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Afghanistan  
**Case file Number(s): (568000-575199)**  
**Box: 37**

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# WITHDRAWAL SHEET

## Ronald Reagan Library

**Collection Name** WHITE HOUSE OFFICE OF RECORDS MANAGEMENT  
(WHORM): SUBJECT FILE

**Withdrawer**

DLB 2/5/2010

**File Folder** CO002 (568000-575199)

**FOIA**

S10-306

**Box Number** 37

SYSTEMATIC

180

ID	Doc Type	Document Description	No of Pages	Doc Date	Restrictions
84240	MEMO	COLIN POWELL TO THE PRESIDENT, RE: LETTERS FROM PAKISTAN'S PRESIDENT ZIA AND PRIME MINISTER JUNEJO <b>R 4/22/2019 WH GUIDELINES</b>	1	4/25/1988	B1
84241	LETTER	PRIME MINISTER JUNEJO TO PRESIDENT REAGAN <b>R 4/22/2019 NSC/STATE WAIVERS</b>	2	4/14/1988	B1

The above documents were not referred for declassification review at time of processing

Freedom of Information Act - [5 U.S.C. 552(b)]

B-1 National security classified information [(b)(1) of the FOIA]

B-2 Release would disclose internal personnel rules and practices of an agency [(b)(2) of the FOIA]

B-3 Release would violate a Federal statute [(b)(3) of the FOIA]

B-4 Release would disclose trade secrets or confidential or financial information [(b)(4) of the FOIA]

B-6 Release would constitute a clearly unwarranted invasion of personal privacy [(b)(6) of the FOIA]

B-7 Release would disclose information compiled for law enforcement purposes [(b)(7) of the FOIA]

B-8 Release would disclose information concerning the regulation of financial institutions [(b)(8) of the FOIA]

B-9 Release would disclose geological or geophysical information concerning wells [(b)(9) of the FOIA]

C. Closed in accordance with restrictions contained in donor's deed of gift.



88 APR 18 P 3: 26

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

84240

2931  
2932.

THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

April 25, 1988

RR

INFORMATION

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

FROM: COLIN L. POWELL 

SUBJECT: Letters from Pakistan's President Zia  
and Prime Minister Junejo

The Pakistani President and Prime Minister have written to you (TABS A-B) thanking you for United States support against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. President Zia credits your discussions on Afghanistan with General Secretary Gorbachev as ultimately leading to the Soviet decision to withdraw, creating thereby the "...20th Century's miracle of rolling back of the Soviet empire...".

The Zia/Junejo letters note the signing of the Geneva agreement on April 14, 1988. The Pakistani leaders add that world attention must now focus on the return of Afghan refugees and the reconstruction of their country after eight years of war.

No reply is needed at this time.

Attachments:

- TAB A Letter to The President from  
His Excellency Mohammed Khan Junejo  
Prime Minister of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan
- TAB B Letter to The President from  
His Excellency General M. Zia-ul-Haq  
President of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan

DECLASSIFIED

Sec. 3.4(b), E.O. 12958, as amended  
White House Guidelines, Sept. 11, 2009  
BY NARA  DATE 4/22/2019

cc Vice President  
Chief of Staff (2)

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

DECLASSIFY ON: OADR

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

CONFIDENTIAL

2931  
~~2932~~

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20506

April 19, 1988

DECLASSIFIED  
Sec. 3.4(b), E.O. 12958, as amended  
White House Guidelines, Sept. 11, 2008  
BY NARA dm DATE 2/6/10

Natl Sec Advisor  
has seen

ACTION

MEMORANDUM FOR COLIN L. POWELL

FROM: ROBERT B. OAKLEY *RO*

SUBJECT: Letters to The President from  
President Zia and Prime Minister Junejo  
of Pakistan

Pakistani leaders have written to the President thanking the United States for steadfast support against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan.

Attached at TAB I is a memorandum from you to the President forwarding the Zia and Junejo letters.

*ML*  
Ledsy and Ross concur. *NR*

RECOMMENDATION

That you forward the Zia and Junejo messages to the President.

Approve *✓*

Disapprove \_\_\_\_\_

Attachments:

TAB I Your Memorandum to The President

TAB A Prime Minister Junejo's Letter  
to The President (Action 2931)

TAB B President M. Zia-ul-Haq's Letter  
to The President (Action 2932)

CONFIDENTIAL  
DECLASSIFY ON: OADR

7  
C. Powell:

#476664

2931  
2

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ



AMBASSADOR OF PAKISTAN

No. Pol/Prot/17/1/88

DECLASSIFIED

Authority NSC/State Waver 3  
BY db REDATE 4/22/2019

EMBASSY OF PAKISTAN  
2315 MASSACHUSETTS AVENUE, N.W.  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20008

April 14, 1988

Mr. President, Sir,

I have been commanded by Mr Mohammad Khan Junejo, Prime Minister of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, to convey to you the following message:-

"Dear Mr. President,

The agreements on Afghanistan being signed today represent a triumph of reason and justice. The pride and the honour belongs to the valiant Afghan people who have waged a glorious struggle, giving monumental sacrifices for the recovery of national dignity. They have demonstrated that in order to live, free people are prepared to die.

Under your leadership, the United States has stood staunch and upright in support of the cause of freedom. Pakistan draws inspiration and strength from your vision and determination.

Working in concert, Pakistan and the United States have negotiated good agreements, but these are a first step. I am sure that in the months ahead both our countries will remain constant in support of the Afghan nation's right to a government responsive to their urges and aspirations. Only then will peace prevail and the refugees be able to return in safety and dignity.

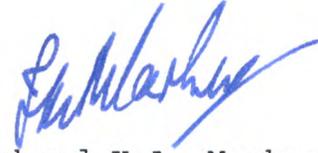
The effectiveness and success of our cooperation will strengthen the government and the people of Pakistan in our resolve to further fortify our partnership with the United States for peace and stability in our region.

With profound regards,

Yours sincerely,

Mohammad Khan Junejo  
Prime Minister of the Islamic  
Republic of Pakistan."

Please accept, Mr President, the assurances of  
my highest consideration.



(Jamsheed K.A. Marker)

His Excellency  
Mr Ronald W. Reagan,  
President of the United States of America,  
The White House,  
Washington, D.C. 20500

8

National Security Council  
The White House

88 APR 21 A 9: 30

System # \_\_\_\_\_  
Package # 2931  
DOCLOG SP A/O \_\_\_\_\_

	SEQUENCE TO	HAS SEEN	DISPOSITION
Bob Perito	<u>1</u>	<u>Perito</u>	<u>A</u>
Marybel Batjer	_____	_____	_____
Paul Stevens	<u>2</u>	<u>✓</u>	<u>copy</u>
John Negroponte	<u>3</u>	<u>John</u>	_____
Colin Powell	<u>4</u>	<u>CP</u>	_____
Paul Stevens	_____	_____	_____
Situation Room	_____	_____	_____
West Wing Desk	<u>5</u>	<u>204/25</u>	<u>D</u>
NSC Secretariat	<u>6</u>	_____	<u>N-Pres</u>
	_____	_____	<u>Noted</u>

I = Information    **A = Action**    R = Retain    D = Dispatch    N = No further Action

cc: VP    Baker    Other \_\_\_\_\_

COMMENTS    Should be seen by: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Date/Time)



ds 2/5/10

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

RECORD ID: 8802931

ACTION DATA SUMMARY REPORT

DOC ACTION OFFICER

CAO ASSIGNED ACTION REQUIRED

001 TAHIR-KHELI	Z 88041816 ANY ACTION NECESSARY
002 POWELL	Z 88042109 FWD TO PRES FOR INFORMATION
002	<del>X</del> 88042214 SEE 8802932 FOR FINIAL ACTION
003 PRESIDENT	Z 88042510 FOR INFORMATION
003	X 88042515 NOTED BY PRES



~~CONFIDENTIAL~~  
ACTION DATA SUMMARY REPORT

RECORD ID: 8802931

DOC ACTION OFFICER

CAO ASSIGNED ACTION REQUIRED

001 TAHIR-KHELI  
002 POWELL  
002

Z 88041816 ANY ACTION NECESSARY  
Z 88042109 FWD TO PRES FOR INFORMATION  
X 88042214 SEE 8802932 FOR FINIAL ACTION

UNCLASSIFIED  
OF CLASSIFIED ENCLOSURE(S)

db  
2/5/10

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~  
NSC/S PROFILE

RECORD ID: 8802931  
RECEIVED: 18 APR 88 16

TO: POWELL

FROM: OAKLEY

db 2/5/10

DOC DATE: 19 APR 88  
SOURCE REF:

KEYWORDS: PAKISTAN  
USSR

AFGHANISTAN

HS

PERSONS:

SUBJECT: LTR TO PRES FM PM JUNEJO THANKING FOR SUPPORT OF AFGHANISTAN CAUSE

ACTION: SEE 8802932 FOR FINIAL ACTION DUE DATE: 21 APR 88 STATUS: C

STAFF OFFICER: TAHIR-KHELI

LOGREF: 8802932

FILES: WH

NSCIF:

CODES:

D O C U M E N T D I S T R I B U T I O N

FOR ACTION  
POWELL

FOR CONCURRENCE

FOR INFO

COMMENTS:

DISPATCHED BY \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_ W/ATTCH: YES NO

OPENED BY: NSCTF CLOSED BY: NSCLG DOC 2 OF 2

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

December 8, 1987

5700  
568995  
-  
C0002  
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FG006-12

MEMORANDUM FOR GENERAL POWELL  
FROM: DANA ROHRBACHER DR  
SUBJECT: AFGHANISTAN

I recently had the opportunity to meet Mr. Saljooque, a top advisor to Pier Gallini and General Wardock. Saljooque is a graduate of the London School of Economics and a former Afghan diplomat (pre-invasion). Saljooque made one point that deserves consideration: The Afghan resistance can now unify to a large degree under the old King. Also, the Soviets may be willing to talk about a neutralized Afghanistan under the King as a way out. The King could be trusted to protect those who sided with the Soviets. On the other hand most Afghan fighters would accept him as a legitimate ruler, perhaps as head of a constitutional monarchy.

