

January 14, 1989
**Memorandum of Conversation between Soviet
Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze and
Najibullah and other Afghan Leaders on 13-14
January 1989 (Excerpt)**

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Summary:

Shevardnadze, Najibullah and others discuss the possibility of Soviet forces providing security for vital cargo deliveries along the Hairaton-Kabul highway, which passes through territory controlled by Ahmad Shah Masoud's forces.

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[President of the Republic of Afghanistan (RA)] Najibullah. An Afghan brigade of 900 men and an MGB regiment are hardly capable of holding out against the rebels in Ahmad Shah's zone of influence in a proper manner. In this regard I request that the Soviet leadership examine the issue of the possibility of placing Soviet military units in the Salang area on a temporary basis; their functions would consist only of guarding the road.

The survival of the government itself depends on ensuring deliveries of cargo via the Hayraton-Kabul highway. The opposition cannot seize Kabul by military means but it will gamble on an economic blockade, fomenting discontent among the population and instigating it to act against the government. Therefore it is extremely important right now to create a sufficient reserve of food, fuel, and other essential goods in Kabul. However it will be possible to ensure the organization of shipments by ground or air only with the direct assistance of the Soviet side.

In this context I would like again to request the creation of an "air bridge" from Soviet territory to Kabul.

We think it desirable for a certain number of aviation resources [aviasredstva] to be at Soviet airfields in direct proximity to the Afghan border on continuous duty which could act quickly against the rebels in case a threatening situation arises in one or another area of the country.

The problem of creating the necessary reserves in Kandahar has remain unresolved until now. It seems that the situation right now permits [us] to try to send a column with freight to that city. The Afghan side can provide part of the subunits of the 4th AK and 2nd AK totaling 2,000 men. However, without the participation of Soviet troops it is impossible to escort the column.

Eh. A. Shevardnadze. As far as I know, the provision of considerable military forces is required to escort a column. A danger of armed conflict with the enemy is not precluded but at the present stage [we] would not want to suffer unnecessary losses.

On the preliminary level we would say that the idea of creating an "air bridge" to Kabul is completely doable.

The issue of carrying out air strikes from the Soviet Union has a very delicate nature. We understand that it will be difficult for you to do without the support of Soviet aircraft but it is one thing to launch strikes when Soviet troops are present and other after their withdrawal...Such measures could unavoidable provoke countermeasures from the US and Pakistan and an unfavorable international reaction.

We also consider it necessary to urgently study the issue of providing security for the Hairaton-Kabul highway, It is clear that without the use of the road it would be practically impossible to solve the problem of supplying the capital...(Kabul, 13.1.1989)...

[RA Prime Minister] M. H. Sharq. Earlier we thought that all the damage which our motherland had suffered was connected with the war; however now we are convinced that the current administrative system has done us no less harm...We have a completely unrealistic budget which is based not so much on domestic sources of income but on free aid from the Soviet Union...You are giving us across-the-board aid but we have not justified your trust. The people ask why this happens...Our armed forces cannot provide security for freight shipments. At the transshipment bases bordering the USSR there is a three-month reserve of food for Kabul but we cannot deliver the food to the capital.

Eh. A. Shevardnadze. Understand, it is not so simple for us to give aid to Afghanistan. The butter, sugar, and flour which we are delivering to you is taken from the Soviet people but it doesn't reach those for whom it is intended. Therefore providing security for the Hayraton-Kabul road and the possibility of organizing an air bridge to supply the capital get top priority. (Kabul, 14.1.1989)...

[RA Minister of State Security] G. F. Yakubi. As long as Ahmad Shah Masoud lives the Kabul-Hayraton route will be closed and consequently the problem of delivering freight and special equipment not only to the capital but to other regions of the country will remain acute. Whether or not this regime stands or falls depends on the solution of this problem...

Eh. A. Shevardnadze. Will there be a coup, if we admit such a possibility, supported by the population of the capital if the city is supplied with everything necessary, in particular kerosene, bread, etc.?

G. F. Yakubi. I think they will not support one since the residents of Kabul are confident that in case of a coup G. Hekmatyar, who does not enjoy popularity in various social strata in the capital, will come to power...(14.1.1989, Kabul).

[RA Minister of Defense] Sh[ahnawaz] N. Tanay. The rebels are carrying out active operations directed at disrupting the Geneva Accords and demonstrating their power in the hope of overthrowing people's power. In my opinion, the military and political situation in the country is in a crisis and this crisis will grow. (14 January 1989, Kabul).

[RA Minister of Foreign Affairs] A[bdul] Wakil. It is necessary for the Soviet side, considering the provisions of the Geneva Accords, to continue to help our armed forces by launching rocket, bombing, and strafing attacks, especially after 15 February.[1] [...] It is vitally important for us to maintain control of the airfields at Bagram and Kandahar and also the port of Hairaton. After the conclusion of the Soviet troop withdrawal Ahmad Shah Masoud will doubtless try to close the road through the Salang [Tunnel pass] [...]

[1] The deadline for the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan.