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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH ON
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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH ON
VALENTIN IVANOVICH VARENNIKOV

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Fort Leavenworth, Kansas

July 1989

The views expressed here are those of the
Soviet Army Studies Office. They should not
necessarily be construed as validated threat doctrine.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Name: Varennikov, Valentin Ivanovich, General of the Army

Current Post: Deputy Minister of Defense, Commander-in-Chief of Soviet Ground Forces

Born: 15 December 1923

Place of Birth: Krasnodar

Nationality: Russian

Father's Occupation: Professional soldier and General of the Soviet Army [General-Lieutenant Ivan Semenovich Varennikov (1901-1971) served as General-Colonel A. I. Eremenko's Chief of Staff on Stalingrad [later Southern] Front (October 1942 - April 1943). During this period N. S. Khrushchev was a member of Front's Military Council.]

Education: Cherkassk Military Infantry School (1941); Graduate Frunze Military Academy (1954) [gold medalist]; Graduate Voroshilov General Staff Academy (1967) [gold medalist]; Higher Academic Course at the Academy of the General Staff (1975)

Party Affiliation: Party Member (1944), Delegate to the 24th, 25th, 26th and 27th Party Congresses, Candidate Member of Central Committee, CPSU, 1986-

Legislative Positions: Deputy of the Supreme Soviet of USSR for 9th and 10th Sessions; Deputy of the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR for 11th Session.

Decorations and Awards: Hero of the Soviet Union (March 3, 1988); 2 Orders of Lenin; Order of October Revolution; 4 Orders of the Red Banner; Order of Kutuzov, First Degree, Order of the Patriotic War, First Degree; Order of the Patriotic War, Second Degree, Order of the Red Star; "For Service to the Motherland in the Armed Forces of the USSR"

Military Career: Entered Red Army in 1941, graduated from accelerated course at Cherkassk Military Infantry School in the same year; took part in heavy fighting associated with Battle of Stalingrad; served with Stalingrad, Southwestern, 3rd Ukrainian, and 1st Belorussian Fronts during the war; in both August and October 1943 took part in heavy fighting and was decorated for valour; during the Battle for Dnieper Senior Lieutenant Varennikov served as a battery commander in 100th Regiment of 35th Guards Rifle Division and was cited for organizing effective fire support for the battalions in the face of a heavy German attack; in 1945 Captain Varennikov served as Deputy Chief of Regimental Artillery and took part in Berlin Operation with the 35th Guards Rifle Division, which, as part of V. I. Chuikov's 8th Guards Army, was involved in heavy fighting in

Berlin; postwar service and commands are unknown; graduated from Frunze Military Academy in 1954 and in the same year given command of a unit; in 1967 graduated from Voroshilov Academy of the General Staff and given command of a division; in 1970 assigned to Group of Soviet Forces Germany and in May 1971 appointed Deputy CinC Group of Soviet Forces Germany; in 1972 promoted to General-Colonel; in July 1973 appointed Commander of Carpathian Military District, serving there until August 1979; promoted to rank of General of the Army in 1978; in October 1979 appointed Deputy Chief of the General Staff and Chief of a Main Directorate; in 1982 named First Deputy Chief of the General Staff [one of three]; in 1985 took over Command Group charged with running the "Afghan phase" of the Soviet Intervention and directed the withdrawal of Soviet forces in 1988-1989; 15 February 1989 named Deputy Minister of Defense, Commander of Ground Forces.

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Sources: Voennyi entsiklopedicheskii slovar' (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1986); Geroi Sovetskogo Soiuza: Kratkii biograficheskii slovar' (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1988) two volumes; Harriet Fast Scott, "Biography of General of the Army V. I. Varennikov," Bright Stars (McLean, VA, 1984); Edward L. Warner III, Hosephine J. Bonan, and Erma F. Packman, Key Personnel and Organization of the Soviet Military High Command (Santa Monica: Rand, 1987); "Two appointed to watch over Afghan transition," Jane's Defense Weekly, (5 November 1988), p. 1156; "Kochetov replaces Lushev in Soviet High Command," Jane's Defence Weekly, (4 March 1989), p. 339; Richard Woff, "Army General Valentin

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Varennikov -- Commander-in-Chief Soviet Ground Forces," Jane's Soviet Intelligence Review, (May 1989), pp. 219-222.

