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Title: "The Airport 1990"

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Summary

Mustafa Hamid details the Battle of Torghar, and analyzes the importance of Torghar for the fight to take Khost as well as the military development of the mujahidin during the campaign. He also analyzes the failed March 1990 coup. This document is a prequel to **AFGP-2002-600092**.

Key Themes

Narrative of the Battle of Torghar

Mustafa Hamid narrates in great detail the process by which the mujahidin took over Torghar mountain in February 1990, and acquired a strategic advantage over Communist forces in the siege of Khost.

As a journalist, at the end of 1989, Hamid decides to work with Jalaladin Haqani to produce a jihadi magazine, *Manba'a al-Jihad*. Some parts of the document are essays from the magazine, and as such adopt a journalistic tone. While touring the region with Abu al-Hareth (with Hajji Farid serving as his interpreter, and Hajji Ibrahim as his assistant), Mustafa Hamid first gets the idea to close the Khost airport, which he does successfully later in the year. During this tour he also experiences hearing bombing from the Communists.

Before his trip to Torghar, Hamid sends his wife and children to Islamabad, after they are subject to harassment in Peshawar. He also meets with Jalaladin Haqani in January 1990. Haqani is the mujahidin leader in charge of attacking Mount Torghar, but up until that time, repeated waves of Mujahidin attacks have been unsuccessful in taking it, including a recent attack by Ismail Kheil that is coordinated very poorly. Hamid estimates that, with Torghar conquered, 70% of the work for taking over Khost will be accomplished.

After the failed attacks, Haqani formulates a new plan. During the campaign, missiles narrowly miss Haqani several times, leading Hamid to be suspicious of how the enemy knows where he is. He guesses that the USSR is still involved via air attacks. An attack by Hakam Khan and Hanif Shah fails again due to poor coordination and disagreement about the use of tanks. Hamid gets an idea to poison the water supply of Khost to sicken enough people to overwhelm the city's hospitals, and he requests help from Abu-Hafs, but it does not seem to go anywhere.

At one point, a British journalist named Tim, embeds himself with Haqani, and Hamid serves as his host. He notes Tim's complete neutrality and lack of emotion, but also detests him. Several months after the battles, Hamid tells Tim that the mujahidin have not yet taken Khost because of Pakistani and US interference.

The mujahidin finally attack Torghar successfully on 16 February 1990. The attack from the south side is the most logical from the enemy's point of view, and although the southern thrust is not the mujahidin's main attack, the enemy shifts most of their forces to confront them there. This leaves the way open for a renewed attack on the western slope, as well as on the eastern slope, where the mujahidin have painstakingly worked their way through a mine field, taking the enemy by surprise. Hamid notes that the mujahidin suffer only one dead in the final attack, leading him to proclaim that they have God's support. In

the aftermath, children come up to greet the victorious mujahidin, the mujahidin assault and take Little Torghar to clear the mountain completely of enemy forces, and Haqani builds a paved road to the summit to cement the mujahidin's control of Torghar. After interrogating some captives, the mujahidin confirm that the enemy forces are fractious, and morale is low, but the Communists are determined to fight to the end.

The US and Pakistan versus the mujahidin and al-Qa`ida

Hamid is suspicious of Pakistan's intentions for the mujahidin, and blames the Pakistani intelligence service for the catastrophic loss at Jalalabad. He describes how General Imam of the Pakistani intelligence service is present at the Battle of Torghar, up to no good, and how he interferes with Haqani's plans. Hamid also assesses that the goal of the US is ultimately to encourage a negotiated settlement between Islamists and Communists, so it works to prevent a complete victory by the mujahidin, and to keep Najibullah in power. Any mujahidin attacks that fail give encouragement to the US and the USSR, especially as the Afghans are (in Hamid's view) responsible for the fall of the USSR. Hamid also blames his anti-US views for being the reason his articles in al-Itihad were not published.

