that the KGB got the upper hand here. In Kabul, they tried to convince us that Amin was a CIA agent. But was any proof cited along with this claim? The only argument was that he was the head of an Afghan ethnic community during his studies at an American university, as if the Americans would recruit such people automatically, no matter who they are. That’s all there was to it. I reiterate that I met with Amin many times, spoke with him for many hours, and was firmly convinced that this was a person who was loyal to the Soviet Union. He asked the Soviet leadership time and time again to receive him during his tenure as premier and later as the

head of state. He wanted to be received, heard, and supported. We made a spy out of him. What else is there to say?"

"It's a mistake to believe that our troops will enter the country and form garrisons without taking part in military activities," Varennikov voiced his support. "They will most certainly be dragged into combat. There will be casualties. How will we explain this to our own people? What kinds of arguments are we going to present to the international community? We will be immediately accused of aggression."

Ogarkov had heard all of these arguments many times before, and fully agreed with them. Nikolai Vasilievich was in a very difficult situation. On the one hand, as the head of the General Staff and the first deputy minister of defense, he was obliged to obey the order and fulfill it immediately. On the other hand, as an experienced military leader and a politician, he could foresee the consequences of this step for his army and his country all too well. Negative premonitions tormented him. Ogarkov, who personally participated in the development and adoption of plans for pre-emptive strikes against NATO countries (to be implemented if any signs of preparation for nuclear attacks against the Soviet Union were detected) and believed in the success of such pre-emptive strikes, who fought against the Nazis and spent decades strengthening the defense capabilities of the Soviet Union, did not believe in the potential success of a *blitzkrieg* in the Afghan mountains. He expected huge troubles to follow such a campaign. No, Afghanistan was not to be given away. He understood that, and was ready to work on alternate scenarios in order to maintain a friendly regime there. But that had to be achieved without the participation of Soviet troops, and without triggering a large-scale war. The Soviets didn't need their own Vietnam across the Amu Darya. Ogarkov thought that if the KGB considered Amin to be an American

agent, they had to find a way to remove him. The best way would be to do it lawfully, using the domestic opposition. They could install someone else who was more reliable in his place. There were people in Kabul who could do it: KGB personnel, GRU operatives, and 1,500 special forces operatives stationed at Bagram, who were waiting for the order. But deploying the Soviet Army would mean exposing it from all directions. That would not end well. That would hurt.

“Fine, I understand you, thank you,” Nikolai Vasilievich bid the generals farewell and remained alone. Now he had to go to a Politburo meeting again.

Brezhnev himself was in charge of the meeting. When the head of the General Staff was given the floor, he caught Ustinov’s glance, which didn’t promise anything good, as if the minister was warning him, “Don’t play with fire or you’ll be sorry.” Having suppressed his anxiety, Nikolai Vasilievich narrated his arguments clearly and succinctly. He suggested bringing small military units into Afghanistan to protect the most important sites as a compromise. The problem had to be resolved in a political rather than a military way.

“Who gave you authority to speak of politics here?” demanded Andropov. “You should deal with fulfilling your own tasks. Leave the politics to us.”

“But I am the head of the General Staff,” Ogarkov objected.

“And not more than that,” Andropov snapped abruptly. “You were invited here not to share your opinion, but to hear the Politburo’s decision and fulfill it. The Politburo is leaning in a different direction, and you know it.”

“Are there any other opinions?” asked Ogarkov, looking around the room.

“To support Yuri Vladimirovich,” responded Suslov in his squeaky voice. Other members of the Politburo spoke after him, also in support of Andropov.

The final decision that day was not recorded in writing. They agreed that, “troops will have to be put on alert for possible military intervention on Afghan territory, ‘just in case.’”

Surprisingly, that episode did not shake Ogarkov’s determination to continue insisting on his point of view. It’s possible that the Politburo was facing such consistent resistance from one of the state’s top leaders for the first time in the many years of its existence.

On December 10, the head of the General Staff undertook a final desperate attempt to derail the course of events. He prepared a detailed, substantive report, which narrated the salient characteristics of the current situation in Afghanistan, with possible solutions to resolve the problems. He concluded that the appearance of Soviet troops on the territory of a sovereign foreign state would likely cause extremely negative political, economic, social, and military consequences. Ogarkov, Akhromeev, and Varennikov signed the report. The three of them brought the report to the minister of defense.

Handing the report to the minister, Ogarkov played his final trump card: “Don’t you think, Dmitry Fedorovich, that the Americans are deliberately baiting us into a large-scale war in order to bleed us to death and to compromise the USSR in the eyes of the international community? Our comrades share the opinion that the U.S. special services falsified and fed us misleading information regarding both Amin’s betrayal and their possible control over Afghanistan.”

“Notice how calmly and, I would say, indifferently they react to our military preparations,” added Varennikov. “They are hardly unaware of these preparations, but they

keep their silence, and don't make any official declarations or engage the media. This is so uncharacteristic of them."

Ustinov didn't show any reaction to what he was told. Certainly, such a version of events was not unknown to him. Once, he read information from an unnamed source claiming that the Americans were planning to land a large group of commandos near the Kandahar Airport, per Amin's request. That really looked very much like disinformation. The minister of defense silently scanned the report. He made a few remarks in the margins with his pencil. Then he signed the first page, placed the documents in a folder, and returned it to Ogarkov. "You should give this to a prosecutor," he said.

He looked away, and paced across his office.

"It is too late," he said, looking into Ogarkov's eyes. "The decision has been made. You and I must fulfill it*."

This was the last of Nikolai Vasilievich Ogarkov's attempts to counter his minister's position. Henceforth he and his subordinates would begin to work around the clock to engage a large group of troops that would soon receive the title "A Limited Contingent of Soviet Troops in Afghanistan."

Even several years later, when the Soviet troops left Afghanistan, when *Glasnost* had arrived, and many politicians and heads of special services rushed to disassociate themselves from their earlier wrong decisions, Ogarkov preferred to remain silent. He didn't leave behind any memoirs or interviews. Such was the way he had been raised.

* Ustinov probably meant that the agreement in principal by most members of the Politburo for military intervention had been obtained. The decision itself would be officially adopted and registered two days later.

“Well, Volodya, it is time to act,” the chairman of the KGB looked at Kryuchkov.

“Consider the order to have been issued. From now on everything, or most of it, depends on you and your men.”

Kryuchkov didn't even consider asking Andropov more about the order. Where did it come from? Who signed it? How was it worded? Kryuchkov was so loyal to Andropov that he would have fulfilled any of his orders without any doubt or discussion. Gratitude for his successful career and sincere respect for Andropov (who unquestionably was a major figure), as well as old professional traditions according to which no unnecessary questions were asked of the leadership, defined Kryuchkov's attitude towards Andropov.

Andropov's words did not catch the chief of intelligence by surprise. Kryuchkov himself was not particularly decisive or analytical. But years of serving in the bureaucratic apparatus had honed his ability to intuitively grasp his boss's desires. He, in turn, was the perfect executor. In this case, the leadership's wishes were obvious: Amin must be killed, someone loyal must be brought to power, and Afghanistan must remain a friend and ally. A lot had already been accomplished. Having been thoroughly instructed, Karmal, Sarwari, and other disgraced opposition leaders, who had been very eager to begin their battle, were transferred to Tashkent, closer to the border, from where they could arrive in Kabul within an hour or two once the signal was given. Then they would engage in fulfilling their assigned tasks. In Kabul, Kryuchkov's operatives worked closely with Parchamis in hiding and Khalqis in opposition. Major KGB and Army special forces, numbering over 1,500, were concentrated at the airbase in Bagram and in Kabul. A KGB operative had penetrated the closest inner circle of the Afghan leader.

However, there remained some problematic issues to address. In essence, Kryuchkov had to plan and implement a regime change in a satellite state of the USSR, which was absolutely sovereign. How would it be possible to explain to the rest of the world that the Soviets appeared in Afghanistan because of multiple requests from the country's leadership and overthrew that leadership immediately upon arrival? It would be much better for the Afghan opposition to be doing the dirty work behind the coup d'état. Then it would remain their internal affairs. But what if they were unable to do that? What to do about Amin? Should he be arrested, tried, and sentenced to death for all of the crimes he committed? Should he be eliminated during the regime change campaign? Should he be brought to the Soviet Union and be isolated there? The Politburo was not going to get involved over such "nuances." It had made its principal decision. The rest would have to be done by them, operatives of the KGB. Every mistake would prove costly.

The difficulty was that Kryuchkov could rely on only a very small group of people to discuss these issues. The level of secrecy was such that even some of his deputies had not caught wind of the campaign.

Certainly, it would be better to get rid of Amin during the coup; much of the problem hinged on physically eliminating him—no person, no problem. It could be treated as an execution based on the sentence of a revolutionary trial. Such an option wouldn't raise particular questions within Afghanistan, because everybody knew that Amin's hands were covered in blood. Moreover, the Soviet Union would have to thoroughly prepare responses to the sensitive questions that would inevitably be asked by representatives of the international community, Soviet friends from the socialist bloc, and leaders of the Non-

Aligned Movement, of which Afghanistan was a member. As if sensing Kryuchkov's pondering, Andropov called him.

"I am sending you drafts of responses in regards to the forthcoming events, prepared by our comrades from the Central Committee. Go over them attentively and tell me what you think."

Soon a heavy package of documents was delivered to him. All of them dealt with the difficult issues that Kryuchkov had been pondering. The title of one document was "On the Unified Interpretation of Issues Related to Changes in the Afghan Leadership and Soviet Military Intervention in Afghanistan." In this document, a wide-ranging analysis outlined views pertaining to a number of related issues.

The document said that Taraki and Amin had addressed Moscow requesting direct military intervention to counter armed foreign interference in Afghanistan's domestic affairs on at least fourteen occasions since March 1979. As a consequence, the Soviet military intervention would be based on a solid international legal foundation in accordance with the Treaty of Friendship, Good Neighborliness and Cooperation between the USSR and the DRA, the UN Charter, and multiple requests from the Afghan government. As for an explanation regarding Afghanistan's new leader: Karmal returned from forced exile in the second half of October 1979, immediately following the murder of Comrade Taraki at the hands of Amin. Being in hiding, he first set up ties with underground organizations and then began leading their activities. Amin's regime will have been overthrown as a result of an underground activist movement consisting of members of the PDPA, which is supported by all patriotic forces within the country. Action vis-à-vis Amin was thus undertaken by the Afghans themselves, including those who were members of the

leadership of the party and the state under Amin. The Soviet military units would have no direct role in the removal of Amin. Their arrival was exclusively designed to preserve territorial integrity, as well as the independence and sovereignty of the DRA in the face of external aggression.