Analysis: General of the Army Valentin Ivanovich Varennikov is one of the last "old soldiers" on active duty with the Soviet Armed Forces. Varennikov, whose father was a professional soldier and general officer, began his service during the trying first days of the Great Patriotic War. Early wartime experiences shaped his professional outlook. After completing an accelerated course at the Cherkassk Military Infantry School, Varennikov joined the fighting around Stalingrad in 1942. From then until the spring of 1945 he fought his way across Eastern Europe, serving as a battery commander and regimental artillery officer. During this period he served with the 35th Guards Rifle Division, which was formed out of the remnants of the 8th Airborne Corps in the summer of 1942. In the Battle of Berlin that division was part of Marshal Chuikov's legendary 8th Guards Army. Reflecting on the hard-learned lessons of the early years of the war, Varennikov has written: "The art of defeating a powerful and ruthless enemy did not come to us at once, but only gradually as we acquired combat experience. I am a witness to how, battle-by-battle, operation-by-operation, the organizational abilities of our commanders and staffs and the combat mastery of the division's sergeants and soldiers rose."¹

For Varennikov, as for others of his generation who served as junior officers during the war, the most important test of competent military leadership has been the ability to meet that test of defeating a powerful and ruthless enemy. Such officers have sought to avoid the costly and painful lessons of mastering the craft of soldiering during combat. A key ingredient in producing such leadership was the creation of an independent, innovative commander able to foresee developments and take decisive actions. His own combat experience, including his performance on the Dnieper and at Berlin, for which he was decorated, emphasized the telling advantages of "swift, clear, independent decision."² These would be themes later stressed in his own tactical writings.

General of the Army Varennikov is one of that cohort of officers who rose to prominence in the mid 1970s. They all served as junior officers during the war, stayed in the military during the dark postwar years, and began their advancement in the post-Stalin era. Varennikov enrolled at the Frunze Military Academy in 1952 and graduated with distinction in 1954. One of

¹ V. I. Varennikov, "Predislovie," in: N. I. Afanas'ev, Ot Volgi do Shprei (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1982), p. 5.

² Ibid., p. 117.

his classmates was then-Major F. Krivda, now General of the Army and Senior Representative of CinC, Joint Warsaw Pact Forces, in Hungary. These years marked the beginning of profound changes in the Soviet military associated with the acquisition of nuclear weapons and the post-Stalin "thaw" which permitted much wider debate and discussion in the Soviet military.

During the next decade his father's connections with N. S. Khrushchev during the war--Varennikov senior served as Chief of Staff to the Stalingrad Front/Southern Front at the same time Nikita Sergeivich was a member of the Front's military council--may have served the son's career well during an era of stormy changes and force reductions. In 1965, Varennikov the younger was selected to attend the Voroshilov Academy of the General Staff. He graduated a gold medalist in 1967, sharing that distinction with Sergei Akhromeyev, the future Chief of the Soviet General Staff. Following graduation from the Academy he received command of a division and was posted to Group of Soviet Forces Germany. Selected as a bright and promising star within the Soviet officer corps, Varennikov was designated a delegate to the 24th Party Congress in March 1971 and has been a delegate at every Party Congress since then. Two months later General-Lieutenant Varennikov was appointed Deputy CinC Group of Soviet Forces Germany. It was at this juncture that Varennikov's professional writings begin. These, in turn, were shaped by his initial and subsequent assignments. In 1972 he was promoted to the rank of General-Colonel.

The first cycle of Varennikov's writings concerned his immediate problems as a troop leader and trainer. His initial article in Red Star in August 1972 came at the end of the summer exercise season and addressed the problem of training battalion commanders to exercise initiative through tactical exercises. Varennikov noted that everyone was opposed to "passivity," but that in exercise after exercise he had seen too many situations where junior commanders were satisfied to observe the enemy and wait for orders, rather than seize the initiative and destroy the enemy. Training exercises should be designed both to bring out the qualities of activeness and independence in commanders and to aid commanders in seeking ways of fulfilling their tasks which would have the most powerful effect upon the enemy in the attack and defense.³ Varennikov was looking for independence within the plan.

Success in his role as Chief of Staff GSFG led to Varennikov's posting in 1973 as Commander of the Carpathian Military District, a post which he held until 1979. During this

³ V. I. Varennikov, "Cherta komandirskogo kharaktera: o vospitanii boevoi aktivnosti na takticheskikh ucheniakh," Krasnaia zvezda (9 August 1972), p. 2.

six-year period Varennnikov continued to address the theme of training effective battle field commanders. Within a year of his appointment, the District had scored a major success in the "Socialist Competition" which the Party had initiated within the military. During the 1973 training year, a guards tank regiment in his district won the Defense Minister's pennant for excellence in exercises. Other units and subunits had also distinguished themselves. These successes were given prominent play in the military press in 1974 and brought Varennikov a certain aura among military district commanders. In closing the meeting to honor the district's "right flankers" [hard chargers] Varennikov challenged his units to even more successes in the next training year.⁴ Varennikov set an example of demanding much from his subordinates, but he also acted as a patron to advance their careers. As examples of promising leaders, Varennikov drew attention to such officers as LTC Lev Generalov, who went on to command in Afghanistan.⁵

Key to the district's successes were the staffs which had made sure that the subunits took training seriously, followed the established norms, and met the assigned tasks. In 1975, Varennikov again returned to the theme of training officers to make independent assessments of the developing tactical situation in rapidly changing combined-arms combat. His target was school-solutions and stereotypical responses to assigned missions. He stressed the lessons of tactical combat drawn from the Great Patriotic War, stating: "Front experience has shown that precisely the commander's independence and initiative often are the deciding factor in victory over the enemy."⁶

In October 1975 Varennikov published in Military Herald the culminating article in his speculations about the qualities of tactical commanders. Here he further developed the theme of improved training and enhanced battlefield performance by subunit commanders. The quality Varennikov chose to emphasize was "creativity," which he closely linked to independence and activeness. The key to developing such skills was to make training exercises into real tests, i. e., to replicate in

⁴ "Pobediteli sorevnovaniia -- na prieme voennogo soveta," Veonnyi vestnik. No. 1, (January 1974), p. 37. The term "right flankers" refers to those subunits which by the excellence have won the right flank position in the order of battle.

⁵ Ibid., pp. 15-17. See also Richard Woff, "Army General Valenint Varennikov -- Commander-in-Chief Soviet Ground Forces," Jane's Soviet Intelligence Review, (May 1989), p. 13.

⁶ V. I. Varennikov, "Samosotiatel'nost' -- cherta komandirskaiia," [Independence -- a Feature of a Commander] Krasnaia zvezda (March 28, 1985).

peacetime the role of combat in wartime when "each battle was a school." Varennikov noted the value of two-sided, tactical exercises because of their competitive aspect and stressed their utility, stating that such exercises "are the best way to check the command qualities of officers and the efficiency and operational abilities of staffs." He also stressed the advantages of live-fire exercises for developing command skills. Varennikov noted that modern combined arms combat often involved situations where platoons and companies must act on separate axes. Battalion commanders would do well to cultivate initiative among their subordinates to deal with a larger, more complex, and dynamic battlefield. This approach to troop control at the subunit level imposed new responsibilities on commanders and their staffs. Training exercises should be structured so that staff officers develop a "single mind with the commander and catch his meaning at once."⁷ In 1975, Varennikov returned to Moscow for the Advanced Academic Course at the General Staff Academy, and in 1976 he was a delegate to the 25th Party Congress, a manifestation of his ties with the Party-state elite surrounding Brezhnev.

In 1977, Varennikov again displayed what he had accomplished with the Carpathian Military District and earned the warm praise of Defense Minister Grechko. Exercise Karpaty [Carpathia], held in July 1977, proved a great success. Hereafter, his writings, while they still addressed tactical themes, also contained a more distinctive political focus in keeping with the emerging Cult of Brezhnev. Consequently, Varennikov stressed the ties between his Military District and General Secretary Brezhnev, who had served as its first political officer at the time of its establishment in 1945-1946. Varennikov was modestly pro-detente but firmly in favor of keeping his powder dry to deter any adventures by imperialist circles. Finally he described the WTO war fighting abilities as the best check upon NATO.⁸

In August 1977, Varennikov repeated the successes of the past training year in Carpathian Military District, especially the successful exercises [Karpaty] concluded in July. This time the Minister's pennant had been won by another regiment in the district, one from the Samara-Ulianovsk, Berdichev Iron Motorized Rifle Division of Civil War and Great Patriotic War fame. Varennikov's focus now, however, was on ways of raising the quality of training. The District's previous and current successes in Socialist Competition had their roots in Party and

⁷ V. I. Varennikov, "Tvorchestvo komandira na pole boia," [Creativity of the Commander on the Field of Battle] Voennyi vestnik, No. 10, (October 1977), pp. 18-32.

⁸ Prisiage rodine verny [Faithful to the Oath to the Motherland] (L'vov: Kamenyar, 1977), pp. 3-8.

getting rear service staffs inside substandard units and subunits up to speed.¹¹

Varennikov continued to serve in the Carpathian Military District until 1979. His writing during his last two years there did not break any new ground. He did introduce the theme of enhanced physical training and conditioning as a part of higher combat readiness.¹² His last article as Commander of the Carpathian Military District linked current training, past victories of Soviet forces, and the peace and prosperity of the present. Varennikov thus wrote in the spirit of "mature socialism" and the late Brezhnev era's self-satisfaction. He used the Lvov-Sandomierz Operation of 1944 to associate the history of the military district with the current peace and prosperity. He wrote, "You see how it improves, how year to year this fine region becomes richer."¹³

In late 1979, Varennikov was appointed Deputy Chief of the General Staff and returned to Moscow on the eve of one of the most momentous decisions of the Soviet leadership in the postwar period: the move to intervene directly in Afghanistan with Soviet military forces. Varennikov has been one of the few Soviet military officers to comment on that decision. As a senior officer in the Soviet General Staff he was an active participant in the decision. In a recent interview with Artem Borovik, Ogonek's war correspondent, Varennikov emphasized the General Staff's reluctance to intervene and stated that both Marshal Ogarkov, then-Chief of the General Staff, and General of the Army Sergei Akhromeev, then-First Deputy Chief of the General Staff, "and certain other comrades had a negative attitude toward this step."¹⁴ In another interview for New Times Varennikov singled out Marshal Ogarkov as an opponent of military intervention, but made him the institutional voice of the General Staff. "Even at that time some military leaders - then Chief of the General Staff Marshal Nikolai Vasil'evich Ogarkov and the

¹¹ V. I. Varennikov, "Proverka na prochnost'," [A Test of Firmness] Tyl i snabzhenie Sovetskikh Vooruzhennykh Sil, No. 11, (November 1977), pp. 29-33.

¹² V. I. Varennikov, "V interesakh boevoi gotovnosti," [In the Interests of Combat Readiness] Krasnaia zvezda, (7 June 1978).

¹³ V. I. Varennikov, "Podvig v Prikarpat'e," [Achievement in the Carpathians] Krasnaia zvezda, (30 August 1979).

¹⁴ Artem Borovik, "Afganistan: Podvodia itogi," [Afghanistan: Summing Up] Ogonek, No. 12, (18-25 March 1989), p. 8.

General Staff as a whole -- spokeout against the introduction of our troops into Afghanistan."¹⁵

Varennikov put the responsibility for the decision to intervene on the political leadership and especially on Brezhnev and Minister of Defense Ustinov. However, he noted that the international situation, especially deteriorating US-Soviet relations played a major role in the decision. Varennikov further stated that the General Staff opposed conducting large-scale combat operations, leaving those to the Afghan Army, instead proposing to use Soviet forces to stabilize certain regions by deploying Soviet forces in what he calls the "garrison option." Rather than desiring a rapid build-up of forces to prosecute a Soviet war against the Afghan resistance, the General Staff proposed a gradual increase. Varennikov stated: "It is now clear that the line proposed by the General Staff at that time was correct in principle."¹⁶

The chief villain in drawing Soviet forces into active combat operations, according to Varennikov, was Moscow's newly appointed head of the Kabul Government, Babrak Karmal. Varennikov described Karmal as an opportunist and demagogue, who used Soviet backing to prosecute his own internal political games within the factions that made up the Kabul Government. In the end, Karmal's chief sin was simply "incompetence and inertia." The outcome was, however, a government policy which undermined support for the Kabul Government and intensified its isolation and vulnerability. Karmal's attacks upon Islam were especially short-sighted and counter-productive. They increased the ranks of the resistance. Varennikov criticized certain unnamed Soviet advisors for not grasping the destructive impact that Karmal's factional fights were having on the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan [PDPA]. He attributed this to a disastrous lack of knowledge of "oriental affairs." From Varennikov's assessment it would appear that only the Afghan Security Organs under Najibullah had any idea of what was, in fact, transpiring in the country.¹⁷

Varennikov's own immediate responsibilities within the General Staff during the period 1979-1985 are unclear from available sources. Richard Woff has speculated that Varennikov was closely involved in planning for the invasion and the conduct

¹⁵ A. Usvatov, "Ne po prognozam oppositsii," [Not According to the Forecasts of the Opposition] Novoe vremia, No. 13 (24 March 1989), p. 12.

¹⁶ Borovik, "Afganistan: Podvodia itogi," [Afghanistan: Summing Up] Ogonek, No. 12, (18-25 March 1989), p. 8.

¹⁷ Ibid., 9.

of subsequent military operations.¹⁸ However, Varennikov's writings during this period, as befitting the imposed silence within the Soviet press regarding the Soviet military role in Afghanistan, offer no clues. Indeed, the very absence of such writing may be positive evidence of other, over-riding concerns. Between 1979 and 1985, Varennikov wrote only one article, a brief tribute to M. N. Tukhachevsky on the 90th anniversary of his birth in February 1982. This article in its portrayal of Tukhachevsky as the ideal soldier-communist, military thinker, and innovator, stressed his role in developing the theory of deep operations and the creation of mechanized forces. In line with the pre-glasnost practice of down-playing the consequences of the "cult of personality," Varennikov treated the Marshal's death as a "tragedy," never mentioning either his execution as a supposed traitor and enemy of the people or his subsequent rehabilitation.¹⁹

During the same period Varennikov also took part in a press conference organized by the Ministries of Defense and Foreign Affairs to announce the publication of Whence the Threat to Peace, Moscow's slick answer to the US publication, Soviet Military Power. This effort to counter charges of a Soviet military threat with an emphasis on the US threat was replete with accusations that the Reagan Administration was preparing for war against the USSR. Varennikov's main concerns were to provide a military justification for the deployment of SS-20s on military-technical grounds, depicting the program as a modernization of theater nuclear forces and rejecting out of hand the US "zero option" solution to the European theater-nuclear forces.²⁰

Varennikov's next writings did not appear until 1985. By that time the interregnum of the post-Brezhnev era had ended, and M. S. Gorbachev was already General Secretary of the CPSU. At the time of this article, Marshal Sergei Akhromeev had already appointed his former fellow gold medalist to take charge of the process of Afghanizing the war. However, Varennikov's article addressed another, equally pressing concern. The 27th Party Congress was scheduled for early 1986, and a new Five-Year Plan

¹⁸ Woff, "Army General Valentin Varennikov -- Command-in-Chief Soviet Ground Forces," Jane's Soviet Intelligence Review, (May 1989), p. 231.

¹⁹ V. I. Varennikov, "Polkovodets," [Commander] Krasnaia zvezda, (16 February 1982).

²⁰ "Voennaia politika SShA -- politika agressii," [The Military Policy of the USA -- A Policy of Aggression], Krasnaia zvezda, (26 January 1982).

would be approved at that time. Already in 1984 Marshal Ogarkov had sounded warnings about the need for redoubled efforts to modernize the Soviet military to meet the challenge of a new revolution in military affairs, associated with the appearance of new technologies. Varennikov's article, although it still contained the rhetoric of "mature socialism" and the need for "vigilance" in the face of the threat from imperialism, contained a cardinal emphasis upon the need to shift to "quality" in keeping with the need to develop "new types of weapons and combat equipment, including high-accuracy conventional weapons and weapons based upon new physical principles."²¹

While intensely involved in Afghanistan, Varennikov wrote his only strictly historical article, an assessment of the Berlin Operation of 1945 as a multi-front offensive. This piece with its usual charges against Western bourgeois falsifiers and specific analysis of those features of the Berlin Operation which are still important for Soviet military art was neither original nor very probing.²² Varennikov is not, as some analysts have asserted, a closet historian. This article was little more than a compilation of Soviet secondary works. It was, however, the essay of a participant, who fought through those costly battles for each block of the city. Varennikov is a soldier's soldier, a combat veteran, a very competent general staff officer, and a hard-driving troop leader with impressive political skills. In a crisis situation he was one officer to whom Marshal Akhromeev could turn with confidence, as he did during the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Station disaster. While General of the Army I. A. Gerasimov was in charge of the military efforts, it was Varennikov that Akhromeev made the General Staff's point man during the critical period of May-July 1987 and later.²³