There is some opposition to the King among those who believe in an Islamic republic, but the government could be structured to bring them in line. Just a thought.

NSC # 8709181

RECEIVED 11 DEC 87 17

TO POWELL

FROM ROHRABCHER, D

DOCDATE 08 DEC 87

KEYWORDS: AFGHANISTAN

USSR

SUBJECT: ROHRABACHER MTG W/ SALJOOQUE / TOP ADVISOR TO GALLINI & GEN WARDOCK OF AFGHANISTAN

ACTION: PREPARE MEMO FOR POWELL

DUE: 11 DEC 87 STATUS S

FILES WH

FOR ACTION

FOR CONCURRENCE

FOR INFO

TAHIR-KHELI

ROSS

RODMAN

BEMIS

ERMARTH

OAKLEY

ROSTOW

LEDSKY

DANZANSKY

COMMENTS

REF#

LOG

NSCIFID

( JD )

ACTION OFFICER (S)

ASSIGNED

ACTION REQUIRED

DUE

COPIES TO

11 ✓ 11  
 NQ7 - per - S. Tahir-Kheli  
 12/14/87  
 C 12/15 No Action Req'd per Tahir-Kheli

DISPATCH

W/ATTCH FILE WH (C)

AK

THE WHITE HOUSE  
CORRESPONDENCE TRACKING WORKSHEET

C0002

INCOMING

DATE RECEIVED: MAY 05, 1988

NAME OF CORRESPONDENT: MR. ERIC LICHT

SUBJECT: OPPOSES THE AFGHAN ACCORDS AND ASKS THE  
PRESIDENT TO PUBLICLY REPEAT HIS COMMITMENT  
TO SEEK AN AFGHANISTAN THAT IS FREE AND NOT  
WITHIN THE SOVIET ORBIT

ROUTE TO: OFFICE/AGENCY	(STAFF NAME)	ACTION		DISPOSITION	
		ACT CODE	DATE YY/MM/DD	TYPE RESP	C COMPLETED D YY/MM/DD
CHUCK DONOVAN		SPG	88/05/05		C 88/10/31
REFERRAL NOTE:					
NS STEV			88/05/18		C 88/05/18
REFERRAL NOTE:					
			88/05/18		C 88/05/18
REFERRAL NOTE:					
REFERRAL NOTE:					
REFERRAL NOTE:					

COMMENTS:

ADDITIONAL CORRESPONDENTS: MEDIA:L INDIVIDUAL CODES:

MI MAIL USER CODES: (A) (B) (C)

- \*ACTION CODES: \*DISPOSITION \*OUTGOING \*
- \*A-APPROPRIATE ACTION \*A-ANSWERED \*CORRESPONDENCE: \*
- \*C-COMMENT/RECOM \*B-NON-SPEC-REFERRAL \*TYPE RESP=INITIALS \*
- \*D-DRAFT RESPONSE \*C-COMPLETED \* OF SIGNER \*
- \*F-FURNISH FACT SHEET \*S-SUSPENDED \* CODE = A \*
- \*I-INFO COPY/NO ACT NEC\* \*COMPLETED = DATE OF \*
- \*R-DIRECT REPLY W/COPY \* \* OUTGOING \*
- \*S-FOR-SIGNATURE \* \* \*
- \*X-INTERIM REPLY \* \* \*

REFER QUESTIONS AND ROUTING UPDATES TO CENTRAL REFERENCE  
(ROOM 75, OEOB) EXT-2590  
KEEP THIS WORKSHEET ATTACHED TO THE ORIGINAL INCOMING  
LETTER AT ALL TIMES AND SEND COMPLETED RECORD TO RECORDS  
MANAGEMENT.

THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

August 30, 1988

TO: VAN ERON

FROM: CHUCK DONOVAN *CD*

These are copies of files that DOS shows have been returned to the White House, but our files show have not been dispatched. We have no record of them coming in down here -- any trace of them in your system? The Kling letter may be overtaken by events, at least partially. Let me know if you have any record of them -- thanks.

8814935

T H E W H I T E H O U S E O F F I C E

REFERRAL

MAY 10, 1988

TO: DEPARTMENT OF STATE

ACTION REQUESTED:

DRAFT REPLY FOR SIGNATURE OF:  
WHITE HOUSE STAFF MEMBER

DESCRIPTION OF INCOMING:

ID: 569244

MEDIA: LETTER, DATED MAY 3, 1988

TO: PRESIDENT REAGAN

FROM: MR. ERIC LICHT  
PRESIDENT  
COALITIONS FOR AMERICA  
721 SECOND STREET  
WASHINGTON DC 20002

SUBJECT: OPPOSES THE AFGHAN ACCORDS AND ASKS THE  
PRESIDENT TO PUBLICLY REPEAT HIS COMMITMENT  
TO SEEK AN AFGHANISTAN THAT IS FREE AND NOT  
WITHIN THE SOVIET ORBIT

PROMPT ACTION IS ESSENTIAL -- IF REQUIRED ACTION HAS NOT BEEN  
TAKEN WITHIN 9 WORKING DAYS OF RECEIPT, PLEASE TELEPHONE THE  
UNDERSIGNED AT 456-7486.

RETURN CORRESPONDENCE, WORKSHEET AND COPY OF RESPONSE  
(OR DRAFT) TO:  
AGENCY LIAISON, ROOM 91, THE WHITE HOUSE, 20500

SALLY KELLEY  
DIRECTOR OF AGENCY LIAISON  
PRESIDENTIAL CORRESPONDENCE

Department of State

Suggested Draft

Dear Mr. Licht:

I am writing in response to your letter of May 3, 1988 to President Reagan regarding the Afghan accords.

While we differ on whether U.S. signature of the accords was an error, I do not think you and the President are far apart on the points you raised in your second paragraph. We have no intention of easing up on our efforts to get the Soviet Union out of Afghanistan so that country can function as a truly independent non-aligned state. Moreover, we have made clear to all the parties that we retain the right to support parties within Afghanistan and that "symmetry" is an essential ingredient in our continuing support of the accords. You may rest assured that we will not remain idle as regards aid to the resistance if the Soviets fail to show restraint in supplying the illegitimate Kabul regime.

Thank you for providing us with your thoughts on this matter.

Sincerely,

White House Staff Member

Mr. Eric Licht,  
President,

Coalitions for America,  
721 Second Street, N.E.,  
Washington, D.C.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
EXECUTIVE SECRETARIAT  
TRANSMITTAL FORM

S/S 8814935

Date May 18, 1988

**FOR:** Mr. Paul Schott Stevens  
Executive Secretary  
National Security Council  
The White House

**REFERENCE:**

To: President Reagan

From: Mr. Eric Licht

Date: May 3, 1988

Subject: Opposes the Afghan Accords and Asks the President to Publicly Repeat His Commitment to Seek an Afghanistan That Is Free and Not within the Soviet Orbit

WH Referral Dated: May 10, 1988

NSC ID# (if any): 569244

         The attached item was sent directly to the Department of State.

**ACTION TAKEN:**

- A draft reply is attached.
- A draft reply will be forwarded.
- A translation is attached.
- An information copy of a direct reply is attached.
- We believe no response is necessary for the reason cited below.
- The Department of State has no objection to the proposed travel.
- Other (see remarks).

**REMARKS:**

*Joe Jay Salpini*  
Director  
Secretariat Staff

56 244

CAD

# Coalitions for America

Paul M. Weyrich  
National Chairman

Eric Licht  
President

M. Kimberly Roberts  
Director

Library Court  
Social Issues

Stanton  
Defense & Foreign Policy

Kingston  
Budget & Economic Policy

721 Group  
Judicial & Legal Policy

Carroll Group  
Catholic Coalition

The Omega Alliance  
Young Activist Coalition

Resistance Support Alliance  
Freedom Fighter Policy

Jewish/Conservative Alliance

May 3, 1988

721 Second Street  
Capitol Hill  
Washington, D.C. 20002  
(202) 546-3003

8814935

President Ronald Reagan  
The White House  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

Your decision to agree to the Afghan accords was a mistake.

While we recognize it is too late to reverse your decision, we ask that you publicly repeat your commitment to seek an Afghanistan that is free and not within the Soviet orbit and that you become personally involved in assuring that, should the Soviets begin aiding its puppet Kabul regime, the United States continues aiding the Afghan resistance with Stingers, long range mortars and mine-clearing equipment.

We would appreciate your continued commitment to the freedom fighters.

Sincerely,



Eric Licht  
President

UNCLASSIFIED  
NSC/S PROFILE

RECORD ID: 8803770  
RECEIVED: 19 MAY 88 10

TO: PRESIDENT

FROM: LICHT, ERIC

DOC DATE: 03 MAY 88  
SOURCE REF: 569244

KEYWORDS: AFGHANISTAN MP

PERSONS:

SUBJECT: LTR RE OPPOSES AFGHAN ACCORDS & ASKS PRES TO PUBLICLY REPEAT HIS  
COMMITMENT TO SEEK AN AFGHANISTAN THAT FREE

ACTION: OBE PER TAHIR-KHELI DUE DATE: 23 MAY 88 STATUS: C

STAFF OFFICER: TAHIR-KHELI LOGREF:

FILES: WH NSCIF: CODES:

DOCUMENT DISTRIBUTION

FOR ACTION  
TAHIR-KHELI

FOR CONCURRENCE  
LEDSKY  
RODMAN  
ROSS

FOR INFO  
CURTIN  
OAKLEY  
ROSTOW

COMMENTS:

DISPATCHED BY \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_ W/ATTCH: YES NO

OPENED BY: NSRCB CLOSED BY: NSEF DOC 1 OF 2

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED  
ACTION DATA SUMMARY REPORT

RECORD ID: 8803770

DOC ACTION OFFICER

CAO ASSIGNED ACTION REQUIRED

001 TAHIR-KHELI  
001

Z 88051910 PREPARE MEMO STEVENS TO KELLEY  
X 88091312 OBE PER TAHIR-KHELI

UNCLASSIFIED  
NSC/S PROFILE

RECORD ID: 8803770  
RECEIVED: 19 MAY 88 10

TO: PRESIDENT

FROM: LIGHT, ERIC

DOC DATE: 03 MAY 88  
SOURCE REF: 569244

KEYWORDS: AFGHANISTAN

MP

PERSONS:

SUBJECT: LTR RE OPPSES AFGHAN ACCORDS & ASKS PRES TO PUBLICLY REPEAT HIS  
COMMITMENT TO SEEK AN AFGHANISTAN

ACTION: PREPARE MEMO FOR POWELL DUE DATE: 23 MAY 88 STATUS: S

STAFF OFFICER: TAHIR-KHELI

LOGREF:

FILES: WH

NSCIF:

CODES:

DOCUMENT DISTRIBUTION

FOR ACTION  
TAHIR-KHELI

FOR CONCURRENCE  
LEDSKY  
RODMAN  
ROSS

FOR INFO  
CURTIN  
OAKLEY  
ROSTOW.

COMMENTS: OBE PER SPT

DISPATCHED BY \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_ W/ATTCH: YES NO

OPENED BY: NSRCB

CLOSED BY:

DOC 1 OF 1

UNCLASSIFIED

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N0016

PW

FG006-12

**MS**

3894

23/5

THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

DSS,

*Wanna*  
FOR FIVE. RETURNED  
TO ME BY MR.

↳

Soviet POWS in Afghanistan  
Ludmilla Thorne

NSC#8803894

Dear President Reagan,

Thank you for saving the lives of these  
five young men. Please help us save  
others. Kind regards,

Luchilla Thone

January 27, 1988

"It has so turned out that no one needs us. The Soviet Union rejects us because it makes believe that there are no POWs here, and it does nothing to help. The United States always wants specific proof beforehand that the Soviet soldiers will be good, while...other countries like Pakistan are too afraid..." Vladislav Naumov, Soviet army deserter in Afghanistan, March, 1986.

THANK you for helping me.  
V. Naumov,

27.1.88.

What day and month is it?" was among the first questions that Igor and Nikolay asked me after we embraced. I had not seen the two Russian army defectors since September 1983 and felt both joy and sadness in seeing them once again in Afghanistan. Joy because it was good just to know that they were still alive and relatively well; sadness because nearly three years had gone by and we were still unsuccessful in getting them out of Afghanistan.

Our meeting this past April took place at a small command post of NIFA, the National Islamic Front of Afghanistan, one of the seven major resistance groups fighting Soviet occupation forces in Afghanistan. It is also one of the most moderate guerrilla parties, which treats its Soviet prisoners well. Because the Soviet military command in Afghanistan usually bombs the hiding places where Soviet POWs are kept, Afghan guerrilla leaders are very strict in demanding that Western journalists not reveal the locations where clandestine meetings with Soviet prisoners like this one are held. The leaders of NIFA made the same request. Igor and Nikolay were two of the Soviet defectors I was to visit on this trip to Afghanistan.

UNCLASSIFIED  
NSC/S PROFILE

RECORD ID: 8803894  
RECEIVED: 24 MAY 88 10

TO: PRESIDENT

FROM: JHEME, LUCHRULLA

DOC DATE: 27 JAN 88  
SOURCE REF:

KEYWORDS: AFGHANISTAN  
MP

USSR

PERSONS:

SUBJECT: LTR RE SOVIET POWS IN AFGHANISTAN

ACTION: FOR RECORD PURPOSES DUE DATE: 27 MAY 88 STATUS: C

STAFF OFFICER: TAHIR-KHELI LOGREF:

FILES: WH NSCIF: CODES:

DOCUMENT DISTRIBUTION

FOR ACTION

FOR CONCURRENCE

FOR INFO

CURTIN  
LEDSKY  
OAKLEY  
RODMAN  
ROSS  
ROSTOW  
TAHIR-KHELI

System - Staff for  
info/record purposes  
only.

-PS

COMMENTS:

DISPATCHED BY \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_ W/ATTCH: YES NO

OPENED BY: NSRCB CLOSED BY: NSRCB DOC 1 OF 1

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED  
ACTION DATA SUMMARY REPORT

RECORD ID: 8803894

DOC ACTION OFFICER

CAO ASSIGNED ACTION REQUIRED

001

X 88052410 FOR RECORD PURPOSES

UNCLASSIFIED

# Soviet POWs in Afghanistan

Ludmilla Thorne



**"Mr. President,  
Is This All We Deserve?"**

## Freedom House Books

### Yearbooks

*Freedom in the World: Political Rights and Civil Liberties*, Raymond D. Gastil; annuals for 1978, 1979, 1980, 1981, 1982, 1983-84, 1984-85, 1985-86.

### Studies in Freedom

*Strategies for the 1980s: Lessons of Cuba, Vietnam, and Afghanistan*, Philip van Slyck; 1981.

*Escape to Freedom: The Story of the International Rescue Committee*, Aaron Levenstein; 1983.

*Forty Years: A Third World Soldier at the UN*, Carlos P. Romulo (with Beth Day Romulo); 1986.

### Perspectives on Freedom

General Editor: **James Finn**

1. *El Salvador: Peaceful Revolution or Armed Struggle?*, R. Bruce McCole; 1982.
2. *Three Years at the East-West Divide*, Max M. Kampelman; (Introductions by Ronald Reagan and Jimmy Carter; edited by Leonard R. Susman); 1983.
3. *The Democratic Mask: The Consolidation of the Sandinista Revolution*, Douglas W. Payne; 1985.
4. *The Heresy of Words in Cuba: Freedom of Expression & Information*, Carlos Ripoll; 1985.
5. *Human Rights & the New Realism: Strategic Thinking in a New Age*, Michael Novak; 1986.
6. *To License A Journalist?*, Inter-American Court of Human Rights; 1986.

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*Big Story: How the American Press and Television Reported and Interpreted the Crisis of Tet-1968 in Vietnam and Washington*, Peter Braestrup; Two volumes 1977; One volume paperback abridged 1978, 1983.

Published October 1986

Dear President Reagan,

Thank you for saving the lives of these five young men. Please help us save others. Kind Regards,

Luchilla Thome

January 27, 1988

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27.1.88.

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Our meeting this past April took place at a small command post of NIFA, the National Islamic Front of Afghanistan, one of the seven major resistance groups fighting Soviet occupation forces in Afghanistan. It is also one of the most moderate guerrilla parties, which treats its Soviet prisoners well. Because the Soviet military command in Afghanistan usually bombs the hiding places where Soviet POWs are kept, Afghan guerrilla leaders are very strict in demanding that Western journalists not reveal the locations where clandestine meetings with Soviet prisoners like this one are held. The leaders of NIFA made the same request. Igor and Nikolay were two of the Soviet defectors I was to visit on this trip to Afghanistan.

As soon as we finished greeting each other Igor grabbed my hand and put it to his cheek. "Feel this," he said. My fingers came across an abscess that felt like a hard boiled egg. "My teeth are rotting, three of them have already decayed to the core. My jaw aches, I have terrible headaches, and I can't sleep," he fired off at a fast clip. Nikolay also showed me his yellow teeth, indicating that he too was hurting.

Igor Kovalchuk and Nikolay Golovin have been prisoners of war in Afghanistan for more than five years. Having received practically no medical care during this time, they have had several bouts with hepatitis, malaria and various other diseases. Rotting teeth is one of their latest problems. In spite of all this, I noticed that Igor, now 26, and Nikolay, 24, had both gained weight, and that they didn't have the wild, frantic look they had during our first meeting almost three years ago. They also didn't chatter away at the speed of machine guns, as they did then, but were calm and lucid in their conversations.

The fact is that during our meeting in 1983 they were visibly stoned on hashish, or *plan* as it is called in Russian. "We haven't touched the stuff in five months and in that respect we feel good," they told me. "I'm actually glad that they moved us to this desolate area because it forced us to go cold turkey," Igor said. And desolate it was. It was definitely one of the most God-forsaken places that I had ever seen in Afghanistan. We were surrounded by an eerie moon-like landscape of grey hills and equally grey flatlands, strewn with rocks. "Now that we're off the dope, do you think that some Western country will take us?" Their eyes were pleading. "We can't go on this way very much longer."

Igor, with stunning green eyes and black hair, had told me that his grandfather was a gypsy, which didn't surprise me. I suspect that his flamboyant, romantic flair

had caused great mischief when he was still living at home, in Kharkov. And in spite of his present difficult life, Igor's exuberant personality still comes through in spontaneous patches of laughter. Like many other Russians, for whom poetry is a national sport, Igor writes poems, most of which are either sad or terrifying. He is ready to recite them at a moment's notice, and whenever he can find a bit of blank paper, he uses it to sketch. The subject matter of his drawings is usually the same as that of his poems: the horrors of war.

Both men were factory workers before they were drafted into the Red Army six years ago, but round-faced Nikolay lacks both Igor's quick wit and his creative temperament, which makes it particularly hard for him to bear the agonizing idleness of his life as a war prisoner. At least Igor can keep himself occupied; Nikolay sulks in silence.

Their typical day consists of sitting in a small room built into one of the quadrangular stone walls that make up the guerrilla stronghold. At a distance it looks like a small medieval fortress, standing in the middle of nowhere. The two prisoners spend most of their time talking with each other or rereading the same Russian-language magazines and books that they have had for years. The new Russian books published in the West which I brought them were yanked out of my bag with a vengeance, and a music cassette by the popular Russian bard Vladimir Vysotsky truly made their day.

The two Russian soldiers are allowed to take brief walks, but always under the watchful eye of an armed guard. For amusement they catch snakes, lizards and scorpions, of which there are plenty in this part of the world. Igor and Nikolay drink enormous amounts of tea, like the Afghans, and subsist on a steady diet of peas and the Afghan pita bread called *nan*.

They also take part in the Afghans' daily Muslim prayers, but unlike other Soviet prisoners whom I have met, Igor and Nikolay do not resent the ritual. Igor told me that on Sundays he also prays "the Christian way." By now both men have become fluent in Farsi and can easily communicate with the Afghan guerrillas, but they keep mostly to themselves. At times they have "heart-to-heart" talks with the commander of the base. "He doesn't like it when we are angry or unhappy," they told me. Like most other Soviet POWs held by the Afghan resistance, the two Russian soldiers were given Muslim names. Igor's is Gulmohammed and Nikolay is called Shermohammed.