A draft of the following document, which had been read by Andropov, Gromyko, Ustinov, and Ponomarev, narrated in detail the situation inside the PDPA, enumerated Amin's scheming and divisive activities, leanings towards the West, continuing acts of repression, and the rationale for Soviet military intervention in the DRA. As far as Kryuchkov understood, the document was to be used inside the Soviet Union in order to clarify the rationale behind the invasion to the base level organizations of the CPSU.

Then Kryuchkov quickly leafed through the draft of a proposal titled "Regarding the Propaganda Campaign to Explain and Justify our Invasion of Afghanistan," in which all of the previous arguments were repeated, including drafts of "Instructions to the Soviet Ambassadors in Socialist Countries," "A Recommendation to the USSR Representative at the United Nations," "Letters to Members and Candidates of the Central Committee of the CPSU, Members of the Central Committees of the Union Republics, and Regional Party Committees," as well as a draft of a "Congratulatory Telegram to the Chairman of the Revolutionary Council, Chairman of the Central Committee of the PDPA, and Prime Minister of the DRA, Comrade Babrak Karmal, on the Occasion of His Election to Those Positions."

Kryuchkov didn't have any critical remarks regarding these documents. They had all been thoroughly prepared. This is what he reported to the chairman of the KGB.

"Then act," Andropov reminded him again.

Kryuchkov had to issue the signal to begin, but he was not in a hurry. He knew what was at stake. He was slow not because he doubted the rationale for the forthcoming action; in fact, his positions on this matter were firm. There could be no doubt about actions mounted in the interest of the Soviet Union and the international socialist movement. Kryuchkov moved slowly to ensure that no failures would occur and interfere with the planned operation or put it at risk.

Per Kryuchkov's directive, Bogdanov and Osadchiy mobilized all of the resources at their disposal, including agents who had been recruited from among Soviet citizens. All of those agents were ordered, without any explanation of the underlying reasons, to be on high alert around the clock and to continue collecting information about everything relating to Amin, his services, government structures, and any movement of military units. The head of PGU reported back the following: "Over 1,500 military advisers and specialists, all of the operatives of the KGB and intelligence, operatives of Zenit, as well as the agents from the Soviet colony—one hundred three agents and fifteen trusted persons—are involved in collecting information."

Operatives of the super-secret Eighth Department of the "S" Directorate (Covert Intelligence), as well as almost all officers from the Department of PGU in charge of Afghanistan, were sent to Kabul from Yasenevo. The Zenit operatives who had been mobilized from different KGB units from around the Soviet Union had already arrived. In addition to those, Kryuchkov received a strong boost from Andropov, who deployed to Kabul operatives from Group A (Anti-Terror), which belonged to the Seventh Directorate of the KGB. Those operatives arrived in Kabul along with the head of the Seventh Directorate, Lieutenant General Beschastnov.

On December 13, the “cook” who had infiltrated Amin’s inner circle, foreign intelligence officer Mikhail T., received the order to use a poison that had been delivered from Moscow to take out Amin and his nephew Asadullah, who was in charge of Afghan state security organs. The plan for the operation was as follows: Amin and Asadullah were to be neutralized. Meanwhile, taking advantage of the temporary power vacuum, the main sites of Kabul were to be suddenly attacked by the Army and KGB special forces, as well as commandos and border troops. The “healthy forces” in the PDPA were to undertake a secondary task. They were supposed to participate in taking over the identified sites from within.

Chief Military Adviser Colonel General Magometov learned about the forthcoming action literally on the eve of the offensive, almost by chance. Ustinov, who spoke with him over the phone, asked, “What’s the status of preparations to remove Amin from power?” Having learned that the adviser had heard nothing about the planned coup d’état, the minister ordered that he immediately meet with Andropov’s representative in Kabul. However, General Ivanov responded to Magometov without blinking an eye, claiming he knew nothing of the plan to overthrow Amin. Only when Magometov, outraged, made a reference to the instructions of the Politburo member did Ivanov introduce him to the plan for the forthcoming operation.

“And you are really hoping to succeed by engaging such limited forces against several thousand of Amin’s guards, KAM operatives, and ranks of loyal Khalqis?” asked the astonished adviser after he finished reading the plan. It was unclear to him how the Afghan army would react. “Are you sure that the armed forces will not rise to protect their leader?”

“At this point, you should stop saying ‘you,’ and start saying ‘we,’” suggested Boris Semyonovich Ivanov, “as you are now among the very few who have been informed of the plan. You are hereby in charge of the army aspect of the operation. You should familiarize General Gus’kov with the plan.”

Gus’kov, a paratrooper, having listened to Magometov’s presentation at Bagram, could not conceal his bewilderment. “Which wise-ass in Moscow has concocted this plan? When has attacking a well-defended enemy without having superiority in numbers or in any other area produced favorable results? Minus the surprise factor?” he asked in disbelief.

The “wise-ass” behind the operation still remains unknown. No written directives ever arrived from the Ministry of Defense or the KGB. The author of the operation’s plan has never been revealed.

On the twelfth of December, the Politburo of the Central Committee of the CPSU issued its verdict. Taking into consideration the secrecy and sensitivity of the task at hand, the document (in a previously unheard-of fashion at the Central Committee) was handwritten by Konstantin Chernenko. This is what was said in the document:

“Under the Chairmanship of L.I. Brezhnev.

Present: Suslov M.A., Grishin V.V., Kirilenko A.P., Pel’she A.Ya., Ustinov D.F., Chernenko K.U., Andropov Y.V., Gromyko A.A., Tikhonov N.A., Ponomaryov B.N.

Resolution of the Central Committee of the CPSU No. 176/125

Regarding the situation in “A”

1. To approve the considerations and actions described by Comrades Andropov Y.V., Ustinov D.F., Gromyko A.A. To permit, during the realization of these actions, for them to introduce minor amendments. The issues that require decisions of the

Central Committee should be introduced in a timely fashion to the Politburo. Implementation of all of these measures should be assigned to Comrades Andropov Y.V., Ustinov D.F., Gromyko A.A.

2. To task Comrades Andropov Y.V., Ustinov D.F., Gromyko A.A., to inform the members of the Politburo of the Central Committee regarding the implementation of the planned actions.

Secretary of the Central Committee, L.I. Brezhnev

Few details about that fatal Politburo meeting are known. What is known is that the head of the government, A.N. Kosygin, who appealed to his colleagues for a more balanced position towards Afghanistan and who consistently rejected the idea of Soviet military intervention, was not present at the meeting because of illness. It is interesting to imagine how he would have voted if he had been in the Kremlin on that day. All of the other Politburo members unanimously approved the document. It is also known that on that particular day, December 12, the Americans and their allies announced their plans to deploy new intermediate-range missiles in Europe, which upset strategic parity and was therefore of great concern to the Soviet leadership.

One might inquire as to the whereabouts of the note with the “considerations and actions” that were purportedly narrated by Ustinov, Andropov, and Gromyko. It is quite possible that such a note never existed. Most probably, they narrated their arguments orally. The cautious functionaries in those days tried not to leave any traces of their activity on paper, such as decrees, plans, and working notes. Even Afghanistan in that handwritten document is hidden shamefully under the letter “A.”

But for Kryuchkov it was a clear signal that it was time to act, and he issued an order to Kabul.

The “cook” Mikhail T. poisoned the Coca-Cola that was served to Amin at lunch in the Ark Palace. Amin sensed no danger and eagerly consumed the Coca-Cola and devoured the meal cooked by his Soviet “cook.” Certain that the poison had been consumed, the “cook” called the office of a Soviet economic adviser and uttered the code phrase: “Please, tell me the status of acquiring additional furniture for my apartment in Mikrorayon.” This meant that he had fulfilled his task and was prepared to retreat. The KGB operative who took the phone used the code phrase signaling that Mikhail could leave and find shelter in the Soviet embassy.

It was assumed that the poison would work within five to six hours after its consumption. During that time, the Muslim Battalion, Zenit, two detachments of paratroopers, and a unit of border guards that were appointed to conduct the operation were to begin advancing towards the sites to be captured: Amin’s residence, the Ministry of Defense, the Central Army Corps headquarters, the Ministry of the Interior, the TV and radio center, KAM headquarters, and the Puli-Charkhi Prison.

Mikhail T. reached the embassy safely and reported to Bogdanov, who brought him to the apartment of one of his co-workers. “Stay here for now. In the evening we will send you to Bagram, and then back to Moscow.”

Bogdanov himself rushed to his residence, where he planned to have dinner with Asadullah Amin, during which the head of the Afghan special services was to be poisoned. It was planned that Bogdanov and Asadullah Amin would be joined for dinner by Ivanov and a Soviet interpreter. However, Boris Semyonovich decided at the last minute that it would not be appropriate for him, a general and a personal representative of Andropov, to participate in such a sensitive affair.

“Tell Asadullah that I am not well, and that the embassy doctor insisted that I stay in bed,” he told the KGB representative. Bogdanov was left to act on his own.

On the afternoon of December 13, 1979, the two key enemies were stuffed with poison. Now the Soviets waited for confirmation that the poison had taken affect, and both Amins were neutralized. Only then could the next phase of the operation begin. But how would one find out what was happening with the uncle and his nephew?

The Center suggested the following scenario: Bogdanov receives an urgent cable from Moscow that the Americans could deploy their special forces at any moment on Iranian territory. The Center recommends that they immediately inform Comrade Amin of the content of this alarming cable, while attempting to ascertain the situation in his residence and his health condition. After midnight, Bogdanov arrived with an interpreter at Ark Palace. They climbed the same staircase where Tarun had been killed three months prior. There they were greeted by Hafizullah Amin. Asadullah also spent the night at the same house. He walked out of his bedroom momentarily to greet the late guest before retreating to his quarters. Having apologized for such an untimely visit, Bogdanov informed the head of state about the contents of the cable. Amin didn't look well. His complexion was gray and he had bags under his eyes, but that might have been the consequence of regular fatigue. He listened to the colonel attentively, thanked him, and asked him to continue to inform him about the evolution of the situation in the Persian Gulf. Both the uncle and nephew saw Bogdanov off. Alas, they did not look like people who were gravely ill.