The parties in Peshawar are often at odds with Haqani, and accused him of issuing a magazine as a step to forming a political party, played other 'dirty games,' and were probably happy that Abdallah Azzam was assassinated. At one point, Hamid describes meeting Abu-Hafs, who is under pressure from the Pakistani government, and suggests getting a British or European attorney to represent him, since Pakistan respects the UK.

Analysis of the importance of the Battle of Torghar

Hamid describes these two articles as the first writing on the battles for Khost. One of the reasons for success is the appearance of Jalaladin Haqani, who is a rare combination of religiosity and competence. The Battle of Torghar was a special siege within the more general siege of Khost. Attacks against Torghar failed for years, and the enemy was well dug in. The mujahidin adopted an indirect approach, where they worked their way closer to the mountain, and gradually cut it off. They then attacked on the seemingly impossible east side, and convinced the enemy that the southern thrust was the main attack. In Hamid's opinion, the battle of Torghar also showed that tanks, which provided mobile artillery, could be used to great effect in mountainous terrain. In the final analysis, the mujahidin enjoyed better morale and command ability than the enemy, but the enemy enjoyed a higher quality and quantity of equipment. Following the capture of Torghar, the mujahidin were able to cut off the airport and all smuggling routes, thus starving Khost. After Torghar fell, the enemy knew Khost was lost.

The military development of the Mujahidin action in Khost

Hamid goes over six features of the changes the mujahidin adopted in the battle for Khost that ultimately resulted in their victory. First, while the Paktia tribes in particular were enthusiastic and skillful fighters, the mujahidin needed to transform themselves into a conventional fighting force to beat the Communists. They accomplished this by instituting a shura (advisory) council that amassed authority and served as a forum for the various tribes to discuss strategy and tactics. The shura council was successful in stopping smuggling by the tribes themselves, but was less useful for coordinating direct military action, where it was vulnerable to delays. Second, the government broadcast constant propaganda, but mujahidin morale was still good. The mujahidin were able to boost morale by avoiding human losses in battles. In addition, the long siege lowered the government's morale, as did the mujahidin's own loudspeaker propagandists. Government defectors received good treatment, which increased defections. Finally, the mujahidin immediately used any weapons or ammunition they captured, decreasing the black market value of the spoils. Third, Khost's location was good for the mujahidin – supply lines from Pakistan were short, and the mountains gave the

fighters natural defenses against air attacks. The mujahidin were also able to use local fighters who knew the terrain, remembered effective tactics against the British, and, because they were more effective in small numbers, were able to concentrate their forces and overwhelm the enemy in specific locations. Fourth, the mujahidin greatly increased their mobility was the adoption of motorized vehicles that moved along paved roads. Fifth, the mujahidin were able to concentrate their tanks for attacks against single targets, and as a result, tanks were decisive in the battles of Nadir-Shah-Cout, Dwamindo, Daraji, and Torghar. Sixth, the mujahidin used wireless communications systems to coordinate well.

Analysis of failed coup of March 1990

In the last section, Hamid analyzes the failed coup against Afghan leader Najibullah on 6 March 1990, which he sees as emblematic of larger problems. The USSR wanted to continue Communism in Afghanistan, but failed, and both the US and Saudi Arabia encouraged the mujahidin, then killed them. For instance, Saudi Arabia sent provocateurs to stir up conflicts within the mujahidin. Finally, the Afghans themselves killed Arabs who were drawn into their tribal battles. The secularists of the Middle East (including Egypt and Turkey's governments) are traitors, as are some mujahidin who are working in concert with the US and Russia. Hamid sees the war as one between Islam and infidels – politics has no place in it.

In the face of the coup attempt, Najibullah came down hard, although it is apparent that the USSR sold him out long ago. On the positive side, the Communist army was cleansed due to the coup, which is good for the mujahidin. On the negative side, the coup revealed the disunity of the Peshawar parties, and weakened jihad, especially when some Afghan claimed to be Muslim. The ongoing stagnation of the mujahidin is resulting in lost opportunities.