Time has turned into an endless blur for them. "Each day is like any other, as well as the months and the years," they said. Since they have stopped using drugs Igor and Nikolay have gained tremendous energy, but they have nothing to spend it on. "We are eager to work. We want to lead normal lives," they told me. "It's been years that I have taken a real bath or even seen a bathtub," Igor moaned. "I don't think that I can hold on for more than two or three months," whispered Nikolay. He often speaks of running away or of committing suicide. A few months ago he did cut his veins, and since that time Igor has been watching his friend like a hawk.

When they were kept at a different NIFA hideout Nikolay also managed to run away, but was caught in Peshawar by the Pakistani police. His escape caused great problems for NIFA because the Pakistan government does not allow Soviet prisoners to be held on its territory. Now NIFA is taking special precautions. The two men are locked up at night and are watched by two guards around the clock. They are not happy that they are always held at gunpoint, but seem to have gotten used to it.

"I also don't like the fact that even I need to be

guarded from attack when I go to the bathroom, but unfortunately, these are the circumstances under which we live," said Wakil Akberzai, the NIFA representative who arranged the clandestine rendezvous with the two Soviet soldiers. An outgoing young man of great physical stature, Wakil has been a good friend of mine since 1983, when I first got the mad idea of traveling to Afghanistan. "I wish that we didn't have to assign two of our men to guard the Russian guys. We could use the guards for other kinds of work," he said. If the United States or some other Western country were to take Igor and Nikolay, Wakil would be just as pleased as the two prisoners themselves.

In spite of the atmosphere of comradeship that prevailed at the NIFA command post during our two-day visit with Nikolay and Igor, the captor-captive relationship was always there, even during meals or gab sessions. At times it was as heavy as smoke.

In the evenings we usually spent an hour or so lying on heavy Afghan carpets and oversized pillows, gazing at the stars. The sky hung low overhead, like black velvet studded with millions of lights. It could not compare with the washed-out sky that I was used to seeing in Manhattan. On one such evening Igor and Nikolay crouched down close beside me and told me that they better call it a night, because their two guards were showing resentment that they were getting so much attention. Unlike Wakil or the post commander, whose contacts with the two Russian prisoners are only occasional, the two guards literally spend day and night with them, and become vexed when their prisoners become the objects of interest with foreign visitors.

Just as Nikolay and Igor were saying good-night, one of the mujahedeen guards suddenly jumped up and jerked the pillow from under my head, pulling from underneath it a Kalashnikov rifle. He pointed it at the two Russian

prisoners. I didn't even know that I had been resting on an automatic weapon, and was surprised by the rash action. During all of my contacts with the Afghan guerrillas over the years their attitude towards me has always been respectful and polite. I have traveled and eaten with them and slept on the same floor with them in cramped, mud-baked huts. "What happened?" I asked Wakil, who was also relaxing under the open sky. "We were afraid that the two guys could kidnap you and use you as a hostage, like the incident of last April."

He was referring to April 27 of last year when twelve Soviet POWs held by the Jamiat resistance group at a military camp on the Pakistan side of the border had overpowered their guards and taken them hostage. The Soviet prisoners demanded to see official representatives who could help them get asylum in the West or somehow change their lives. There was a stand-off, someone fired a shot which hit an ammunition dump, and in the ensuing explosion not only the Soviet POWs were killed, but twelve other men too, including some Afghan government prisoners and members of the Jamiat party. Since that time Pakistani officials have been particularly adamant that Soviet prisoners not be held on their territory.

Of the two soldiers it was Igor who had witnessed scenes of extreme brutality when he was in the Soviet Army. His first real shock came after six months in Afghanistan, when he was driving in an armored personnel carrier (APC) with several senior enlisted men and a young woman who was part of an entertainment group from the Soviet Union. The driver of the APC was showing off in front of the pretty girl by driving much too fast. As they were racing down the road, two small Afghan children, a girl and a boy, were crossing. The little girl made it across the street, but the boy was caught under the left wheel of the vehicle and mauled to

death. "We have just killed a child," Igor screamed, but the driver continued on as if nothing happened. "That's when something jolted in my head," Igor recalled.

A second, equally violent incident also took place with APCs, but this time the victims were his fellow Soviet soldiers. As Igor told the story, two treaded APCs were going in file, both travelling too fast, but the driver of the second vehicle, an ensign, was thoroughly drunk. At a crucial moment the brakes failed, and the second APC rammed straight into the first one, in which three of Igor's close friends were riding. One was decapitated, another lost both legs and the third was crushed to death. One of the dead boys was from Igor's home town; they had worked together at the same factory. Soviet army life in Afghanistan abounds with such drunken tales of horror.

Both Nikolay and Igor served in Kunduz, but whereas Nikolay worked in a bakery, Igor was part of a reconnaissance unit and was assigned to a BRDM, a small armored personnel carrier used for reconnaissance. His job was to fire the machine gun on the vehicle, which was also equipped with a laser. "It didn't kill people but merely blinded them," he explained with a cynical smirk. "The BRDM would position itself close to an Afghan village, after which the gunner looked for a suitable target, usually a group of villagers, and then I had to shoot," Igor said. "After I pulled the trigger and looked through the viewfinder I could see people's heads rolling off like watermelons and their bodies ripped apart, like pieces of raw meat," he grimaced.

"Although I had less than six months left to serve, I just couldn't take it anymore. Both Nikolay and I started looking for ways of escaping." Igor admits that he took part in other war atrocities, such as attacking Afghan villages with grenades and machine guns. Igor described to me one

such particularly vicious attack, led by his platoon commander Lieutenant Polovinkin. "After we sprayed a hut with bullets and Polovinkin threw in a grenade, I peeked inside and saw about fifteen people, men, women and children, all slouched together, in a pile of blood. It was like a butcher shop, reeking with a horrible smell." Some of the Soviet recruits who were new at this kind of activity threw up or fainted after completing the mission. Igor described the attack in one of his frantically scribbled poems.

We spilled ourselves around the village,  
There was an order to spare no one.  
Move forward, young men,  
That's all you heard--forward!  
Our platoon commander  
Burst into an alley,  
Killing everyone, the old and young  
.....  
Quickly, he screamed to Vitka,  
Fly through this door,  
And drive pity out of your heart.

During the attack one of the Afghan inhabitants of the house killed Vitka by thrusting a sickle into his stomach. Igor continues the poem by describing his feelings after witnessing the gory scene:

He was my friend. Why did he die?  
He was yet so young, only 20.  
Why was his death necessary?  
Anger wells up in my soul,  
As I throw a grenade  
Through the window.  
.....  
And Vitka dies in my arms.

"What will I tell his mother?" Igor asks in another poem, after another friend died in battle. "His blue eyes gazed into my soul."

Atrocities committed by the other side are also described in Igor's poems. He told me how a group of his fellow soldiers were ambushed one night by Afghan guerrillas and also killed in cold blood. Many of the Soviet soldiers were mutilated by having their noses or genitals cut off. Later the Soviet command laid out the corpses for the other soldiers to see, in order to incite hatred for the Afghan partisans. Igor remembers this painful experience by writing:

Forty youthful souls are lying dead,  
But who is guilty of their deaths?

The most common theme which echoes through his poetry is:

Why are we here,  
Killing simple people,  
Conquering their land?  
After all, they are  
Defending their homes.

In 1983 Igor also told me that Lieutenant Polovinkin had ordered his men to tie up twelve captured *mujahedeen* or holy warriors, as the Afghan guerrillas prefer to be called, and place them in the path of three Soviet armored personnel carriers. The Afghans' bodies were severed into pieces. Igor was among those who had to clean up the bloody scene by burrying the remains in a shallow grave near the road. Igor told me that later, Commander Polovinkin, who was stinking drunk, pulled out of the grave one of the severed heads, poured benzine over it, and placed it in a pot to cook.

"Was that really true?" I asked Igor. When he had first described the gruesome tale nearly three years ago he was high on hash, and I couldn't be certain that the bizarre incident really took place. It was simply too horrible to be true. "Yes, it did happen," he once again told me, and showed me a poem in which he describes the drunk platoon commander carrying on a long conversation with the severed head:

Allah is great,  
Make him connect  
A body to your head,  
So you can become my buffoon.

Now Polovinkin is back home in the Soviet Union, reportedly working in the Kremlin as a guard. A few days after the atrocity with the twelve mujahedeen had taken place, Igor was sitting in the mess hall and noticed that a dog had wandered in, holding a decaying human hand in his mouth, which it had also pulled out of the common grave.

Igor still has frequent nightmares about such horrific experiences. "He often screams in his sleep," notes Nikolay. As a form of catharsis, Igor has sketched many of the frightful scenes in a primitive, child-like manner. One drawing depicts Polovinkin holding the severed head.

After seeing such brutality, "I decided to hell with it, I'd rather be a 'traitor'," Igor told me. "But in the eyes of God I will not be mired in this dirt and blood, which the KGB has unleashed. They don't believe in God, but I do, so we had to go different ways." And for these men there is no way back. Under the Soviet military code, desertion is punishable by ten or fifteen years' imprisonment or execution. "I love my homeland but I can't stand a regime which has killed so many people and continues to follow upon its bloody path," Igor wrote me in a recent letter

transmitted by the mujahedeen. "We would like the world to know more about Afghanistan and about the bayonets and silencers that were attached to our automatic rifles."

At times Igor and Nikolay show signs of bitterness that they did the right thing by refusing to be accomplices to murder but were subsequently dealt such a cruel reward. At moments like these Igor's religious faith, which often comes up in both his conversation and in his poetry, comes to the rescue. "Every person must bear his own cross," he remarks. Igor's mother was a Russian Orthodox Christian, he told me, and could read Old Church Slavonic. There were always icons in the house. The two letters which Igor wrote to President Reagan asking for political asylum are also filled with references to God. "May God protect you," he writes at the top of one letter, and ends the other appeal with the word "amen."