Having returned to the embassy late that night, Bogdanov sent a cable to the Center describing what he had seen in Ark Palace and proceeded to sleep.

The poison worked, but strangely, only in the case of the nephew. On the morning of December 14, it became known that doctors had been summoned to the palace, including those from the Soviet Military Hospital. The doctors reported that Asadullah had been sent to the hospital under suspicion of severe food poisoning. By the evening, the decision had been made to evacuate him to Moscow for further treatment.

At the same time, the Center issued the order for Babrak Karmal's departure from Tashkent to Bagram. De facto it meant the beginning of the second stage of the operation. Ivanov reported the situation to Kryuchkov over the telephone.

"Asadullah Amin is in the hospital on an IV. Attempts have been made to pump his stomach and to purify his blood. He is in bad condition. As to Hafizullah Amin, according to information that we have as of now, his condition is of no concern. He continues to work according to his regular regime."

"Why?" snapped Kryuchkov. "Can you explain to me what this means? Where is your man who served them lunch? What does he have to say?"

The operative Mikhail T., whom Kryuchkov had in mind, was back in Amin's kitchen again. Earlier that morning, he was urgently transferred from Bagram back to Kabul, on account of Amin having survived the attempted poisoning without apparent suspicion of his cook's involvement. The "cook" had acted according to plan. He added poison to the container with Coca-Cola and personally watched Amin drink the entire glass of it. Ivanov reported this to Kryuchkov.

“Two variants are possible here,” he explained. “Either the poison didn’t work yet and we should wait longer, or the Coca-Cola neutralized its effect.* In that case, the situation has changed dramatically, and some decision must be made soon.”

Kryuchkov, normally firmly composed, assumed a heavy silence.

“Do you understand that we already airlifted everybody?” he said finally. “That the plane with Comrade K is flying from Tashkent to Kabul? That the special forces have been given the order to begin?”

“We will be informing you about the situation in the palace,” promised Ivanov.

“Fine,” mumbled Kryuchkov in displeasure, and hung up.

Meanwhile, fighters of the Muslim Battalion, Zenit operatives, and paratroopers in Bagram were indeed ordered to board military vehicles and to get ready to march on Kabul.

Valery Kurilov found out by chance that the operation for which they had been brought to Bagram would start at any moment. When walking one evening not far from his tent, he noticed that part of Bagram had been surrounded by barbed wire and the military bunkers were draped with camouflage. Valery took this as a sign that important military figures were visiting. Upon closer inspection, he saw that strange persons in unmarked soldiers’ overcoats walked within that fenced territory. Valery recognized his old acquaintance Sarwari in one of those figures. Gulabzoi was nearby. The former head of security also recognized one of his recent saviors and was very glad to see him again.

“Are you back? Are all of your other comrades here as well?”

* The tests that were later conducted allegedly confirmed the latter variant.

“Everybody is here,” Kurilov assured him. “The whole gang!”

“Great!” laughed Sarwari. “Then victory will surely be ours. Death to bloody Amin!”

Kurilov was about to return to his tent, but was suddenly approached by an unfamiliar special forces operative. The man was enormous, and armed to the teeth. Valery didn't yet know about the existence of the elite counterterrorism Group “A.” They introduced themselves. It turned out that Valery's new acquaintance was in charge of security for members of the future Afghan government.

“Don't approach them anymore,” he told Kurilov, nodding towards the Afghans.

“Don't tell anybody that you saw them. It's important that we keep this a secret.”

“So,” Kurilov concluded, “this means that we will advance on Kabul to overthrow Amin soon.”

The next day, his assumptions were confirmed. At first, the Zenit fighters were assigned to a fleet of armored vehicles of the Muslim Battalion, and were ordered to prepare to advance on Kabul. Then the commander of one of the Zenit units, Yasha Semenov, came and said that he had been invited to the commander's tent for a meeting. The participants of the meeting looked strange in the faintly lit tent. All of them, those who sat at the table of the “presidium” and the regular participants, were dressed in the soldiers' overcoats and hats. The bosses could be distinguished by the ribbons on their epaulets. Sergeants' signs signified that their carrier was actually a colonel. Almost all of them were unshaved, with shadows of fatigue on their faces. Commanders of the Muslim Battalion, Zenit, and paratrooper detachments all participated in the meeting.

One of the unfamiliar parties, an older-looking man (Kurilov figured that he must be a general) gave a lecture on the topic of Hafizullah Amin's character flaws, his alleged ties

to the CIA, and his alleged behavior in favor of the United States, all of which pointed to the necessity of his ousting. This was confirmed by Yasha Semenov, who was next to speak. Yasha put forth a specific military assignment. He listed the license plate numbers of armored vehicles and distributed target sites in Kabul for those vehicles to attack. Kurilov's vehicle was in the most "honorable" group, which was tasked with the capture of the Ark Palace.

Listening to the instructions, Valery suddenly realized that it all seemed like a bad dream. Here they were at an airdrome surrounded by strange foreign mountains, under an unstable tent, their unshaven faces huddled around a faint heater. Most important, of course, was the impossible task that they had been assigned. How could one military company of Army special forces, a group of paratroopers, and two dozen Zenit fighters gain control over the well-guarded Ark Palace in the center of Kabul? They say that two thousand guardsmen loyal to Amin guard the palace. Also to be reckoned with was a close group of guards consisting of his relatives, as well as the army brigades based in central Kabul.

The plan was as follows: five armored vehicles would break through the gates of the palace driving at full speed, enter the palace territory, and quickly suppress the defensive positions before an interpreter would announce via a loudspeaker that Amin's anti-popular regime had fallen and recommend that the guardsmen lay down their arms and surrender, at which point they would raise their arms and walk out towards their liberators.

Valery looked around to see how his comrades had reacted to the instructions. They were clearly dismayed. Semenov and Golubev looked sideways. They were obviously very uncomfortable.

“Is it possible to see a floor plan of the palace?” someone inquired from the back row.

The seniors at the desk exchanged a look before one of them* confirmed, rather without conviction, “We will familiarize you with the floor plan at a later point in time.”

“What should we do with Amin after capturing the palace? Should he be taken prisoner? Should he be executed on the spot?”

“This is not your concern. There will be people there, including members of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the PDPA, who will take care of Amin. They will know what to do.”

“What if the guards put up intense resistance, and receive support from commandos from the Bala Hissar Fortress?” asked one of the Zenit operatives, who obviously was familiar with Kabul.

“According to intelligence reports, the guards are positively inclined towards the Soviet military men and will not open fire upon you,” assured an elder commander.

“And if they do?” many voices asked. “What should we do then?”

“Then,” the “senior sergeant” spoke sternly, “you will have to demonstrate everything that you have been trained to do, and fulfill your task at any cost. Even,” he paused, “at the cost of your own life. Any more questions?”

Now there were no more questions remaining. The meeting’s participants departed in silence. Transport aircrafts containing personnel from the 345th Airborne Division began to land on the landing strip, one after another. The battalion and reconnaissance

* Most probably, this would have been the deputy commander of the airborne troops, Lieutenant General N. Gus’kov.

group arrived to support the detachment led by Senior Lieutenant Vostrotin. Still, it seemed as though there was not adequate military force to capture the whole city.

At approximately the same time, Senior Military Adviser General Magometov called Marshal Ustinov on the phone. "Comrade Minister, I have studied the situation and should state with full responsibility that currently I do not have sufficient forces and means to successfully fulfill the task, nor to subsequently maintain order in Kabul."

"What, are you a coward?" was Ustinov's decisive reply.

Magometov broke into a sweat. "Comrade Marshal of the Soviet Union, I am thinking about only one thing: how to successfully fulfill the task that has been assigned to me."

"So fulfill the task. Get busy."

Having connected with Gus'kov, and having received confirmation that the paratroopers had arrived, the senior military adviser issued the order to begin their advance.

However, as soon as the first armored vehicles left the perimeter of the base, an order to halt arrived.

In Moscow, a council of military and KGB leaders, having analyzed the evolving situation after receiving information regarding the ineffectual attempt to poison Hafizullah Amin, and having consulted with their representatives in Kabul, decided to postpone the operation. This meant the adoption of the second scenario that had been discussed within the Politburo but that was never officially recorded. That scenario called for the intervention of the Soviet Limited Military Contingent and, only then, the assault on government sites and the transfer of power in the capital.

Fear of potential failure played a decisive role during the operation. The shared perception of failure meant the collapse of Soviet positions in Afghanistan, the loss of influence over the country, the conclusive eradication of the PDPA, and the potential destruction of the Soviet embassy in Kabul. The operation's leaders in both Moscow and Kabul didn't seem to seriously entertain hopes for garnering support from local PDPA members. An organized underground did not yet exist. There were separate, unconnected groups of Parchamis and Khalqis who were displeased with Amin, but not disposed to cooperate with one another. There were also very few heroes who were prepared to sacrifice themselves for the sake of saving the April Revolution. Such assertions can be verified by the situation after the command to halt had been issued late on December 14. Avenues of communication to relay this command throughout the underground did not exist, yet, to the surprise of the KGB operatives, there were no armed incidents during the evening or through the night in Kabul. This pointed to the fact that there was never any intention on the part of the dedicated opposition to move forward with the coup d'état.

At 9 p.m., all of the electricity in the capital went out. The city was drowned in darkness. The initial plan had called for an "accident" that would take down the grid. This action turned out to be unnecessary under the circumstances.

Close to midnight, General Kirpichenko brought together senior intelligence officers for a meeting at the resident's office. He was visibly irritated. He had just spoken with the Center. Both Kryuchkov and Andropov expressed their dissatisfaction that the plan to remove Hafizullah Amin using readily available sources in Kabul had failed.

The deputy head of intelligence confirmed that all KGB operatives and agents that had participated in the operation had to return to their regular work routine until receiving

a new order. Nobody bothered to ask when such an order would arrive, or inquire as to the nature of that order. Amidst heavy silence, Kirpichenko uttered the mysterious phrase, “Somebody is stringing us along.”

The next morning, Karmal, Anahita, and other members of the future Afghan leadership flew back to Tashkent.

Within several days, almost all military groups that had arrived in Bagram—the Muslim Battalion, Zenit operatives, and the paratroopers—received an order to relocate to the unfinished barracks near the Tajbeg Palace on the edge of Kabul. The official reason given was to protect the future residence of the head of the Afghan state.

