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Najibullah Assessment of the 'Ahmad Shah Problem'

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Summary:

Najibullah assesses the threat posed by opposition leader Ahmad Shah Masoud.

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Switching to more important and urgent problems, I would like to especially stress the following.[1] At the present time no one has any doubt that the priority area should be the implementation of peaceful, political measures in the name of achieving a settlement. But at the same time it appears evident that in conditions of continuing interference in the affairs of Afghanistan by Pakistan, the US, and other countries and the opposition's rejection of a cease-fire, it is also impossible to forget military means. As it appears that right now it is exceptionally important as before to launch powerful missile, artillery, and air strikes on the bases, storehouses, and gatherings of enemy personnel in order to preempt his attempts to unleash a large-scale offensive after the withdrawal of Soviet troops.

In this context the issue of fighting the group of Ahmad Shah Masoud, who belongs to the Islamic Society of Afghanistan, holds special importance. Considering that his forces are capable of cutting the strategic Hairaton-Kabul highway in the area south of Salang right after the withdrawal of [Soviet] troops, blockading Kabul, and thereby creating a catastrophic situation for the capital, Ahmad Shah should be viewed as the main enemy of the government at the present stage.

The problem of Ahmad Shah has been around a long time but, in spite of measures taken, it is a very critical one, as before. In our view it is unwarranted to delay its resolution.

[...] For the last four years practically no large operations have been conducted against him with the exception of small individual strikes. As a result he has managed to create a powerful grouping totaling about 11,000 men and 2,500 [of them] right in the Panjshir. It needs to be recognized that Ahmad Shah is also skillfully using the advantages arising as a result of our passivity.

At the present time a joint operation of Soviet and Afghan forces against Ahmad Shah has been planned, but it will be of a local nature, essentially limited to a cleaning out of adjoining road sectors and the replacement of Soviet posts with Afghan ones. We say that such an operation cannot inflict notable damage on the enemy and change the fundamental nature of the situation [...].

[1] Assessment provided by Najibullah during Shevardnadze's visit in January 1989. See "Memorandum of Conversation between Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze and Najibullah and other Afghan Leaders on 13-14 January 1989,"