"I pray to God that He will instill good feelings toward me in the hearts of my guards," Igor confided. "Yes, and you should also try to control your gypsy temper," I told him, because during the two days that I spent with the two prisoners this April, Igor was sometimes remarkably hot tempered, even with his guards.

When they were still serving with the Soviet Army in Kunduz, Igor and Nikolay made contact with the mujahedeen in the hope of making their way to the West. One guerrilla fighter promised to help them reach Pakistan and eventual freedom if they would deliver weapons to the resistance. The two Soviet soldiers agreed, and set up a meeting with their Afghan contact in a ditch near the Soviet garrison, but just as they were handing over an automatic rifle, Nikolay stood up and was noticed by a passing Afghan. He turned them in at the nearest Soviet control point, after which Igor and Nikolay were surrounded by Soviet APCs and fellow Soviet soldiers.

The two men were kept in a military prison for three months, during which time both were severely tortured and beaten. Nikolay's head was bashed by a wooden hammer and Igor's left arm was cut with razor blades, after which two electric cords attached to a 24-volt battery were stuck into the bleeding wounds. His arm now bears deep gashes. But the worst part, they said, was when the warder, who was often drunk, would suddenly come into the cell at night and stick a flashlight into their eyes, blinding them. "Then a pair of boots would hit us straight into the face," they added.

At one lucky moment they talked their guard into letting them go out to get some hashish. Barefoot and dressed only in slacks, the two prisoners made a run for it. The alarm was sounded, sending twenty Soviet soldiers scurrying after them in hot pursuit, shooting. "As we were running, a mule wound up next to me," Igor recalls. "Several shots were fired, ripping its stomach. God sent me that mule and saved my life," he said.

As the two soldiers were racing to escape they ran to an Afghan village and asked for the mujahedeen. They weren't difficult to find. The guerrillas concealed the exhausted fugitives by moving them from village to village. "As soon as the Soviets found out where we were, they bombed the place," they said. The Soviet command also offered a hefty reward for the two escapees, consisting of one million afghanis (about \$8,000), a tractor and a house, if they were turned in alive. If they were delivered dead, the house would not be included.

Greatly weakened by the prison beatings and the loss of blood, the two deserters finally couldn't run any more, and collapsed. The mujahedeen bandaged their wounds and delivered them to a safe house on a horse. To kill the pain and help them fall asleep, Igor and Nikolay smoked a sizable dose of hashish. Although they had smoked hash in the

Soviet Army, like most other Soviet servicemen in Afghanistan, they say that it was during this period that they really got hooked.

"Loneliness and hopelessness kept us going," they said. "People wonder why we became dope addicts here. With this kind of life you'll not only turn into an addict, but you'll be ready to do anything, cut your wrists, your legs or your throat," Igor said. "Try putting yourselves in our place," he added.

Saying good-bye to Soviet prisoners in Afghanistan is always the most difficult part. I know that after a few days or weeks I will be back in the comfort of my home, with my friends and family. But what do they have to look forward to? Another fleeting visit with an American friend three years later?

Since Igor and Nikolay have stopped smoking hash the pain in their decaying teeth has become worse. The two Russian soldiers say that the hash had acted as a painkiller. Emotionally, their feelings of desperation have likewise become more acute, for the narcotics also dulled their senses. The medicines and vitamins that I left with them in April have all run out. One of the letters which I recently received from the two soldiers ends with three SOSs.

Before leaving I told Igor and Nikolay that a week earlier I had spoken with three other Soviet POWs and that after returning to the United States I would do everything in my power to help them come to America. "They'll probably take the other three POWs and leave us behind," Igor remarked with a sad, bitter laugh. "Other Soviet guys who came here after us are already in the States, but we're still here," Nikolay added.

The three other Soviet army deserters I spoke with were Vladislav Naumov, Sergei Busov and Vadim Plotnikov. I had already interviewed Vladislav in October

1983, just two weeks after he had defected. At the time he was a gangly boy of 20, but already revealed a remarkable ideological motivation, which drove him to take the "suicidal step" of deserting from the Red Army, exactly one year after he was drafted.

Born in Volgograd, Vladislav worked for a year as the chief mate on a merchant vessel on the Volga River before he was called into the army. Like most Soviet soldiers sent to Afghanistan, Naumov went through boot camp in Turkmenistan, the southern most Soviet Central Asian republic bordering Afghanistan. He was trained as a sharpshooter and also learned to operate tanks. At the end of the six-month training period the soldiers in his unit were told: "Whoever wants to go to Afghanistan will go to Afghanistan and whoever doesn't will go there anyway."

When he was in basic training Vladislav also worked in the so-called "Lenin room," where he drew all kinds of posters, mostly with propaganda slogans. Soviet draftees who get such "cushy jobs" are generally considered with a measure of disdain by other soldiers because those who get such assignments are usually selected not only for their talent or abilities but also for their militancy. Vladislav was part of such a trusted group of about fifty bright young men who were given special political instruction in the "Lenin room," a kind of ideological pressure chamber crammed with Lenin's bust, his writings and other propaganda pieces. The men were also asked to keep watch over other soldiers and to report on anything that looked suspicious. Vladislav spoke of his own selection for membership in the propaganda unit with cynical amusement, because in his case it obviously didn't do much good.

On several occasions officers who had served in Afghanistan were invited to speak to the select group. They told the young recruits of the fighting but the descriptions

were always couched in very special language. "They had to arouse some sort of patriotic feelings in us," he said, "but it was always done on the human level. We were told how someone saved his buddy or helped a friend, but there was no mention of the party or of communism."

Naumov was sent to Afghanistan as a part of a paratroop assault regiment. He took part in some combat operations as a sniper but spent most of his time near Jalalabad as a guard and tank mechanic. Vladislav's story has many similarities to those of Igor and Nikolay. He also became quickly disenchanted with the Afghan war. He told me that sometimes, when he was repairing tanks, he found pieces of human flesh in the treads, which made him shudder. Like Igor and Nikolay, he also began transmitting arms to the mujahedeen. He was also caught and beaten in a Soviet military prison, and he too managed to pull off a dramatic escape.

Since I last saw him nearly three years ago Vladislav has turned into a very handsome and confident young man. If he were attending an American college, he would probably be president of the student body. Since his defection Vladislav has written several articles on Soviet military tactics in Afghanistan and a fascinating account of his experiences from the moment he was drafted in Volgograd to his current life with the Afghan resistance. The detailed manuscript just could become a best seller in the West.

Because the Hezb-e-Islami party of Yunis Khalis, which is holding Vladislav and the two other deserters, has made it possible for me to correspond with the three men during the past two years, my meeting with them this spring was almost like a reunion with old friends.

Sergei, 22, with a typically Slavic face, high cheekbones, light brown hair and small blue eyes, was a part of the working class poor in the Soviet Union. He shared a

small room with his ailing mother in a communal apartment in Perm and hoped to take her to a spa some day. Before he was drafted Sergei worked as a welder in a factory, and at the same time he was learning to drive a truck. Not unlike many American teenage boys, Sergei had always wanted to be a truck driver. Thus, when he was assigned to drive a food delivery truck in Bagram, a major Soviet air base north of the Afghan capital, he was initially pleased.

Twenty-one-year-old Vadim, a short, street-wise young factory worker from Moscow, was trained as a demolition expert before he was sent to Afghanistan. Last year I found out quite by accident that he has relatives living outside of Boston, who are more than eager to have him join them.

What makes these three Soviet POWs different from the two dozen others whom I have interviewed is that they are actively fighting with the mujahedeen against Soviet and Afghan government forces. In this respect their hectic lives are a complete contrast to the unending idleness of Igor and Nikolay's existence. By now the three deserters have taken part in approximately twenty military operations, some of which they themselves had planned. Other Soviet army defectors in Afghanistan told me that they would do anything short of "shooting their own." What made these three cross that difficult psychological barrier?

"We had to show the mujahedeen that we truly support them, and that was the last step to take," they told me. As a "final sign of trust," their commander, Mahmud, a quiet, pensive man, has even given them permission to carry arms. During a fierce battle which took place in Nanganhar Province in January of this year, in which the three Soviet soldiers participated, 95 guerrillas and about 200 civilians were killed.

"We only experienced bombing raids," they wrote me

in a letter after the battle. "But the civilian population was subjected to extreme cruelty. Once again villages were burned, and women and children were knifed to death with bayonets." The three men also work as paramedics and sometimes write me how their patients are doing. The Afghan guerrillas are openly proud of their three Russian "relics," as the soldiers jokingly refer to themselves.

Naumov, Busov and Plotnikov deserted separately and in different parts of Afghanistan, but all within one month, in October-November 1983. Since that time they have been constantly together, like three Russian musketeers. "We have even begun to think alike during the past two-and-a-half years," said Vadim. "We don't regret that our lives have turned out this way, and if we had to do it all over again, we would," Sergei added. "Our lives have become interesting, they have assumed meaning," Vladislav remarked.

The letters which the three soldiers send me usually include special requests to help the still poorly equipped Afghan partisans. "Please send us binoculars, maps, manuals on defusing Soviet mines, and metal detectors," they wrote in the first letter, in January 1984. Another letter had an urgent plea for "those miraculous things, talkie-walkies." Luckily, the three soldiers have also asked for Russian books published in the West, newspapers, poetry and music cassettes, all of which I found vastly easier to send than the other items.

"During the past six years of war in Afghanistan I was probably the only demolition expert who was sent there," Vadim told me. "In Afghanistan it's the Soviet Union that's bombing villages and, naturally, I wouldn't be asked to defuse the very same bombs that we were dropping." Vadim was trained for five months in a special unit in Turkmenistan on how to defuse unexploded bombs and to evacuate people.

He says that he can take apart and reassemble practically any Soviet bomb that was made from 1943 to the present. What happened is that he had a fight with his platoon commander during basic training and threatened to kill him after he got out of the army. "No you won't," was the commander's response. "Because I will send you to a place from which you will never return." That place proved to be Afghanistan.

Vadim was sent to serve in a small guard unit at the Jalalabad airport, but after only one week he managed to escape. Vadim said that when he was still in Moscow he had already learned what was really happening in Afghanistan, and he wanted no part of it. When he was going through basic training he started devising an escape plan. After he arrived in Jalalabad, Vadim found out that Pakistan was only about forty miles away and decided to head in that direction.