It was at this point that Valery Kurilov fully understood the absurdity of the plan that they were supposed to have implemented on December 14. The night march on Kabul would never have been the swift advance that their bosses had in mind. One third of the armored vehicles broke down while riding on the paved highway. The vehicles had to be towed. Communication worked intermittently or not at all. The soldiers of the Muslim Battalion were at a loss in the simplest situations, could not carry out basic mechanical repairs, and ignored their commanders’ orders. It took the column four hours to travel sixty kilometers. When it entered Kabul, it looked miserable. Only the paratroopers in their new BMDs looked presentable.

When General Magometov received reports of the failures of the night attempt to redeploy, he grew outraged. He ordered the immediate removal of the commander of the Muslim Battalion, Major Halbaiev. Only with great difficulty was the major’s post preserved. However, the GRU leadership in Moscow decided to reinforce its position by urgently sending Colonel Kolesnik and Junior Colonel Shvetz, who were in charge of

training the special forces units and were directly engaged in the formation of the Muslim Battalion.

The First Main Directorate of the KGB of the USSR also reinforced the leadership for the forthcoming operation. Major General Drozdov, who had recently been appointed head of the “S” Division Headquarters, flew to Kabul on December 19. General Drozdov was a World War II veteran who had participated in a number of dangerous intelligence operations. Andropov, bidding him farewell, was candid about the gravity of the situation. “The situation is very complicated there. You will have to resolve important problems. You are one of the few who truly knows what it means to battle.”

But didn't Amin, this intelligent and perceptive individual, sense the clouds amassing overhead? Didn't he sense that he was in mortal danger? He had many opportunities to monitor the actions of his “Soviet friends,” including KGB operatives, military officials, and diplomats. How can one explain why Amin wasn't alarmed by the mysterious happenings at the airdrome in Bagram, the landing of airplanes at night that Afghan officers working at the airdrome were discouraged from investigating, sometimes under threat of death? Why wasn't he concerned by the tense atmosphere that permeated the Soviet military groups that had purportedly been sent for his protection? Or by the increasing cases of distribution of leaflets urging Afghans to overthrow him, the “tyrant and CIA agent”? His agents reported increasing activity among the Parchamis in hiding. And then, of course, there was the issue of the sudden illness of Asadullah and his departure to the Soviet Union for treatment.

As for the nephew, at first Bogdanov was suspected because Asadullah started to feel poorly immediately following the dinner at his residence. However, the investigation that followed revealed a fact that saved Bogdanov. It turned out that on that very evening, Asadullah had spent time in the company of prostitutes, during which food had also been served. The women were immediately arrested and interrogated severely.

The Soviet comrades, referring to the Moscow doctors, tried to calm Amin. “Nothing terrible happened—regular food poisoning is all. Comrade Asadullah is feeling better and will return to Afghanistan soon.” Bogdanov even mentioned that “Comrade Asadullah had asked to arrange a meeting with Andropov, and now that he wound up in Moscow, such a meeting was possible.” This helped calm Amin.*

As to the activities at Bagram, including the increasingly frequent landing of heavy cargo planes with military personnel and equipment, it was explained to Amin that the intensified activity was in anticipation of the forthcoming Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan that had been many times requested by the head of state himself.

“The Soviet leadership finally agreed that it was necessary to deliver a final blow to the rebel forces,” explained the new senior military adviser, Magometov. “You were correct, Comrade Amin, when you said that it would be impossible to resolve this task without the support of our armed forces. Everybody mentions your wisdom as a statesman, political visionary, and consistent defender of the achievements of the April Revolution.”

“What do you need from us in connection with the forthcoming military intervention?” Amin was obviously pleased to hear the adviser’s flattery.

* After the events of December 27, Asadullah Amin “in accordance with a personal request from Babrak Karmal” would be placed in a KGB investigation chamber before being transferred to Afghanistan, where he would be executed in 1980.

“It would be good for you to send your plenipotentiary representative to Termez to help establish mutual contacts with the command of our military group.” Having spoken these words, Magometov secretly hoped that Amin would send Yaqub, the head of the General Staff, who was considered absolutely loyal to the general secretary, thereby presenting a potential threat to the organizers of the forthcoming coup. If Yaqub were sent to the Soviet Union during those crucial days, then the chances of success would grow exponentially.

“I will do so. The head of the Operational Headquarters of the General Staff, General Babajan, will go to Termez. Please tell your leadership that he will be granted the necessary authority to make decisions on my behalf.”

Moscow undertook a number of measures, the goal of which was to mask the preparations for the imminent operation and to lull Amin’s awareness. The secretary of the Central Committee of the PDPA and Politburo member Pandzhsheri arrived in the Soviet Union to schedule inter-party activities. An intensive exchange between delegations along economic, cultural, educational, and military lines continued. Ambassador Tabeyev, when meeting the head of Afghanistan, officially informed him that the requests to the Soviet leadership regarding military assistance, including sending a number of military detachments to the DRA, would be fully satisfied. The date of the Soviet military intervention was set for December 25. In response, Amin asked to give his deepest gratitude to the Central Committee of the CPSU and to Comrade Brezhnev personally.

According to his closest allies, Amin looked energetic and full of optimism during those days. It was clear that he had little sense of what was about to happen. He routinely conducted meetings of the Revolutionary Council, the government, and the Politburo.

On December 20, the long-awaited move of the head of state and party into the newly renovated Tajbeg palace took place. Vasily Safronchuk turned out to be one of the first guests in the new palace. He asked to meet with Comrade Amin on the occasion of completion of his tour in Afghanistan.

Safronchuk, as well as Ambassador Tabeyev, was unaware of the forthcoming secret operation. Otherwise he certainly would not have reported the overall positive characteristics of the Afghan leader in his final cable to Gromyko. The adviser conceded that the head of state used a bit too much leftist phraseology, and was a Pashtun nationalist. "However, while he is in charge," he continued, "we shouldn't be concerned about the deterioration of relations with Afghanistan." Safronchuk concluded that Amin was a reliable partner. Safronchuk wrote to the minister that he could consider his mission in Kabul to be accomplished, and asked for the minister's permission to leave for Moscow before the new year. "Agreed," Gromyko wrote on the cable, allowing Safronchuk to return to Moscow.

Then Minister-Counselor Safronchuk paid Amin a final visit. Amin put his routine agenda aside and showed off his new residence to Safronchuk with obvious pleasure: luxurious halls for official receptions, offices, personal apartments with expensive furnishings, even his personal bathtub that had been carved from a single piece of green onyx.

"If Comrade Brezhnev were to arrive here, we would be proud to receive him in this palace," concluded Amin after the grand tour.

"Certainly," the diplomat assured him. "Everything has been made according to the highest world standards."

Amin was happy to hear that. He seemed energetic and full of optimism for the future.

Hafizullah Amin moved to Tajbeg without any premonitions, although some of his closest advisers warned him against the move under the pretext that it would not be possible to maintain the security of the residence. But Amin remained firm. "The Soviet comrades have guaranteed me one hundred percent security. They promised to surround the area with barbed wire, to install an alarm system, and to arrange patrols around the clock." There was probably another reason for him to want to leave the former royal complex as soon as possible. Everything there reminded him of the recent tragic events, including the death of Tarun and the murder of Taraki. Amin felt uncomfortable in Ark Palace.

"Did you know that the Tajbeg Palace was built according to the wishes of our progressive ruler, Amanullah Khan?" Amin asked Safronchuk proudly, as if he wished to emphasize that he was as major a political figure as the Afghan king.

After warmly bidding his Soviet adviser farewell, Amin went to the center of Kabul, where he had a scheduled meeting with health workers. Speaking to the participants of the meeting, he condemned the United States' policies, particularly recent U.S. maneuvers in the Persian Gulf. On that very day, Amin informed the government about the considerable expansion of Soviet military assistance.

"Finally, Soviet comrades have heard our requests to send military units to Afghanistan in order to defend the achievements of the April Revolution," he declared solemnly to his allies. Applause followed.

“*Inshallah!*” exclaimed the head of General Staff, Major Yaqub. “They should have intervened militarily in the summer. These rebels turned my hair white,” he joked.

“Perhaps this is because of the Americans,” suggested Abdul Karim Misak, the minister of finance. “The threat of their deployment on Iranian territory seems to be quite realistic, doesn’t it?”

“In Moscow, they call it ‘their international duty,’” clarified Amin, meaning the Soviet military intervention.

Two days later, in accordance with earlier plans involving inter-state contacts, a high-level Soviet delegation led by Talyzin, the Soviet minister of communications, arrived in Kabul. Certainly, the decision to send a minister of the Soviet government with his entourage to Afghanistan was risky. Those who planned the operation to overthrow Amin were uncertain about the success of their plan. Nobody knew what the outcome would be. They most likely acted in the interest of the state, so that Amin would have little reason to suspect that something was amiss.

If that was the case, then Moscow clearly succeeded. During the last phase of this large-scale historical drama, it out-maneuvered the main hero—or anti-hero, depending on one’s perspective.

The Kremlin was in a frenzy. The issue of Amin had to be resolved by the end of 1979. As always, when the state put forth any global task to the armed forces or special services, there would be no limit in allocating funds and human or material resources. Absolutely *no* limit.

Akhromeev, the deputy head of the General Staff, with a group of generals and later the first deputy minister of defense, Marshal Sokolov, was sent to Termez. There the formation of the 40th Army, a full-fledged war machine with a number of headquarters, reconnaissance centers, rear support services, and other infrastructure components, was underway.

High-level KGB apparatchiks continued to arrive in Kabul. There were so many of them that the old guard—Ivanov, Bogdanov, and Osadchiy—began to grow indignant and deeply frustrated. Not only did the new arrivals require housing, every general was trying to introduce his own agenda, ideas, and needs. The atmosphere at the embassy grew increasingly tense by the day.

Bogdanov still nourished hopes that Amin would be eliminated without unnecessary noise or fanfare, which would allow the USSR to avoid large-scale troop involvement. Bogdanov, Ivanov, and Kirpichenko spent a long time discussing various options for removing Amin. Leonid Pavlovich remembered that in the summer, Soviet dentists treated Taraki's teeth, to the former head of state's delight. He called Bakhturin.

"Tell me, what is Amin's dental situation? Does he have any problems? Perhaps he would like to get dentures in our embassy's clinic?"

