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KGB's Afghan Foundling Wants to Die in Prison

Pavel Simonov, Ulugbek Djuraev



Emblem of the KGB

Afghanistan will soon become the site of a trial of the apprentice of the former Russian Intelligence resident in Indonesia and Iran. One of the chiefs of the Afghan pro-Soviet regime's (1978-92) secret services, Asadullah Sarwary, is due to face trial on a charge of crimes against humanity. This was announced yesterday by the Afghan websites in Europe. Sarwary was one of the main architects of the "red terror" that cost the lives of tens of thousands of people.

Asadullah Sarwary was born in 1943, according to Soviet sources. The active stage in his career (1967-81) was inseparably connected to Moscow. Sarwary was one of the first officers of the Afghan army to obtain their military training as a combat pilot in the Soviet Union. Since 1967, he had been participating in the activity of the Khalq faction of the illegal Marxist People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (**PDPA**). Sarwary was a dedicated

supporter of Khalq's leader, **Noor Taraki**.

In July 1973, Sarwary, together with other leftist officers was participating in the overthrow of the last Afghan Monarch, Zahir Shah. As a result, the king's cousin and the former Prime Minister, Muhammad Daoud came into power. In April 1978, the same officers deprived Daoud of power and killed him.

The Arbiter

After the above mentioned overthrow, Sarwary headed the National Security Department. He had been learning the skills of intelligence work and in the counterintelligence sphere from a high-ranking KGB officer, Leonid Bogdanov, who was dispatched to Afghanistan from Moscow especially for this mission (before that he was the resident of the Soviet foreign intelligence in Indonesia and Iran).

By the end of the summer of 1979, Sarwary together with a number of other Khalq's leaders, turned to an open confrontation as if defending Taraki with the Prime Minister of the new regime, **Hafizullah Amin**.



Noor Taraki

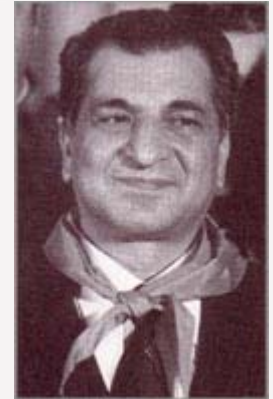
as if defending Taraki. Following Amin's initiative, Taraki was liquidated in October of the same year. According to the evidence of the KGB's foreign intelligence director at that time, Vladimir Kryuchkov: "...the Soviet secret servicemen managed to save Sarwary and another Afghan from Amin's security service at the last moment. Following the Center's instructions, the servicemen of our Kabul station put them into a car, and after several intentional rounds in the streets in order to be seen, initiated their transportation out of the city. But in reality the Afghans were transported to our safe secret address, located right under the very nose of the American secret service, almost in the very center of Kabul," (Lichnoye Delo (Personal Case) book, 2003).

Soon after that, Sarwary and his supporters were secretly transported to Moscow. In December 1979, they returned to Kabul together with an elite KGB unit, and took part in the liquidation of Amin, which was organized by the Soviet secret services. The Kremlin appointed the obedient **Babrak Karmal** as the Head of the pro-Soviet regime in Kabul.



Hafizullah Amin

Under the new leadership, Sarwary received the mission of reorganizing the National Security Department that he previously headed. Many officers who were appointed by the former ruler and his supporters, were fired (many of them were later executed or put in jail for years). At the same time, with the help of the KGB representatives, Sarwary carried out structural changes in his department. Some of the units were abolished; some new ones were created. The secret service was renamed as the Ministry of State Security. However, after carrying out these reforms, Sarwary did not remain long at his post. By 1980, as a result of rivalry between different groupings and clans in the administration of the ruling party, he was replaced. His place was taken by the old Karmal's comrade, a high-ranking functionary of



Babrak Karmal

Parcham faction, **Muhammad Najibullah** (he will later become the last president of the pro-Soviet regime).



Muhammad Najibullah

Power Challenger

Sarwari's discharge from office was accompanied by a charge of misuse of powers and discrediting the regime by carrying out mass repressions. Sarwary was once again saved by the KGB. On Moscow's demand he was only sent into an "honorary exile" as the Ambassador of Afghanistan in Mongolia. Until the end of Babrak Karmal's rule, Sarwary stepped aside from active participation in Afghan internal affairs.

In spring 1986, Asadullah Sarwary got his last chance to come back into politics. By then, Moscow was already totally disappointed with its creature, the alcoholic Babrak Karmal. The fight for power became strained in the administration of the Kabul regime. The rival factions, (Khalq and Parcham), the ethnic groupings, and different clans were each pushing their candidate for the position of the "head of state". Support from the influential powers in Moscow was a passport to success. The power challengers fiercely strived to get the favor of the mighty Soviet secret services: the well-known KGB, and the military intelligence GRU. The secret services themselves were competing with each other over influence in Afghanistan, and over the Kremlin's policy towards this country.