Vadim walked away from his post one evening when he was on guard duty and almost everyone else was watching a movie. He loaded himself down with four automatic weapons and canned food, and walked all night. He had heard that in Afghanistan there was a free Russian unit fighting the Communists, and decided to look for it. Instead, he found the mujahedeen.

Vadim's reasons for deserting from the Soviet Army were somewhat unusual. But the most common reasons that Soviet servicemen in Afghanistan defect, which I had heard many times, were reiterated by Sergei. "When I was still in basic training I was told that in Afghanistan I would find American and Chinese mercenaries," he told me. "After I arrived in Bagram I asked an older soldier about this and he told me to throw this idea out of my head." Like other Soviet soldiers, Sergei quickly realized that the only foreign troops stationed in Afghanistan were Soviet, and that they were fighting the Afghan people.



Nikolay Golovin



Vadim Plotnikov



Sergei Busov



Vladislav Naumov



Nikolay Golovin and Igor Kovalchuk with their Afghan guards



Wakil Akberzai and Zmarai, one of the young resistance fighters who was accompanying us



Wearing the chaderi...  
Ludmilla Thorne is on the left



An Afghan freedom fighter brings a shy village girl to meet us



Igor Kovalchuk's drawing of Lt. Polovinkin holding head of Afghan resistance fighter



Ludmilla Thorne with her fifteen-year-old guide, Shamsullah

A second reason for deserting was the "constant humiliation" to which new recruits were subjected. In addition to carrying out their own regular duties, the young draftees are also continually on the run at the behest of senior enlisted men, who force them to perform such menial tasks as washing their laundry and their floors, polishing their boots, making their beds, and so on. One young deserter told me that he even had to wash his commander's feet. "The new recruits are treated like servants," said Sergei. And if they don't carry out every whim and fancy of the "dedy" or "grandfathers," as the older servicemen are called, the young draftees are ruthlessly beaten by the senior enlisted men, while officers turn a blind eye.

Several Soviet POWs with whom I have spoken told me stories of how some young recruits were either driven to suicide as a result of such offensive treatment or shot the abusing sergeants and officers in a state of total rage. "You can't tell from the bullets how they were killed because the mujahedeen use the same weapons as the Soviets," Vladislav told me. Sometimes such shootings take place in a one-to-one situation, and in some cases it happens as a group action. Vladislav described an incident where a whole unit of paratroopers killed their hated *politruk* (political instructor). "As they were scrambling along a narrow ridge, one of the paratroopers hit the *politruk* in the face, so that he fell over the edge and was killed," Vladislav said. "During the investigation that followed, everyone stood up for the guy who did it, and the case was made to look like an accident.

A third major reason for defecting, in Sergei's words, is the "unjust war" that is being waged in Afghanistan by the USSR. "I saw how an Afghan village was being bombed near Bagram," he recalled. "Why would they want to bomb this village, which was just six kilometers from a major

military unit? I asked myself. All of this influenced me in my decision to defect."

The extreme discrepancy in military pay is also a source of resentment. A private gets only nine rubles a month, whereas a lieutenant receives 250 or 300 rubles, as well as about 600 more rubles that are deposited in his bank account at home. "Majors' salaries are even higher and they also plunder and steal a lot over here," Igor told me. All Soviet servicemen, whether they are privates or officers, get paid in special ruble checks.

After spending numerous hours talking to Vladislav, Sergei and Vadim in Russian and in private, I became convinced that their support of the Afghan resistance is genuine. They even spoke of returning to Afghanistan if they should one day become American citizens, and of helping the mujahedeen even more. In this respect these three POWs are also different from most other Soviet army deserters with whom I have spoken. The others dream primarily of making their way to the West and starting a new life. A few want to return home, even if it means being shot or going to prison.

Whereas other Soviet army defectors could explain their acts of desertion with only vague ideological reasoning or none at all, because for them it was a split-second gut reaction, these three are sharply anti-Soviet in their convictions, and they have worked out in their minds a set of political concepts. A major element in their thinking is that there is a direct parallel between Nazism and Soviet communism, especially when it comes to the Kremlin's current policies in Afghanistan. The three men make constant comparisons between the tactics of Hitler's SS troops in World War II and the actions of the Soviet Army in Afghanistan.

Another important point they make is that "the

problem of Afghanistan is not only the Afghans' problem but that of the whole world." "Never forget that in Afghanistan real genocide is taking place," Vadim said, "and it has turned out that we too have become victims of this war."

The three deserters try to put their beliefs into practice by involving themselves in such activities as writing leaflets for distribution among Soviet forces in Afghanistan and making a three-hour television film. In view of the fact that few Western television journalists dare go inside Afghanistan, they hope to fill the gap with their own documentary.

But the soldiers know that regardless of what they may do while they are in Afghanistan, their possibilities will always be limited, and for this reason, Vladislav, Sergei and Vadim, like Igor and Nikolay, also wrote letters to President Reagan asking for political asylum in the United States, which I brought out with me and forwarded to the White House.

"In the USSR I am relatively free to move about, but I did not have the opportunity to think, write or to live freely," Vladislav writes in his letter to President Reagan. "With the Afghan partisans I have gained relative freedom of thought, but I have lost the relative freedom of movement," he continues. What Vladislav, Sergei and Vadim now want is "total freedom."

Members of the Hezb-e-Islami party have grown fond of their three Soviet friends, and I suspect they are releasing them with a heavy heart. But they also realize that the three young men cannot have a normal life in Afghanistan, and they also know that they can no longer return to the USSR.

The Afghan resistance groups that are willing to release their Soviet prisoners to the West emphasize that the Soviet POWs should be treated as human beings and not

simply as publicity ploys in the East-West conflict. And after three Soviet army deserters who were given asylum in the West returned to the USSR, mujahedeen leaders are also demanding that the defectors be provided with greater support to help them adjust to their new and difficult lives in the West.

"These boys are human, they need life, and they must have their own way of life," said Abdul Haq, a leading commander of the Hezb-e-Islami party who has been closely working with Naumov, Busov and Plotnikov. "But we don't want people in the West to drop them, so that the Soviets can contact them and take them back to the Soviet Union," he added. Abdul Haq was also quite offended when a representative of a militant Russian anti-Communist emigre group offered one thousand dollars per POW for their release. "They are not cows or cars; why should we sell them?" he asked.

Getting inside Afghanistan, whether it's to report on the war, to give aid to the wounded or to interview Soviet prisoners, is not a simple matter. Neither the Soviet government nor the puppet regime in Kabul allows for foreign journalists to have free access to the country. In 1984 Vitaly S. Smirnov, the Soviet Ambassador to Pakistan, issued a blunt warning to Western reporters, stating that Afghan guerrillas and "the so-called journalists accompanying them will be killed" upon entering Afghanistan. Finding itself under the shadow of a belligerent superpower that has already overrun its neighbor, Pakistan is understandably uneasy about journalists slipping across its borders into Afghanistan, even if it is to provide objective coverage on what is happening in the Soviets' unhappy domain.

I agreed to take three Canadian journalists inside Afghanistan to interview the Soviet POWs. Reaching Igor

and Nikolay involved a two-day journey inside the war-torn country. In order to clear nine Pakistani checkpoints leading to the Afghan border, we had to dress in Afghan clothing, in an effort to blend in with the mass of exotic looking humanity that quietly flows across the Afghan-Pakistani border. The men wore the traditional billowing pantaloons and long tunics, and I donned a *chaderi* or *burka*, a tent-like garment which streams down from the head. It is sleeveless and has only a small screen of grided cloth in front of the eyes, through which I could barely see. Before putting on the pale blue costume I watched Afghan and Pakistani women in Peshawar as they gracefully glided across streets and busy markets, like the make-believe ghosts that we are used to seeing on Halloween. But as soon as I put on my *chaderi* I nearly fell into the first ditch that I had to cross. With only a bit of frontal vision to go by, I was--and am--perplexed as to how Muslim women are able to navigate.

Because Wakil arranged for us to travel in a special vehicle that often crosses the border, we passed all nine checkpoints without challenge. Some minutes later, Wakil stopped the car and exclaimed: "Welcome to Afghanistan," after which I promptly took off my *chaderi*.

At a certain point in our journey, we changed our vehicle and pushed on in jeeps. Suddenly, the road came to an end. It was time for our party of sixteen people, four Western journalists and twelve mujahedeen guards, to abandon the jeeps and to start walking. Just as we were getting out of the cars with our water bottles and cameras we heard a thunderous roar and felt the earth shaking beneath our feet. "What's that?" I asked Wakil. "Can't you see that Soviet jet bombing that hill over there?" he calmly asked.

"Quickly, let's run under that tree," he continued, this time in a loud, strong voice. We scrambled to a gnarled *khawan* tree and cowered under it for several minutes. A

dull, droning sound hung overhead, after which we saw the silvery glimmer of two Soviet jets streaking across the sky, leaving long white tails of jet fumes behind them. Luckily, they unloaded their bombs somewhere behind us, and once again we heard the sound of an explosion. Just as we started to crawl out from under the tree's bony branches, we saw two more jets sparkling in the azure sky. "Run back under the tree," Wakil screamed. "If they see us they will take special action." That was his euphemism for being shot. Perhaps he was simply trying to calm us, but for a few moments my stomach was gripped with fear. A cavalcade of bizarre thoughts, including the realization that at any moment all of us might die, flashed through my mind. In other articles that I have written about Afghanistan I have often stated that Soviet bombs "strike fear into the hearts of the Afghan people," but now I know that it's more in the gut than in the heart. After a while the terrifying sounds of the jets melted away and the Afghan countryside once again fell into crashing silence.

Scrambling up and down steep rocky mountains seemed second nature to our Afghan guides, who pranced over them like sprightly mountain goats. I tried to put up a good front, but the combination of inadequate shoes and my asthma at times made the trek almost unbearable. At one point, when I was absolutely certain that I couldn't scamper yet over another single craggy hill, Wakil's fifteen-year-old nephew, Shamsullah, who became my own special guide, literally pulled me up and over. "You can do it," he said with a childish grin.