"I can look into it," responded the security officer. An accompanying instruction followed.

"Well, look into it, and ask our dentists about the possibility of planting a capsule with poison into his tooth during the treatment."

Once again, they visited the scenario involving a sniper. Kryuchkov suggested arranging an ambush in the mountain roads near the Tajbeg and opening fire on the

general secretary's motorcade with a combination of grenade launcher and sniper rifle. Specialists from the Eighth Department offered their creative means of elimination, but when they began to sort through the details of their proposals, one hundred percent success could not be guaranteed, so they did not go anywhere.

At some point, Boris Semyonovich Ivanov lost his temper. "I will go myself," he suggested to his astonished colleagues. "Give me an unmarried interpreter who is prepared to sacrifice his life to fulfill his mission. We will come up to Amin and bomb the three of us into smithereens."

Certainly, the Center would never sanction this sort of plan, and General Ivanov himself got carried away in those final days of endless reprimands from Moscow, acrimonious exchanges between colleagues, and total uncertainty.

Certainty arrived on December 25, when, via a military bridge that had been built across the Amu Darya, the 108th Motor Rifle Division entered Afghan territory. Paratroopers of the 103rd Airborne Division were flown in simultaneously. Units of the Fifth Motor Rifle Division left Kushka, headed towards Herat and Kandahar. Another motor rifle detachment and paratrooper assault brigade, as well as a number of other military detachments, began to advance on Afghanistan. The issue of uncertainty became moot. The full-scale assault became inevitable.

Babrak Karmal and the other members of the future leadership were once again in Bagram.

On December 26, members of the Politburo Commission on Afghanistan, plus Chernenko, convened at Zarechie, at Brezhnev's *dacha*. The minister of defense debriefed the group on the troops' advance. Aside from an Il-76 heavy cargo plane flying

spectacularly into the mountains surrounding Bagram, there had been no particular problems. The troops moved along pre-assigned routes and met little resistance from the locals. "Everything is going as planned," declared Ustinov, making little effort to disguise his satisfaction. Gromyko reported the steps taken by the Foreign Ministry to explain to the international community the sight of Soviet soldiers beyond the Amu Darya and Panj rivers. Then Andropov took the floor. Without going into great detail, he assured his colleagues that everything under his purview was prepared for the final step of the operation. "There will be a new general secretary in Kabul tomorrow," he promised.

"Well, comrades," summed up Leonid Ilyich, "I think that we should approve what has been accomplished and what we plan to accomplish. Let's continue to meet in this format in the future. I only have one wish of each of you. Consider your every step thoroughly."

On that very day, the military and the KGB operatives in Kabul confirmed the plans to seize vital government sites, first and foremost the residence of the head of state. The KGB representative personally instructed the "cook," who was again to prepare the "main course" during tomorrow's events in the Afghan capital. Zenit and Alpha commandos were brought a box of good vodka from the embassy. According to tradition, they needed to drink one hundred grams to bolster their spirit on the front lines.

They were past the point of no return.

On the evening of December 25, Valery and Tamara Starostin were preparing to attend a Catholic Christmas celebration in the house of their Polish friends, diplomats Stanislav Smolen, his wife Hanna, and their son Gromek. Tamara was dressing up and

putting on make-up when their doorbell rang. It was Victor Bubnov. He was in a great hurry. He entered the house, opened a duffel bag, and took out a Shmeisser submachine gun and a set of ammunition. "You might find this handy," he suggested. Then Victor informed Starostin that he was leaving immediately for Bagram in order to meet colleagues who were due to arrive from the Soviet Union. He asked him to watch over his wife Antonina in his absence, in case military actions began in Kabul before his return. "I'll take care of her, trust me," Starostin assured his friend.

After that, Valery and Tamara, with two bottles of Soviet champagne, a bouquet of fresh roses from Jalalabad, and a gift for Gromek, went to Mikrorayon, where the Smolens resided.

It was already dark. The black night shined with stars. Snow had yet to fall in Kabul, though that night was particularly frosty.

Small airplanes flew low over Mt. Asmai, the Shur Bazaar quarters, and other districts of Old Kabul, signal lights blinking in the night sky. Flares attached to small parachutes fell from the airplanes. Hanging in the dark sky, the flares brightly illuminated the streets and houses below for several minutes.

"Look how beautiful it is!" exclaimed Tamara. "I wonder why they are launching these flares."

"They probably want to know what's happening in Kabul. They are very concerned that an uprising may begin at any moment. They want to show the residents that they are in control of whatever might be plotted below."

The Smolens prepared a feast for their holiday celebration. Hor d'oeuvres included Starostin's favorite pickled *ryzhyk* mushrooms brought from Poland by Stanislav, potato

pancakes, veal, and traditional baked carp, the scales of which were distributed among the guests as a holiday talisman. Gromek put the scale that he received from his mother in the car that Starostin had given him and rolled his toy around the apartment. He was the jolliest participant of that Christmas celebration.

Stanislav's closest friend, a Polish diplomat named Vishnevsky, and a staff member of the United Nations mission in Kabul, Mozolevsky (their wives remained in Warsaw because Afghanistan was deemed unsafe), joined the Starostins and Smolens at the party. The polite and tactful Poles spoke Russian, even amongst themselves, throughout the evening. The company drank, ate, and told jokes.

Starostin made great efforts to pretend that he was sincerely relaxed and happy, and to conceal his underlying concern about the impending invasion.

"Valery, you've hardly had a drop! Don't tell me you've converted to Islam! Maybe I should pour you something else?" Stanislav asked.

"I'm sorry friend, I have gastroenteritis and heartburn. I don't want to make it worse."

Valery, who had never offended his friends by refusing a drink, barely wet his lips on that night. He felt that he might be summoned for important work at any moment. Too many signs suggested that the end was near—Victor Bubnov's sudden departure for Bagram, the recent arrival of at least ten KGB generals from Moscow, the flares falling from the sky, and the suspicious tension at the embassy.

Sitting around the Christmas feast with his Polish friends, Starostin remembered his meeting with Agent Khost, per the agent's request, in early November. Khost had always been very closely linked to Babrak Karmal, and was his trusted ally. Leaving Kabul, Karmal

bestowed responsibility for leading the military branch of Parcham upon him. During the meeting, Khost told Starostin that on November 4, members of his military organization intended to begin an uprising with the goal of removing Amin and his “hated fascist regime.” They were planning to engage some military units in implementing the plans for the uprising and were hoping to garner the support of the populations of Kabul and the provinces. On November 7, the day of the Great October Revolution, they planned to organize a military parade at Chaman-e Hozuri, the “Red Square” of Afghanistan.

Having received that information, Starostin dashed to Osadchiy. When the resident heard him out, he grew anxious and ordered Starostin to “urgently go to the club in Mikrorayon. Boris Semyonovich is there, attending a concert. Tell him what you told me.”

Within twenty minutes, Valery found Ivanov and asked the general to accompany him on a stroll. Having heard the information that Khost had given Valery, Ivanov became very nervous. “Valery Ivanovich, please meet with Khost as soon as possible. Tell him that their time has not yet come. An untimely uprising could bring our efforts to ruin. Tell him that when we need their assistance, we will inform them through you.”

The next morning, Starostin met with the agent again. Making a reference to Moscow’s instruction, he asked Khost to postpone the planned armed uprising. Valery even made up a proverb in Afghan style: “An unripe fruit may hurt the stomach.” Khost rejoiced when he heard Valery. “This means that you will support us, that salvation is near! I was always sure that the Soviets would never leave their friends in trouble.”

“I don’t know exactly what will happen. I don’t know what plans regarding Afghanistan exist in the Kremlin. I am only telling you what I was told to tell you,” replied Starostin.

A week later, Osadchiy summoned Starostin to his office. They talked about a variety of issues before the resident surprised Valery by asking, "In your opinion, what would be the most desirable means of physically eliminating Amin, taking into consideration the specifics of the Afghan cultural mindset?"

"I suppose he should be eliminated by Afghan patriots, preferably Khalqis. It would be better to kill him in public, by a straight shot to the face, or for a suicide bomber to kill him at point blank with a grenade. The murderer must die along with Amin. This would be striking and would impress the Afghans as a courageous act."

"Where can we find such a person?"

"If necessary, we will find one within a few days. Many people suffered on account of Amin, and many are prepared to give their lives for revenge. All that is needed is the weapon and logistics for the set-up."

"What do you think about poisoning Amin?"

"As far as I know, only women use poison in Afghanistan. Not just women, but old women. Killing him with poison might result in a sense of pity for him and contempt for the murderer."

"Fine, Valery, I am only talking in the abstract. May Amin continue to live and be well, for now," laughed Osadchiy.

Valery remembered another grim episode from 1979. On December 14, the deputy head of PGU, General Kirpichenko, then a recent arrival from Moscow, called him for a meeting.

“Valery Ivanovich,” he said, “could you inform Agent Khost of the need for him to undertake measures to prepare the military branch of Parcham for a military uprising in the shortest possible time? This coming night will herald an end to Amin’s regime.”

“I think I should be able to connect with Khost within an hour or two, if he is in Kabul. What should I tell him, specifically? What kind of signal should the Parchamis receive in order to begin the uprising? Where should they gather? Where will the weapons for the uprising be stored?”

“Tell him that tonight Amin’s regime will be overthrown. Members of Khost’s organization should not necessarily take part in the storming of the palace. Their most important task is to report to service in their army and police units in order to normalize the situation in the armed forces. Then they will be maintaining order in Kabul and other cities around the country.”

“Will do,” Starostin said, his heart pounding with trepidation from the importance of the task.

Soon Valery met with Khost in one of the small Kabul streets on Mt. Asmai. Having heard Valery’s message, Khost was ecstatic. “I will relay it to my people immediately,” he said.

When Starostin returned to the embassy, he was immediately sent for by Osadchiy. “I’m sorry, Valera. The task that Kirpichenko gave you has been postponed for now. Go find your agent as soon as possible to halt the order. The overthrow of Amin’s regime has been postponed.”

“What do you think of me, Vilior Gavrilovich?” shouted Starostin. “An hour ago, I told Khost one thing, and in thirty minutes I am to tell him something else entirely? What should I do now?! Should I go shoot myself?”

“What do you think of me, having to listen to your hysterics here?” replied Osadchiy. “You should try to get a better feel for our circumstances. Go as soon as possible, catch Khost, and tell him. Do what is needed.”