Against this background, Asadullah Sarwary found himself in the epicenter of the collision of interests of many influential forces in the Soviet and Afghan capitals. This fact was clearly evidenced by a unique document that was published in 1995 by the retired Russian Major General, Alexander Liakhovsky. At the end of the 1980s, he was the closest aide to the Commander of the Soviet troops in Afghanistan, and is currently thought to be one of the best specialists on the subject of the Soviet intervention in this country. In his major treatise – *Tragedia i doblest Afgana* (Afghan's Tragedy, and Valor) – Liakhovsky releases the secret report of the Kabul GRU station, put together in April 1986. It was mentioned in this document that: "...Najib (*Muhammad Najibullah*) and Sarwary are qualified as possible successors to Babrak Karmal... The attitude toward the possibility of Najib's becoming General Secretary of the Central Committee of the PDPA (at that period – the highest position in the Afghan leadership) is most contradictory, ambiguous, being rather negative than positive... Against Najib, a number of comrades (party functionaries of the ruling regime) quite highly evaluate the personal qualities of Sarwary. They suppose that he will be able to guarantee the party's unity (the Russian could in no way intercede with the feuding factions, Khalq and Parcham), as he had always fought factionalism; he is well known both among the Pashtuns, and the national minorities; he is authoritative among the army servicemen. He has a steady hand. Sarwary is thought to be a personality that combines the qualities of the party and the military man, who will be able to rapidly grasp the situation, to lead the fight against counterrevolution (the popular resistance to the pro-Soviet regime), and to obtain stabilization in the country. Among his flaws they mention the tortures that were permitted towards the detainees during his period in the Ministry of State Security, which is still not forgotten..."

In the end, the victory was that of the KGB, which played a much more important role in the Kremlin's Afghan policy than the GRU. In May 1986, the former chief of the secret service, Muhammad Najibullah, became the new head of the Kabul regime, of whom the Chief of the KGB foreign intelligence in that period, Vladimir Kryuchkov, would later write the following: "Young, energetic, educated, precocious man of the world." (*Lichnoye Delo*). Following Oriental traditions, the new ruler did all he could to neutralize his potential adversary. That was the end of Sarwari's political career.

Prisoner

During the last years of the pro-Soviet regime, Asadullah Sarwary found himself practically barred from state and party activity. In April 1992, after Najibullah's overthrow, his former rival was arrested by the Jamaat-e Islami security servicemen. While the armed groupings of this party were under the command of the legendary Ahmad Shah Massoud, its security service was headed by Muhammad Fahim (the latter became the Afghan Minister of Defense ten years later). According to the data of the Russian intelligence station, which continued its work in Kabul under the aegis of the embassy, in May 1992, Fahim was personally present during several of Sarwari's interrogations. However, as he was estranged from the command of the secret service twelve years prior to it, Sarwary was not of any special value for Jamaat-e Islami. It was rather the feeling of hatred towards him that motivated the supporters of Ahmad Shah Massoud, as Sarwary was responsible for massacring many of their relatives and friends. That is why quite numerous resistance

participants advocated Sarwari's quick execution. However, the leaders of Jamaat-e-Islami planned to hold an exhibit trial of the criminals of the pro-Soviet regime, in parallel issuing a demand from Moscow to compensate the Afghan people for their sacrifices and losses. For that reason Sarwary was temporarily put into the famous Kabul prison, Pul-i-Charkhi, where many of his victims had previously perished. Yet, his trial and that of his accomplices was not destined to happen. The Mujaheddin groups were always confronting each other, not having time not only for the functionaries of the overturned regime, but for the

minimal arrangements in the country. Gradually the new rulers of Afghanistan had forgotten Sarwary. In late September 1996, just before the very intrusion of the Talibs' advance force into Kabul, he and some other high-ranking prisoners were speedily evacuated to the North, into the Panjsheri Valley – the patrimony of Ahmad Shakh.

In the second half of the 1990s, gossip was coming and going about Sarwari's alleged escape to Russia. On several occasions the Talibs even demanded his surrender from Moscow. Mullah Abbas, then the Mayor of Kandahar, said that the former head of the secret service in the pro-Soviet regime was supposed to be sentenced on the charge of "deeds done by order of the Kremlin". However, this also did not happen, and not for the reason of Sarwari's alleged hiding in Moscow. He spent all the time since the moment of his Kabul seizure by the Talibs, and until their departure, in a small prison located in Dahab village, almost in the very core of the Panjsheri Valley. Ahmad Shah's men practically saved their captive from certain death. Had he fallen into the hands of the Talibs, Sarwary would have followed the doom of his "more successful" rival, Nagibullah, who was monstrously torn to pieces in September 1996. In April 2002, Sarwary was returned to Kabul prison.

A quarter century past the time when he was frightening his compatriots, the decrepit and gray-bearded old man is once again waiting for his fate to be decided. He is not particularly interested in how this trial is going to end. His only wish is to spend the rest of his life in the horrible Pul-i-Charkhi, as he had long ago forgotten how to live at liberty.