We often had to cross shallow streams, and whenever there were only two large stones for me to step on, Shamsullah would quickly find a third rock and splash it into the water, so that I wouldn't get my feet completely wet. It's moments like these that are never forgotten, and I'm

certain that this young Afghan boy will remain in my memory forever.

The monotony of the desolate mountains was suddenly interrupted by a green meadow. In the middle of it a small house appeared out of nowhere; its owners rushed out and offered us green tea. A few kilometers later, after scampering across a particularly scaly stretch of barren hill tops, we were again greeted by the splash of a wild meadow and an Afghan home. This time we were given a pail of cold buttermilk which we quickly passed around. Although I have never liked the white murky taste of buttermilk, at that moment nothing could have tasted better.

We often hear that the entire Afghan people support the resistance, which is why the Soviets' wrath spills over onto the civilian population in the shape of bombs and mortars. My brief experiences inside Afghanistan this spring and during three previous sojourns have confirmed my belief that this is so.

Our trip back seemed less strenuous and relatively uneventful. Shamsullah was again staying close to me, keeping watch over my panting efforts to keep up with the men. Towards the end of our long walk, when we were already coming close to our waiting jeeps, a colorfully dressed young Afghan woman and a child suddenly appeared across our path, like two apparitions. "Is that a man or a woman?" she asked, pointing her finger at me. "Can't you see with your own eyes that it's a woman?" Shamsullah replied. "But if she's a woman, what is she doing with all of these men?" she again asked, in deep wonderment.

The immensity of the Afghan people's suffering caused by the Soviet Union's invasion is beyond measure. Nearly a million Afghans have been killed by Soviet bombs, mines and other brutal means of modern warfare, and

another four million have fled the country. I shall never forget the shrivelled face of an old Afghan woman at the Hayatabad transit camp near Peshawar who had just escaped from her native village inside Afghanistan. Her entire family was wiped out by Soviet bombs right in front of her eyes. And how can one forget the sad face of an Afghan boy whose legs were blown off by a Soviet booby trap?

But the Afghan conflict has also been tragic for the Soviet people, whose teenagers must die in a war in which they don't believe. And it has created the hopeless situation of the Soviet POWs. I have here described only five of the two dozen prisoners that I have interviewed, but it is estimated that there are several hundred Soviet POWs inside Afghanistan.

One of the six army defectors who were given asylum in the United States, Nikolay Ryzhkov, returned to the Soviet Union in December 1984. When I first met Ryzhkov in August 1983 near the Afghan-Pakistan border he was eager to come to the United States, even though he was one of those deserters who had not seen much suffering in Afghanistan and had no concrete ideological beliefs. I helped secure Nikolay's release and that of another deserter, Alexander Voronov, and naturally was greatly distressed when Nikolay went back. Two Soviet deserters who were brought to England also returned to the USSR after receiving emotional letters and photographs from their families. The average age of the army defectors is twenty. The difficulties of adjusting to a new life, homesickness and the Soviets' devious and persistent efforts to lure the defectors back home must take their toll. Much also depends on the character of the individual person. "You shouldn't judge thousands on the basis of these three who went back, for people are different, no one is alike," writes Igor Kovalchuk in his letter to President Reagan.

Whether any Soviet defector can make a successful transition to Western life, be it Stalin's daughter Svetlana Alliluyeva or a farm boy who winds up in Afghanistan, depends, in the final analysis, on the internal makeup of the individual. Nikolay Ryzhkov didn't want to work, study or do much else unless he was pushed. Life in an open society where an individual must choose and decide for himself is difficult for such a person, especially when he is still so young. But most of the other eight Soviet army deserters from Afghanistan who are now living in Western Europe and in America are doing well. One of them, Nikolay Movchan, has also been actively campaigning in the United States and in Europe on behalf of Afghanistan and his fellow POWs who are still inside.

In mid-Sept. of this year, reports reached the West that Ryzhkov was sentenced to twelve years' strict regime labor camp. His going back has also made it even more difficult to get the American government to accept other Soviet army defectors, and the Soviet news agencies Tass and Novosti have issued some scurrilous attacks against me and others who have been involved in the POW issue. But I don't regret that we helped Nikolay Ryzhkov come here. It is always better to err on the side of good.

During the past three years I have conveyed numerous requests for asylum from Soviet prisoners in Afghanistan to our government. Some of these soldiers are now dead. The letters from the five army deserters described in this article were forwarded to the president on May 15. I have reported to American government officials on the horrendous conditions under which some Soviet POWs are held and have pleaded for help. As a private individual that is all I can do, but the response has been disheartening.

So far the United States has brought only six Soviet army deserters to this country, while in 1985 twenty-two

others were killed during desperate attempts to escape or to gain asylum. That is not a very good record. One would think that this administration would be more eager to help Soviet defectors reach these shores, in spite of the difficulties involved. Pakistan does not wish to allow the use of its territory as a transit for Soviet army defectors, in fear of the USSR's retaliation. But it is hard to believe that a superpower like the United States cannot extract a handful of Soviet teenagers out of Afghanistan. I wonder how long it would have taken the Soviet Union to bring American soldiers to Moscow, had they asked for asylum during the Vietnam war. Perhaps forty-eight hours?

Although most of the Soviet prisoners that I have interviewed are treated well by the mujahedeen, the treatment can vary, depending on the group that is holding them. The fundamentalist Hezb-e-Islami party of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar has kept some Soviet prisoners in dank underground dungeons. "Can't you get the Red Cross to come here, so they can see what's happening?" one Soviet POW whispered to me at a Hekmatyar stronghold that I visited in 1983.

Besides humanitarian considerations, it seems obvious that there are also important ideological reasons why Western countries should give political asylum to those Soviet soldiers who have asked for it. And I dare say that there is also a moral obligation on our part to respond. Once a Soviet soldier in Afghanistan has taken the crucial step of defecting, for whatever reason, he should surely be given the opportunity to live somewhere besides the bleak mountains of Afghanistan. We should not expect the Afghan resistance, which is involved in its own life and death struggle, to carry the burden of holding Soviet POWs. The mujahedeen must sometimes share their last meager rations with their Soviet captives.

A systematic method for screening, processing and

transporting Red Army deserters out of Afghanistan could be devised, similar to the program that was set up by the allies for Soviet army defectors and prisoners at the end of World War II. Those Soviet POWs who want to go home should be allowed to do so through the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), provided that they are not repatriated forcibly, and that they are also given information on their right to ask for asylum. Some Soviet POWs in Afghanistan whom I have interviewed didn't even know the meaning of the term "political asylum."

It is also necessary that the ICRC exert all of its efforts to help the mujahedeen's POWs, who are tortured and often shot on the spot by Soviet and Afghan government forces. There is yet another reason why a comprehensive, long-range POW program be set in motion. Namely, if a steady flow of Red Army deserters from Afghanistan were to make its way to the West, it just could act as yet another possible lever on the Kremlin leadership to force them to reconsider their policy in that country. It could induce them to give serious consideration to the idea of pulling their forces out of Afghanistan. But changes are very slow in coming, both in Moscow and in Washington.

In the meantime, the five Soviet army deserters whom I visited this spring and many others continue to be men without a country and without a future.

"We have spent many sleepless, anxious nights together with the mujahedeen...we have shared the last crumbs of bread and the last drops of water," writes Sergei Busov in his letter to President Reagan. "Is it possible that after all of this, my friends and I are destined to live a life of anguish and suffering, without freedom? Can it be, that this is all we deserve?"

Original Russian language letter to President Reagan written by Vladislav Naumov

Многочитаемому г-ну Р. Рейгану. 31.3.86.

Меня зовут Владислав Наумов. Я русский. Родился и вырос в городе Волоколамске. Велюю службу проходил в Афганистане, в городе Джелалабаде. В № 93992 - 66. В 1983 году, 1 октября, я добровольно перешел на сторону афганских борцов за независимость, в среде которых каюсь и по сей день.

Первое, что предприняло мой киде - это отращивание к советскому образу жизни и вообще к советской политике, которую СССР проводит в Афганистане.

Второе, что повлияло меня на этот естественный шаг - это отращивание статьи свободности. Я хочу статьи свободности и говорю об этом вполне откровенно, как человек переживший войну и жестокости КГБ.

В СССР я обладаю относительной свободой передвижения, но не имел возможности свободно жить, писать, думать. В кругу афганских партизан я приобрел относительную свободу мысли, но потерял относительную свободу передвижения. Так уж получается, что наизя око, т.е. то, к чему человек стремится сквозь смерть, он в то же время теряет другое и нежелательное.

Вместе со своими друзьями - В. Глоцкийким и С. Буковал, мы провели против афганских и советских коммунистов около 20-ти военных операций. Вместе с партизанами мы делили воду и хлеб, вместе мы кормили детей. Мужьям наших братьев, потому что наши братья относились к афганцам в духе под естественных правил. И поэтому наши афганские друзья не против того, чтобы мы получили свободу в свободном мире. По крайней мере они пока

Translations of letters to President Reagan written by five Soviet POWs in Afghanistan:

Dear Mr. President:

It is now the third year that I'm with the Afghan partisans. In terms of time in general three years is not a long period, but in the life of a human being...

All of this time my friends and I have been trying to make our way to the Free world, but so far it has all been without any results. We are rejected, Western countries are turning away from us. But why? What are we guilty of? I, a former (Soviet) soldier, voluntarily laid down my arms and joined the resistance, in hope of finding freedom.

In the USSR I lived like millions of other Soviet citizens. I finished school, then the PTU (professional technical school) and later worked at a factory as an electrician-welder. A human being is so created that he is constantly dreaming of a good, happy life and all of his life he strives toward that dream. But what can you do with this dream in a country where a person is considered merely as a cheap working unit? My parents and I lived in a communal apartment where we were allocated a room which was 14 square meters. Living in such cramped quarters, we couldn't even dream of a three-room apartment, not to speak of a happy life.

On April 2, 1983, I was taken into the army. I was literally taken, because no one asked me whether I wanted to go or not. Two months later I was already in Afghanistan, where I came face to face with real communism: lying, genocide, lawlessness, humiliation, betrayal, servility, etc. I could go on listing its other similar qualities without end. I didn't want to support all of this then, and I will not do so in the future.