That December 14 was a difficult day.

“Let’s drink to a beautiful Christmas, the Son of God, and the Holy Trinity! Let’s drink for Christ’s mercy, and may our sins be forgiven,” said Starostin when it was his turn to propose a toast.

As soon as he stopped talking, horrible sounds came from above. The dishes on the table began to tremble. It became clear that huge, heavily loaded airplanes were descending on Kabul.

“So it begins,” thought Starostin.

“See, Valery, it seems that God heard your toast,” joked the Polish diplomat Smolen.

On Thursday, December 27, Hafizullah Amin invited his closest allies, members of the Politburo, and ministers to his residence. Some of them were accompanied by their wives, who were served in the female quarters of the house. The formal reason for the gathering was the return from Moscow of Politburo member Pandzhsheri, but Amin had another significant reason to invite his guests. He couldn’t wait to show off his new residence and boast of its luxury.

Before dinner, Amin invited the guests to survey the landscape surrounding the Tajbeg from a huge terrace adjacent to his office. Pines had been planted around the palace and flower beds had been designed, and a modern restaurant complete with a pool was constructed nearby for future occasions. The guards and other military units stayed in the unfinished barracks not far from the palace, and one could see a row of tanks that had been half-concealed. The front of the palace was guarded by the Soviet special forces.

“There are no fortress walls here, like at Ark,” explained Amin. “Security is guaranteed by several rings of protection. A fly would not be able to cross the perimeter.”

The Politburo members were duly impressed, judging by their verbal reaction. Nobody knows, however, what was on their minds.

Then the dinner began. The generous host set the light, relaxed tone for the gathering. When Pandzhsheri, who was directed by doctors to follow a strict diet, refused to eat soup containing meat, Amin joked that they must have spoiled him with the Kremlin cuisine. Everybody laughed, including Pandzhsheri. He repeated to everybody what he had already told Amin: that the Soviet leadership was satisfied with his report of Taraki’s death and the country’s change in leadership. His visit, he said, had further strengthened relations with Moscow. He had received confirmation that the USSR would provide Afghanistan with comprehensive military assistance.

The host solemnly looked his guests. “The Soviet divisions are already on their way. I’ve always told you that our great neighbor would not desert us. I speak on the phone with Comrade Gromyko often, and we have jointly discussed how to better formulate the message about Soviet military assistance for the international community.”

“The leadership of the Central Committee of the CPSU asked me to give you brotherly communist greetings, and to assure you that it highly values your contribution to the revolution,” added Pandzhsheri.

“I will be sure to mention this in my address to the Afghan people, which will be aired tonight,” promised Amin. “Is the TV crew already here?”

“They are waiting for you to finish,” explained Jandad. “They are downstairs on the ground floor. The head of the Political Directorate of the army, Iqbal, is with them.”

It was planned that Amin would explain the reasons for the appearance of the Soviet troops in Afghanistan during his address to the people. In particular, he would declare that they arrived according to the behest of the Afghan leadership, to protect the integrity and sovereignty of Afghanistan in the face of external aggression.

After *pilaf*, everybody moved to a neighboring hall where tea was served. Some guests, citing urgent commitments, left for the city.

Something strange happened then. Almost simultaneously, everybody began to feel ill. They were overwhelmed by a terrible sleepiness, the likes of which nobody had before experienced. Misak, the minister of finance, anxiously asked Amin, “Perhaps the food was bad? Perhaps somebody added something to it?”

“Don’t worry,” responded Amin. “My cook and the dieticians are Soviet. They test every dish before it is served.”

Misak shrugged his shoulders, and, pinning himself against the walls, rushed outside for fresh air. He boarded a car that awaited him and drove to the ministry. Once there, he slipped into an armchair and fell into a deep oblivion.

Meanwhile, inside the palace there evolved a curious scene. Amin's guests were draped over couches and carpets, completely discombobulated. Some of them laughed hysterically. The frightened guards dashed to the telephones to call for doctors from the Soviet embassy and the Central Military Hospital.

A strange illness momentarily struck everybody, except for Pandzhsheri, who looked at his friends with surprise. Amin, too, was affected. His guards, holding the general secretary's limp body, helped him to a couch, where the master of the palace fell into a deep sleep.

It seemed as though on his second try, the "cook" did not fail. The poison that had been mixed in with the soup worked exactly as it was supposed to. However, there remained flaws in the operation. First, the poison acted immediately, instead of later that evening, when the capture of the palace was planned. Secondly, the people who planned the operation did not foresee the impact of the "insignificant" factor involving the intervention of medical professionals, including Soviet doctors, who arrived to the palace immediately in an effort to save Amin, led by Valayat Habibi, the head of the Central Hospital. General Habibi and his deputy, two Soviet colonels (military physicians), two doctors from the embassy, and nurses were mobilized to attend to the crisis in Tajbeg. Ambassador Tabeyev personally sent embassy physicians, as he was unaware of the special operation.

Some guests had to be immediately evacuated to the hospital. Some had their stomachs pumped in the palace. The most attention was given to Comrade Amin. His stomach was pumped and IVs were administered. Major Jandad ordered the immediate arrest of all persons in charge of cooking and serving dishes that day. He also ordered all of

the remaining food and drink to be sent for expert analysis. All of the Afghans were detained, but the “cook” Mikhail T., and the dieticians, managed a timely escape from the premises.

Having been brought back to his senses after several hours, Amin opened his eyes and asked the doctors with surprise, “How did this happen in my home? Who did this?” He did not receive a response, though the silence didn’t last long. When it was 7:30 p.m., and all was dark outside, several explosions shook the palace walls. Bits of plaster began to fall from the ceiling. Glass shattered. The screams of guards and servants came from all around. Almost right away, tracer bullets pierced the dark of the night, raining on the palace from all sides. The roar of explosions was constant.

Everything that existed until that moment suddenly ceased. The wall of fire that fell upon the palace clearly signified a massive coordinated assault. But what was it? A betrayal? A Parchami uprising? A rebel attack? A nightmare?

Amin lifted his heavy head from the pillow. Two people were beside his bed: his wife Patmana and Faqir, the minister of the interior, who had just arrived from Kabul. Seeing the minister, Amin quietly spoke. “Faqir, it seems that I am going out of my mind.”

Shooting and grenade explosions rattled the ground floor of the palace.

“Give me a submachine gun,” asked Amin weakly, and attempted to rise.

“Whom are you going to shoot?” asked his wife. “The Soviets?” She had understood everything.

Almost all forces that had by then been transferred to Kabul—the Muslim Battalion, the Zenit unit, the battalion of paratroopers that was headed by Vostrotin*, and Group

* Later, general, hero of the Soviet Union, deputy minister, and deputy of the State Duma

“A”—participated in the storming of the Tajbeg Palace. Paratroopers from the 103rd Division, who had recently arrived by air from the Soviet Union, were en route to assist them. Amin had no chance of survival.

When the battle for the palace moved up to the second floor, Amin collected himself, rose from the bed, and, holding containers with saline solution, his veins still tapped by syringes, walked out into the corridor. Alexeyev, a military physician, later recalled, “He was walking along the corridor in his underwear, holding bottles filled with saline solution like grenades, his body reflecting fire from the palace halls. His five-year-old son ran out from his room crying and pressed himself against Amin’s legs. They tried to hide behind the bar stand from the wall of fire, the very bar that Amin had been showing off to his guests just hours before. That’s where they were killed by grenade shrapnel.”

In a few minutes, when the result of the battle was clear, a group consisting of two Soviets and two Afghans* approached Amin’s lifeless body. They turned Amin onto his back, compared him to a photograph, and, once they were sure of his identity, one of the Afghans shot the former leader and “commander” of the April Revolution at point blank range.

Colonel Kolesnik from GRU, who was in charge of the operation, and General Drozdov from the KGB, who was in charge of the special forces, signed the identification protocol of Hafizullah Amin, after which the corpse was wrapped in a curtain, taken away, and buried near where the Muslim Battalion had been stationed. The bodies of his two sons, also victims of the assault, were buried nearby.

* These Afghans were Sarwari and Gulabzoi, who participated in the operation of storming the palace. They were in the second echelon.

In total, twenty-five Afghans, including Shah Wali's wife, died during the storming of the Tajbeg Palace*. Five KGB special service operatives were killed, and fourteen from the Muslim Battalion and among the paratroopers. There were more than a hundred wounded men. Colonel Boyarinov, the head of Balashikha, who personally led his Zenit fighters to battle, was killed. A stray bullet killed Colonel Victor Kuznechenkov, a military physician, who had arrived to save Amin from the poisoning.

When the battle was at its peak and disparate messages were arriving at the embassy from the palace, Bogdanov received a call from Kryuchkov. Kryuchkov explicitly stated that they did not need Amin taken alive. At approximately 8:30 p.m. local time, Moscow received several reports that indicated that their main target had been eliminated.

This, however, was not the end.

It was the end of what was later called the "First Stage of the April Revolution."

* This figure only refers to the Afghans who were inside the palace. No numbers exist for casualties during the approach to the Tajbeg Palace. According to some estimates, several hundred people died during the assault.

Authors' Dialogue

Vladimir Snegiryov:

I don't know about you, Valery Ivanovich. As for me, I've finished working on my part of the book with an ambivalent feeling. On the one hand, there is the satisfaction of having completed a big and difficult project. This book is the result of many years of research, meetings, conversations, and difficult contemplation on my part. On the other hand, I continue to feel that the work is unfinished, and that I have not yet written everything that needs to be said. I am concerned that the readers will find many questions unanswered. One of the most important questions is whether Moscow was justified in cruelly eliminating Amin, thus becoming an unwilling participant in the uninterrupted cycle in which Afghan leaders are violently overthrown. Did another scenario exist, whereby Moscow could realistically have closed its eyes to Amin's betrayal of Taraki and continued to support Amin as if nothing had happened? If so, it might have allowed Moscow to avoid military intervention and all of the sad consequences of that act. It is obvious that Amin, with all of his business savvy, was considerably superior [in some respects?] to his predecessor.

Arguments continue around this topic. Was Amin really a CIA agent? If so, then at a critical juncture of the Cold War, Moscow could justify the use of its military to defend its interests in a strategically important region. But what if that was not the case?

Alas, you and I have had our disagreements regarding this issue. You're firm in your belief that the Soviet leaders had basis to suspect Amin of secret collaboration with the United States. I am firmly convinced otherwise. In my opinion, the myth of Amin the American spy was cooked up by the KGB in 1979 in order to push the Kremlin towards

more decisive action in Afghanistan. Let's bring out our thoughts and arguments regarding this issue for the reader to judge and decide who is right.

Valery Samunin:

Yes, let us. Like you, my highly respected co-author, I believe that the question of Hafizullah Amin's association with the CIA's network of agents is certainly very interesting. It is understandable for people to get excited about espionage-related intrigues. I also agree that many people think that if Amin really was a CIA agent, then the Soviet leadership made a just and well-founded, if not wise, decision to eliminate the traitor. But if Amin didn't work for the American intelligence services, this means that the Kremlin leaders made a serious mistake, if not a criminal act. However, I would not directly link the issue of Amin's "espionage" with the issue of whether his removal was justified. I am convinced that these factors are distinct, yet somehow related.

Let's recall what we know with respect to the accusations of Amin's involvement with the American intelligence services.

Vladimir Snegiryov:

To begin, I would like to say that when delving into the subject of modern Afghan history, I came across very different people—PDPA figures, leaders of the Islamic opposition, Soviet politicians, diplomats, intelligence officers, and generals. Most of them (the absolute majority!) never seriously believed that Amin worked as a spy. Many of them, who I regard as figures of great authority, categorically rejected that version. I can even cite their last names.

Valery Samunin:

I can guess whom you have in mind. Some are probably main characters in our book: Deputy Minister of Defense Pavlovsky, Generals Gorelov and Zaplatin, Party Adviser Kharazov, and Foreign Ministry Adviser Safronchuk. Due to their work obligations, they met with Amin on a near-daily basis, and he routinely greeted them with open arms and a Hollywood smile. He was always prepared (at least in his words) to accept their advice and follow their recommendations. It is too bad that Amin didn't have a tail, like a dog. If he had a tail, it would have wagged with joy when he met those advisers. They liked such "affection." Well, not all of them.

Ambassador Puzanov's attitude towards Amin begs special attention. I would describe that attitude as "nothing personal." "I should do my work," Alexander Mikhailovich used to say. "I am being told to inform Amin as the head of the Afghan state about such and such proposals, or such and such considerations of the Soviet side. I should attempt to convince him of this or that. I do it, and then I send a detailed cable about how the task is being fulfilled back to the Center. I should inform Moscow about Amin's opinions on different issues, and his agreements or disagreements with the Soviet side. But I cannot help but also attend to my other diplomatic and protocol-related functions. I have to implement a program of cultural exchange. This was the nature of my work. Whether Amin is or is not a CIA agent, whether or not he betrayed the Afghan revolution, is not my concern. 'Special people' should deal with this. We have plenty of them at the embassy."

Vladimir Snegiryov:

But even the “special people,” in particular many leaders of the First Directorate of the KGB (Foreign Intelligence), in their conversations with me, never said with certainty that U.S. special services had recruited Amin. They allowed for the possibility of it, but no more. Their position, more often than not, was that it made little sense to speculate about whether Amin was a CIA agent. The essence was that, objectively, he damaged the outcome of the April Revolution, along with our interests, by committing his actions. That was what played the decisive role behind making the decision to liquidate him and replace him with the more loyal and predictable Babrak Karmal.

Valery Samunin:

Do you really think that “special people,” particularly senior intelligence leaders, would ever tell the whole truth to a journalist or a historian, and would go so far as to reference the source of the information? This is impossible. Even I, your co-author, have left a lot of information out of this book, as if I’ve “forgotten” it altogether. A lot of it will follow me to the grave.

However, I can assure you that the operatives of the KGB Residency who were working in Kabul then, including Alexei Petrov, who worked with Hafizullah Amin prior to the April Revolution on an assignment from the CPSU’s Central Committee, suspected that Amin was a traitor and a CIA agent. There were many signs of this. Moreover, this person was watched by KGB intelligence long before he emerged as one of the leaders of the PDPA. His biography was scrupulously researched. There was one vague moment in it in particular. Before leaving for his studies in America, Amin published nationalistic and even anti-Soviet articles in Kabul newspapers. Judging by those articles, he had absolutely no

affection for the USSR, at a time when he was already a mature person with well-formed political opinions. For some time in the United States, he successfully led a group of Afghan students. And then, right after the founding congress of the PDPA, he quit his studies without any apparent reason and returned to Afghanistan. Once he returned to Kabul, he quickly became Taraki's trusted right-hand man and the mortal enemy of Babrak Karmal, which would lead to the eventual break-up of the PDPA.

Since that time, information about Amin's collaboration with the American intelligence services began to arrive in Moscow through KGB channels. The flow of such information was steady. It came from Afghan sources, as well as agents from other countries. However, for a long time we treated accusations of Amin's involvement with the CIA as slander, and as a consequence of inter-party disagreements within the PDPA.

Vladimir Snegiryov:

You agree that there was a basis for believing that Amin was being slandered. You and I emphasize many times in the book that the factional strife within the party was accompanied by such mud-slinging and slander from both sides, and it would have been very easy for a party member to accuse another member of treachery. The surviving Khalq leaders say that Babrak Karmal was an informer for President Daoud, which would mean that he was an agent of the secret police. Parchamis, for their part, freely directed accusations of that sort at members from the other faction.

As to your remark regarding the fact that intelligence leaders would never reveal the whole truth, thank God if this is the case. That's why their services are called secret services. However, there remains one significant question here—this is true if one talks

about their sources of information and secrets from their own organizations. But why would our intelligence operatives be so concerned about uncovering CIA secrets?

Valery Samunin:

Allow me to continue. Sometime later, one of the most highly respected Soviet psychologists was asked to compile a political portrait of Amin. The scholar familiarized himself with the materials provided to him and concluded that Amin was not the person he pretended to be. This indicated to Soviet intelligence leaders that Amin was most probably an American agent. Very thorough studies were conducted in the USSR and Bulgaria involving Assadullah Sarwari and his friends, the runaway ministers. Not only foreign intelligence operatives, but also analysts, psychologists, medical researchers, linguists, and experts—dozens of them—participated in that work. They scrupulously collected all the information known to Sarwari and the ministers about the configuration of forces within the PDPA. One theme appeared repeatedly—Amin was an agent of the CIA.

However, I have one more, and perhaps the most compelling, argument. This involves a notebook that was taken from Hafizullah Amin. I leafed through it myself on the day after his murder. Then I was instructed to translate into Russian all of the notes that the notebook contained—names of different people, telephone numbers, and some other things. On one page I read a note written by Amin; it said “CIA,” and was followed by a U.S. telephone number.

Vladimir Snegiryov:

I heard about this story from our intelligence veterans, and it appears to me to be the weakest link in your chain of arguments. Tell me, what kind of agent would write the telephone number of his handler from the special services in a notebook that he carries around in his pocket? If this were the case, then the words and numbers could have been written in by graphology experts from PGU, who, as far as I know, participated in storming the Tajbeg. By the way, appreciating all of the awkwardness of that “action” and the implausibility of the case, the intelligence veterans never cited the episode with the notebook in their memoirs. Read the books by Bogdanov, Kirpichenko, and Shebarshin. All of them are generals who were direct or indirect participants in those events. And they all chose to omit such a prominent detail. Why?

Valery Samunin:

I appreciate your irony. Intelligence agents really should not be recording such things in their notebooks. I agree. I always told this to my own agents. They would regularly agree with me, and right there in front of me would attempt to make some notes, even on a restaurant napkin, that they would put in their pockets, thinking that I would not notice. They just couldn't rely on their memory. It is possible that CIA operatives didn't pay enough attention to teaching Amin the rules of conspiracy.

Vladimir Snegiryov:

Well, I have another serious counterargument. It is known that the CIA never abandons their agents, particularly the valuable ones who have penetrated high echelons of power. If such an agent were to die, then his closest relatives would usually be well taken

care of. What happened to the family of the Afghan leader? Right after the Tajbeg assault, Amin's wife and children were incarcerated. They were kept in prison until 1985. Then for two more years they were kept under house arrest. In 1987, his widow wrote to the Ministry of Education of the DRA requesting assistance so that her children could receive education. Her request was granted. Two daughters and one son left to study in the Soviet Union. Patmana herself remained in Kabul until the mujahadeen's arrival. After that she left for India, lived in Russia for some time, and now resides in Hamburg with one of her daughters. Her only income is a small allowance given to political refugees.

Or, let's address Amin's practical actions, first as a member of the Central Committee of the party, then the second-in-command of the country, and then the head of Afghanistan. If we don't take into consideration his distinctly "Afghan" outbursts, such as manifestations of Pashtun nationalism, Eastern perfidy, and cruelty, Amin acted as a loyal friend of the Soviet Union and a professional revolutionary. Even his enemies emphasized his vital role in creating a military organization within the Khalq faction and his decisiveness during the days of the April coup d'etat. Very few doubted his sincerity when he said that he was "more Soviet than many Soviet citizens." It's a different story that his "Sovietism" was a bit too leftist, that he was getting ahead of himself, and that he worshipped Stalin.

And if he worked for Americans, why would he time and again invite Soviet troops for his own protection, to deter rebel attacks, and to defend the sovereignty of Afghanistan? One can certainly suppose that it was part of a complex strategy with the goal of dragging us into an exhausting war on another state's territory. But to me, such an explanation seems a bit too unrealistic. Certainly, the Soviet presence under Amin continued to grow, while severe limitations were imposed on the Americans.

Valery Samunin:

First, I would never make a categorical statement that the “CIA never abandons its agents.” Second, I wouldn’t use such definitions in regards to Amin as the “loyal friend of the Soviet Union” and a “professional revolutionary.” In order to consider oneself a friend, one needs to at least know who his friend is. Amin knew very little about the Soviet Union. He mainly knew it from sensational publications in the American media and from reprints of those publications in Afghanistan. This is why he thought that the Soviet leadership—this was in the late seventies—was using Stalinist principles and methods. That is why he attempted to portray himself as a “Stalinist.”

