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Title: "A Mother's Deep Sorrow"/"The Airport Project"

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Synopsis

Mustafa Hamid keeps a detailed day-by-day account of the Airport Project, which aims to shut down the Khost airfield for a month through continuous rocket attacks, thus convincing the enemy to stop using the airfield.

Key Themes

A Mother's Deep Sorrow

The first section is a description of the death of Isma'il, the brother of Hakani, a warlord along the Aghanistan-Pakistan border, at the hands of an incompetent doctor in Miranshah. His mother, whom Mustafa refers to as the Great Mother, dies soon after. Although she does not fight, Mustafa waxes at length on how she provides emotional support and hope on the 'internal front', which is just as important as the battlefield. The Great Mother dies soon after Isma'il, lamenting that she will not live to see the results of jihad in Afghanistan. For Mustafa, the past year has been a time of both sorrow and victory.

The Airport Project

Most of the rest of the document is dedicated to a highly detailed first-person account of what is referred to as the Airport Project. This is an operation, run by Mustafa that aims to deny the use of the airfield at Khost to the enemy (the Communists) for long enough that they cease to use it as a means of reinforcing their troops in Khost. The mujahidin launch approximately 1200 rockets over the course of one month, which is enough to convince the enemy to stop using the airfield.

The account begins on August 3, 1990, with a confirmation that Iraq has invaded Kuwait. The next day, Mustafa, a leader of Camp Abu Al-'Abbas, begins preparations for the operation. The most essential material is ammunition, and much of the account describes Mustafa's attempts to find enough rockets to carry out the plan. Camp Abu Al-'Abbas is a series of caves dug into a mountainside. The other cooperating jihadist centers appear to be close by, or at least within several hours drive of each other inside Afghanistan. In preparation for the operation, Mustafa and others select sites for a number of different launchers, and have small camps built in those locations.

There appear to be five launchers in operation at any given time, and operations for the most part take place at night, when the enemy is attempting to resupply Khost under cover of darkness. The launchers are sited such that each one covers a different part of the airfield. The mujahidin stationed on the observation points on top of the mountain sight planes landing or taking off. Each launcher team then communicates with the other teams by radio (which often fail, or are jammed by the enemy), and coordinates firing (continuously if possible). The teams aim to prevent airplanes from taking off or landing, or barring that, to destroy the planes on the ground and/or prevent them from unloading their cargo. The effectiveness of each team is occasionally harmed because some of the mujahidin are taking vacations to Miranshah at any given time.

The enemy adopts a two-pronged strategy in response to the mujahidin attacks. First, it continuously adapts its tactics for landing and unloading planes, for example by using helicopters to escort transport

planes so as to confuse the mujahidin. Second, it regularly targets the mujahidin launcher teams with air strikes, and later with cluster bombs, although it is clear the enemy does not know exactly where the teams are. The mujahidin suffer almost no casualties from the attacks.

Lack of ammunition and transportation are consistent problems for the mujahidin. Mustafa has difficulty getting some of the teams, particularly that run by Abu Tamim, to fire continuously because they are worried about running out of rockets. In fact, at one point approximately halfway through the operation, the mujahidin do in fact run out of rockets, and the enemy succeeds in landing a number of planes. It is also difficult to transport more rockets and supplies to the launcher sites because for much of the operation the mujahidin do not have a working car, and must resort at times to donkeys.

The Arab jihadis and Afghans

Mustafa is ambivalent about the role of the Arab jihadis. They are often difficult to control because they seek to be martyrs on their own terms. The other unit commanders are also often at odds with each other about tactics, and even overall strategy. Mustafa becomes quite angry with his allies on a number of occasions. There is also tension between the Arab jihadis and the Afghans. The Arabs believe the Afghans are content to be trained, and then, once the Communists are removed, to steal things and/or to go home, without being mindful of the need to establish an Islamic state in Afghanistan. Mustafa is also at times dismayed by the lack of operational security among the Afghans, as it is their custom to regale their friends with tales of their battles. For their part, the Afghans resent the Arabs for not letting them operate the launchers at times, and for not trusting them with the best equipment.

Interactions with Al-Qa'ida

Mustafa's interactions with al-Qa'ida are in general not positive. The main (administrative/political) wing of al-Qa'ida is too bureaucratic, and not supportive of the Airport Project, although it promises support at the beginning. At the outset, al-Qa'ida pulls a number of Arab jihadis who would have been useful, and reassigns them to defend Saudi Arabia from Iraq. Only about a third of the required rockets that al-Qa'ida promises actually arrive in the beginning. Mustafa further complains that al-Qa'ida is focused on its camps rather than actual battles, and that the organization only has focus when Usama bin Laden gets involved. Mustafa's discord with al-Qa'ida is slightly alleviated when, towards the end of the operation, with the support of Abu Hafs, the military wing of al-Qa'ida delivers the balance of promised rockets, and at the end of the document he mentions that he is uncomfortable operating against the commands of al-Qa'ida. This is all the more frustrating because Mustafa intimates that there are long periods of time when al-Qa'ida is unresponsive to the mujahidin's requests for orders and supplies.

Discussion of the political situation and political intrigue

Mustafa has a number of discussions with other mujahidin leaders and with al-Qa'ida about the political situation in Afghanistan, and in the Middle East. At first, he seems to believe that the Gulf War is actually a joint plan by Iraq and the US to take over the Middle East. Usama bin Laden apparently calls for Arabs to return to Saudi Arabia to defend it, and Saudi religious scholars support the presence of American troops in Saudi Arabia (temporarily), which confuses Mustafa. Part of the problem of unclear guidance about the political situation appears to be the lack of religious scholars, a void that has not been filled since the death of Abdallah Azzam. Mustafa is also suspicious of Arab jihad organizations, especially those under the Salafi banner, and thinks they will only come to ruin.

Mustafa at one point wonders about the future of him and his family after the end of the war. This is all the more important because his family begins feeling political pressure due to his activities. Mustafa's wife and

children live for a time in Peshawar, where the children are enrolled in a Saudi school, but they are forced to leave after Saudi intelligence operatives begin interrogating them about Mustafa's activities.

Mustafa also relays his thoughts about US involvement in Afghanistan. In his view, the US was nowhere to be found during the actual fight with the Soviets. Once the Soviets decided to withdraw, the US sent in Stinger missiles so that it could say that its technology had defeated the Soviets. This allows the US to sell more of its weapons around the world. By and large, the US strategy is to deny either side a complete victory, and force the mujahidin and the Communists to come to a negotiated peace.

Rise of the new airport

Finally, in response to the closing of the old airport, the enemy actually begin building a new airport out of the range of the launchers. At first, Hakani, the top mujahidin leader, does not believe that the new airfield's tarmac is of high enough quality to accept planes, so they do nothing about it. Unfortunately for them, this turns out to be untrue, and the enemy begins landing planes at the new airfield. Although the mujahidin eventually begin attacking this one as well, Mustafa estimates that this mistake cost the mujahidin about six months before they were finally able to take over Khost.

Conclusion

Mustafa assesses that the Airport Project is successful because it does close down the old airfield and destroy about a dozen enemy planes, even though the enemy builds a new airport. In the latter parts of the documents, he begins talking about preparations for new operations, not only against the new airport, but also more conventional offensives to take over Khost and other cities held by the Communists.