I completely support the Afghan partisans and their just struggle for their country's freedom. We have spent many sleepless, anxious nights together under one sky, and we have shared the last crumbs of bread and the last drops of water. It is so difficult to remember all of this!

Is it possible that after all of this, my friends and I are destined to live a life of anguish and suffering, without freedom? Can it be, that this is all we deserve?

Of course, I have achieved freedom in Afghanistan. I can take

walks and express myself freely, but this can happen only in a tight circle, in Afghanistan. I cannot tell the world what is happening here, I cannot exert myself on behalf of Afghanistan. My friends and I need total freedom, and we see this freedom in the image of your country. In America we will be able to join our American friends and together fight for the observance of human rights.

Of course, I understand your feelings regarding Nikolay Ryzhkov's returning to the USSR, but I can assure you that my friends and I have no intentions of doing this. Judge for yourself: first of all, we do not agree with Soviet policy, not only regarding Afghanistan, but concerning the entire world, and the Soviet people themselves don't agree with it. And secondly, we have fought against Afghan government soldiers and Soviet troops. Part of the fighting took place in Nanzian (Ninganhur Province), where the three of us took part in more than ten operations. In some of these battles the results depended on how well we could manage our military assignments. We would be shot in the USSR just for our thoughts, not to speak of our participation in armed battles. All three of us fully understand this, and there can be no thoughts of our going back.

Mr. President, I, Sergei Busov, and my friends, Vladislav Naumov and Vadim Plotnikov, ask you to let us come to the United States of America! This is our last hope of having a chance to *live* and not simply to exist. Please extend your helping hand to us, who are innocent victims of this damned war.

Respectfully yours,

/s/ Sergei Busov

P.S. Ludmilla Thorne, a staff member of Freedom House, knows all about our matters. She knows more about us than anyone else and will be able to make direct contact with us at any moment.

March 31, 1986

Dear Mr. President!

This appeal comes to you from a former Soviet soldier who was stationed in Afghanistan and who did not want to participate in the genocide which the Soviet government is conducting there with the hands of Soviet people.

I would like to tell you a little about myself. My name is Vadim Alexandrovich Plotnikov. I was born on February 13, 1965, in Moscow, where I lived and went to school. My life in the Soviet Union was hardly any different from that of the average Soviet citizen: I went to kindergarten, to school, and then to work. After completing eighth grade, I had to start working because my family needed extra means of support. You know that simple people in the USSR live on the poverty level. I continued my education at a night school for working youth.

In May 1983 I was drafted into the Soviet Army and went through basic training at an aviation unit in Soviet Turkmenistan. After finishing this military training, which lasted five months, I was sent to Afghanistan.

I went over to the side of the Afghan patriots voluntarily, with my weapon in my hand, because I did not agree with the policies of the Soviet political leadership.

My own political convictions are obviously against the Communist ideology. It is now the third year that I am with the Afghan resistance and my main goal is liberty. I want to be a free person and to live in a free country. It is precisely for this reason that I deserted from the Red Army. I turn to you as the president of America and as a very good person and ask you to grant me and my friends *political asylum in the U.S.A.*

During the years that I spent in Afghanistan I had to live through a lot and to observe many things. Only here did I see the true face of Soviet communism and came to the conclusion that the main enemy of freedom is Soviet fascism.

I have relatives in the U.S.A., who love me very much and who are waiting for me, and thus, I would like to live in America and be reunited with them. In America I will be able to speak up publicly against the war in Afghanistan and also fight for human rights in the USSR.

I believe that you will pay heed to our difficult situation and will help us come to America. I ask that you take a personal interest in our case because otherwise some people who are not interested in our release may stand in the way. I would like to assure you that for me, there is no way back, because for a year now I have taken up arms against the Communists and I am fighting to defend the freedom of

Afghanistan. In no way can I wish to return home. I believe that those soldiers who returned to the USSR have committed a crude and crass act against the entire Free world.

I believe in you and hope that you will personally help me and my friends. With best regards.

Yours,

/s/ Vadim Plotnikov

P.S. All necessary information about us can be obtained from Ludmilla Thorne, a staff member of Freedom House.

April 1, 1986

Dear Mr. Reagan:

My name is Vladislav Naumov. I am Russian. I was born in the city of Volgograd. I served my military duty in Afghanistan, in the city of Jalalabad, with unit number 93992-66. On October 1, 1983, I voluntarily went over to the side of the Afghan freedom fighters, and up to the present time I am still within their ranks.

The first reason which prompted my escape is that I detested the Soviet way of life and the Soviet policy in Afghanistan. The second reason why I took this suicidal step is that I wanted to become free. I wish to become free and say this quite honestly, as a person who has gone through war and has spent time in a KGB prison.

In the USSR I was relatively free to move about, but I did not have the opportunity to think, write or to live freely. With the Afghan partisans I have gained relative freedom of thought, but I have lost the relative freedom of movement. Thus it has turned out that while I have attained that which I tried to reach even under the threat of death, I have at the same time lost something else, which was also important.

Together with my combat friends V. Plotnikov and S. Busov, we have taken part in approximately 20 military operations against Afghan and Soviet Communists. We share with the partisans our water and our bread, and together we feed the lice. The *mujahedeen* believe us because our personal relationships were formed in battle, under the whiz of flying bullets. And for this reason our Afghan friends are not against our desire to gain freedom in the Free World. At least, at the present time, this is what they believe. As a former member of a paratroop

assault regiment, I am taking this opportunity to ask you to make it possible for me to live in a Free and perhaps the most developed country in the world--America.

It would be strange if I were to return to the USSR, because I very well know what awaits me there, and you, Mr. President, know it as well. Such are the laws in my country.

Quite some time ago I came to the firm decision that I must live and not simply exist. We do not want to consider ourselves as animals or mere shadows. It so happens that Soviet people must seek their paths to freedom in the most extreme ways, and after we also took such steps, we grew disappointed in some people. Now our hope lies only in you and no one else, and we are appealing to you as president and a fighter for peace in the entire world. And perhaps it may sound somewhat presumptuous, but I believe that it is precisely you and no other person who can make the decision that America should grant me and my friends political protection.

If you will refuse us in our appeal, I will have to resort to the most extreme and final means. I believe in you!

Yours,

/s/ Vladislav Naumov

May God protect you!

P.S. Our only and truest friend in the U.S.A. is L. Thorne. Through her you can learn all of the details about us. 3/31/86

Dear President Reagan:

I am a former Soviet soldier who voluntarily crossed over to the Afghans. I am currently in my sixth year as a prisoner of war and now you are my only hope. I ask you to give me political asylum in the free country of America.

Yes, I know that some soldiers who were given asylum in the West returned to the Soviet Union, and by doing this they closed to us the door to the free world. But please don't judge all of us the same. To forget the grief and the difficult life that I was leading I smoked hash, but then I understood that this would only make it more difficult for me to reach the West. I have now stopped all of that and have become a healthy human being, and as a healthy person I once again appeal to you.

I, Nikolay Vasilyevich Golovin, was born in the Ulyanovsk region on January 30, 1962. I went to school and worked as an electrician and as a chauffeur. I also want to work in America.

Respectfully yours,

/s/ Nikolay Golovin

April 3, 1986

Dear Mr. Reagan:

I am writing you because you are the president of the freest country in the world. I, Igor Leonidovich Kovalchuk, did not want to kill children and women; I did not want God to judge me for having spilled blood. In Afghanistan I learned to understand the entire Soviet government system, and learned to hate the violence that man can exert over man. I left the army in hope of reaching the free world, where I can follow the dictates of my soul and not that of a knout.

I have been in Afghanistan for six years. America is a freedom-loving country which defends human rights. I ask you to give me political asylum. We know that three Soviet soldiers who came to the West have returned. But you shouldn't judge thousands on the basis of these three, for people are different, no one is alike. It is true that during the course of four years I smoked hashish, but please try to put yourself in my place, and think what it was like, to sit all this time within the walled confines of a mud hut, and that's all. Yes, I smoked, but now for the past five months I have stopped.

I am writing you the truth, I have nothing to hide, but I just can't wait anymore. People have been promising to help us for three years. And our only hope now is you. I hope that you will help us. As for hashish, please don't be afraid, I won't touch it any more.

With great respect,

/s/ Igor Kovalchuk

May God grant you happiness and many years of life without war. Amen.

P.S. In order to bring us out of here, Ludmilla Thorne, a representative of Freedom House, will know how to find us.

## FREEDOM HOUSE

Freedom House is an independent organization that places human freedom in the broad context of individual rights and global politics. Freedom House believes that civil rights at home and advocacy of human rights abroad depend upon American power, its prestige, and its human values.

In international affairs, these values concentrate our attention on violations of human rights by tyrants on the right as well as the left of the political spectrum. At home, our values stress the need to provide all citizens equality of opportunity, not only in law but in daily civic and private performance.

Freedom House has a very active program that includes bimonthly and annual publications, public advocacy, press conferences, lecture series, and research of political rights and civil liberties in every country.

## THE AUTHOR

Ludmilla Thorne is director of Freedom House's Center of Appeals for Freedom. She previously served as executive director of the Third International Sakharov Hearings held in Washington, D.C. in September, 1979. Born in the Soviet Union of Russian parents and educated in the United States and Europe, Ms. Thorne has written numerous articles and book reviews on Russian and East European subjects for the *New York Times Magazine*, the *Wall Street Journal*, *Life Magazine*, the *New Leader* and other publications.

During the last three years Ms. Thorne has made four trips inside Afghanistan, where she interviewed Afghan resistance commanders and Soviet POWs. She arranged and accompanied journeys for ABC's "20/20" program, Australia's "60 Minutes," *Life Magazine* and the Canadian newspaper, the *Whig Standard*.

Ms. Thorne helped secure the release of two Soviet army defectors who were later given political asylum in the United States, and she has led the campaign to bring more Red Army deserters who have asked for political asylum to the West. Her most recent trip inside Afghanistan was made in March and April of 1986, at which time she brought out the Soviet soldiers' moving letters to President Reagan cited in this publication.

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