He certainly does not deserve the definition of a “professional revolutionary.” In the late 1960s I lived and worked in Afghanistan, and communicated closely and intensely with highly respected Afghan intellectuals. I cannot remember a single person who even once mentioned Amin’s name among the Afghan revolutionaries. Taraki, Layeq, Bareq Shafi’i, Khyber, Karmal, Pandzhsheri, Mahmoudi, Gubar, Tahir Badakhshi, were all noted. But nobody knew one thing about Amin then. That person somehow unnoticeably snuck into the party, helped by his strange, if not mysterious, relationship with Taraki. Once Amin gained strength, he immediately directed his crushing “revolutionary” outrage not against the “forces of reaction and imperialism,” but against Parchamis.

Now, as to his endless requests to bring Soviet troops into Afghanistan. It is known that the Americans, as early as May 1978, were considering the possibility of full “entrapment” of the USSR in Afghanistan as an opportunity to deliver a blow to the international prestige of the Soviet Union and to force it to suffer catastrophic losses.

Naturally, Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan could not seriously affect the strategic balance in the world, or seriously damage U.S. interests. However, it could result in extremely unfavorable consequences for our country. That's exactly what happened. That's why Amin constantly "invited" our troops into the DRA.

Vladimir Snegiryov:

Then here is my last argument for you. The version of the double game that the Afghan leader was playing began to develop actively when the "gang of four" appeared on the stage, correct? It was when the prominent Khalqis—Sarwari, Gulabzoi, Watanjar, and Mazdouryar—contacted KGB operatives in Kabul. Their concerns, in particular the statement about Amin's alleged involvement with U.S. intelligence, became the basis for the cables that deeply unnerved Moscow. At that time, the opposition figures blamed the dictator for everything in order to save their own skins, and out of concern that his leftist politics would result in the defeat of the revolution. But three decades have passed since then. Watanjar and Mazdouryar are no longer with us. Sarwari is imprisoned for life in Kabul. He was not forgiven for his role in the mass acts of repression. Gulabzoi, having lived abroad during the time of troubles, returned to Kabul and is still active on Afghanistan's political scene. When he is asked if he considers Hafizullah Amin to have been a CIA agent, this veteran of political battles inevitably replies, "I never thought so."

Valery Samunin:

Yes, Gulabzoi changed considerably since those times. This, I know. But the version of the double game of Hafizullah Amin first appeared and then developed well before the

emergence of the “gang of four.” This I have already mentioned. It’s just that the information from the disgraced Khalqis seems to have appeared at the right time.

Now, I want to say something important. The issue of whether Amin was a CIA agent is akin to the question, “Do you believe in flying saucers?” One might say, “No, I don’t believe in them”; another might say, “Yes, I believe in them”; and a third might say, “Yes, I met the aliens, and I flew with them to their planet.” For some it is an issue of faith, for others, an issue of knowledge.

The destruction of the regime of Hafizullah Amin (and Amin himself) didn’t happen because someone among the Soviet leadership suspected him of having ties with the CIA. In politics, particularly in high politics, such a “small thing” as working for a foreign intelligence service is not taken into consideration very often. There are many examples confirming this in the history of our country, as well as the history of other states. The Soviet leadership, beginning on July 17, 1973, when Mohammad Daoud came to power in Afghanistan, in accordance with the concept that had been developed by our political theoreticians and specialists of the Orient, considered that only some kind of “united front of progressive and patriotic forces” could overcome the advances of pro-imperialistic reaction in such a backward, medieval country. In connection with that concept, the Soviet leaders constantly attempted to impose on Daoud a union with the PDPA, and with some fake public organizations consisting of old intelligentsia, human rights activists, progressive clerics, and others. We wrote in great detail about Daoud’s reaction to this in our book.

After the April Revolution, Moscow continued singing the same tune: “Comrades and revolutionaries: do create a ‘front of progressive and patriotic forces’ as soon as possible.”

However, not only did Taraki not create such a front, but at Amin's initiative, he destroyed his former friends and allies, the Parchamis. Thousands of innocent people, many of whom could have supported progressive changes in Afghanistan, were eliminated.

After Amin removed and killed Taraki, the internal political situation in Afghanistan did not improve at all.

Taraki's death and the salvation of the "gang of four" changed the balance of forces in Afghanistan radically and determined the further development of Soviet-Afghan relations. From the point of view of the Kremlin leaders, a real possibility for the creation of a "front of progressive and patriotic forces," based on the union of allies of Karmal and the late Taraki, finally appeared realistic. Certain work was done in that regard. Sarwari, Watanjar, and Gulabzoi formally made peace with Karmal. The concept of the unified "front of national and patriotic forces" was adopted by the future Afghan leaders. However, Hafizullah Amin and his people never fit into that model of "national unity." Amin would never, under any circumstances, collaborate with the very same people whom he did his best to destroy. He wouldn't do it even for the sake of salvaging the April Revolution. And those people, in turn, would never forgive him for the past.

The first phase of the April Revolution in Afghanistan was totally compromised, and that was why they needed to either give up the revolutionary reforms or enter the second phase.

Vladimir Snegiryov:

Well, what is true is that neither the Soviet nor the Afghan leaders should be judged from the position of today. There was a battle of two worldwide systems. Humanity was on

the brink of nuclear catastrophe and nobody wanted to make a compromise during that struggle. It turned out that Amin found himself between two fires. He became the sacrifice of the great confrontation.

In our book, we have only slightly lifted the curtain that hides the mysteries of the “first phase” of the April Revolution. There are still many blind spots in its history, from the perspective of both the Afghans and the Soviets. So it is too premature to conclude this conversation.

I am also convinced that now, when Afghanistan has become the subject of the hottest breaking news again as Americans and their allies are trapped there, the lessons of recent history should be studied particularly thoroughly, and the correct conclusions should be made based on those lessons.

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Babushkin, A. N. — Major general, served in the Information Analysis Department of the KGB First Chief Directorate in the 1970s, later was the head of the KGB Secretariat.

Basov, V. V. — A prominent Soviet expert on Afghanistan.

Bakhturin, S. G. — KGB colonel, served as a security officer at the Soviet embassy in Kabul

from 1977-1983.

Biryukov, L. I. — KGB colonel, served as a KGB agent in Kabul from 1978-1983.

Bogdanov, L. P. — KGB major general, directed a KGB Representative Office in Kabul from 1978-1980.

Chuchukin, V. A. — Major general, was the first deputy of the KGB representative in Kabul from 1979-1983.

Gavrilin, V. T. — KGB colonel, served as a KGB resident in Kabul in the 1970s.

Golovatov, M. V. — In 1979, was a member of the antiterrorist group “A,” later headed the “A” subdivision of the Seventh Directorate of the KGB.

Golubev, A. T. — KGB lieutenant general, in 1979 participated in the “Storm-333” campaign.

Gorelov, L. N. — Lieutenant general, was the chief military adviser in Afghanistan from 1975-1979.

Gulabzoi, S. M. — An active participant of the April Revolution, later was a minister in Taraki’s, Karmal’s, and Najibullah’s governments, served as the ambassador of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan in the USSR from 1987-1990.

Habibi, V. — Director of Kabul Central Hospital at the end of the 1980s.

Jawzjany, Sh. — A prominent member of the People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan, served as a prosecutor-general in Afghanistan from 1978-1979, was a member of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the PDPA, in 1989 was the first deputy of the Revolutionary Tribunal chairman.

Ibragimov, A. T. — Operative of the KGB Residency in Kabul from 1979 to 1982.

Kalugin, O. D. — KGB major general

Karmal, Babrak — One of the founders of the People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan, was the general secretary of the People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan from 1979-1986, was the chairman of the Revolutionary Council.

Karmal, Kava — B. Karmal’s son.

Keshtmand, S. A. — Member of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the PDPA, in 1978 was a minister of planning in the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan, in 1981 became the head of the government of the DRA.

Kharazov, V. I. — In 1978, was the first party adviser in the Central Committee of the

Democratic Republic of Afghanistan.

Kozin, V. P. — Served at the Soviet embassy in Kabul from 1975-1978, later was a postgraduate student at the Diplomatic Academy, translated from Pashto during Taraki's visits to Moscow.

Kryuchkov, V. A. — In 1979, was the head of the First Directorate, later was the chairman of the KGB.

Kuznetsov, A. M. — Served as a military interpreter for a group of advisers in Kabul from 1978-1979.

Kutepov, Yu. I. — An officer at the KGB Ninth Directorate, was responsible for the security of the first figures in Kabul from 1978-1979.

Leonov, N. S. — KGB lieutenant general, in 1979 was the head of the Information Analysis Department of the KGB First Directorate.

Lozovoi, A. V. — Grandson of B. S. Ivanov, KGB lieutenant general.

Massoud, A. S. — Mujahadeen leader from 1977-1992, later was defense minister of Afghanistan.

Misak, A. K. — A prominent member of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan, was the finance minister in the DRA from 1978-1979, was the mayor of Kabul from 1989-1990.

Mishin, Yu. G. — Secretary at the Soviet embassy in Kabul, later served as a staff member at the Foreign Department of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party.

Osadchiy, S. V. — Extraordinary and plenipotentiary ambassador of the USSR, son of V. G. Osadchiy, who was a KGB resident in Kabul.

Polyakov, G. A. — Served as a staff member at the Foreign Department of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party from 1977-1991.

Ponomyrov, B. N. — Politburo of CPSU candidate, head of the Foreign Department of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party.

Puzanov, A. M. — The Soviet ambassador in Afghanistan from 1972-1979.

Qadir, A. — In 1978, one of the main initiators and leaders of the April Revolution, later was the defense minister of the Democratic Republic of the Afghanistan.

Rurikov, D. B. — Served as a second secretary at the Soviet embassy in Kabul from 1978-1979, later was an assistant to the president of the Russian Federation, Yeltsin, and an extraordinary and plenipotentiary ambassador of the Russian Federation.

Shah Wali — A prominent member of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan, in 1979 was the minister of foreign affairs in Afghanistan, in 1989 was a minister with no charge.

Shebarshin, L. V. — KGB lieutenant general, was the leader of the KGB First Chief Directorate from 1988-1991.

Solomatin, B. A. — KGB major general, deputy director at the KGB First Chief Directorate.

Tabeyev, F. A. — Soviet ambassador in Afghanistan from 1979-1986.

Taraki, Nurbibi — The widow of N. M. Taraki, who was the general secretary of the Central Committee of the PDPA.

Zamyatin, L. M. — The head of the International Information Department at the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union from 1978-1979.

Zaplatin, V. P. — Major general, was an adviser at the Political Headquarters of the Armed Forces of Afghanistan from 1978-1979.