Varennikov has discussed at some length the process of Afghanization of the war. This process involved not only the gradual removal of Soviet forces but also a shift in the political content of the war towards greater efforts to co-opt elements of the resistance and to increase both the political and military capabilities of the Kabul Government. It was Varennikov who put into practice the Gorbachev-Akhromeev policy of

²¹ V. I. Varennikov, "S uchetom potrebnostei oborony," [Taking into Account the Needs of Defense] Krasnaia zvezda, (16 December 1985).

²² V. I. Varennikov, "Klassicheskii primer nastupleniia gruppy frontov," [A Classical Example of the Offensive of a Group of Fronts] Voенно-istoricheskii zhurnal, No. 8 (August 1987), pp. 12-19.

²³ Borovik, "Afganistan: Podvodia itogi," [Afghanistan: Summing Up] Ogonek, No. 12, (18-25 March 1989), pp. 30-31.

redefining the war.²⁴ In this regard Soviet military withdrawal was both a part of overall grand strategy of retrenchment to deal with domestic problems and tactical adjustment to fight the political struggle in Afghanistan more effectively. Varennikov recently and rather candidly outlined this policy and assessed its consequences. Against a divided opposition which lacks both political unity and military unity, the Soviets were able to complete Gorbachev's announced withdrawal, get a face-saving political solution in Geneva, and leave in place an Afghan Army that has proven much more combat capable than resistance and Western assessments have assumed. Varennikov has made it quite clear that his central insight into this process was to take as given the realities of Afghan society, the role of Islam, the power of tribal and regional loyalties, and inability of the resistance to shift from ambush and raiding actions to successful war-terminating, general operations.

In this regard he now sees Jalalbad as the proof of the pudding. Varennikov has pointed out that in the process of withdrawal of Soviet forces, the Resistance failed to move in to fill the any vacuum left by the withdrawal of Soviet forces. Moreover, the three-stage withdrawal was conducted in just such a manner so as to increase the reliability of the Government's forces and means, broadly construed:

We must speak about the reliability not only of the army but also the party-state apparatus. It is natural that the civil war has left an impression on all strata of the population: family ties, traditional connections, and so further exist. Of course, it would be quite wrong to say that all goes well there. The internal problems are numerous. But now all has been mobilized for the struggle. The matter is clear, the stability of different sub-units and different organs are different.

But we should not leave out of consideration those contradictions, which exist in the ranks of the opposition. Conflict among them goes on constantly at the top and directly in the localities. This, undoubtedly, also has left an impression on the general situation.

I personally hope that our friends will retain power.²⁵

Assessing the current situation, Varennikov sees two paths for Afghanistan: either national reconciliation under the Kabul

²⁴ "Marshal Akhromeev's Post-INF World," The Journal of Soviet Military Studies, I, No. 2, (June 1988), pp. 173-174.

²⁵ Usvatov, "Ne po prognozam oppoozitsii," Novoe vremia, No. 13 (24 March 1989), p. 12.

Government or a continuation of the fighting. Kabul, in Varennikov's opinion, is politically and militarily ready to follow either course to a successful conclusion. He agrees with Najibullah that there is, indeed, "a light at the end of the tunnel."²⁶

On February 15, 1989, the day when General-Lieutenant Gromov led the last Soviet forces out of Afghanistan, the Soviet Ministry of Defense announced General of the Army Varennikov's appointment as Chief of the Soviet Ground Forces. Since then Varennikov has been honored with election to the Congress of People's Deputies, and has emerged as a prominent spokesman in defense of the military against its critics in this era of glasnost. In that capacity he has discussed the role of the 40th Army in Afghanistan and its contribution to the political and military stabilization of the Kabul regime. He has defended the Army against the charges of Andrei Zakharov that Soviet troops waged a bloody war in Afghanistan, even machine-gunning their own wounded.²⁷

Regarding the role of the Army in perestroika, Varennikov addressed a set of themes relating to the relations of the army with Soviet society at large and to questions concerning the fate of the Army itself. Varennikov sees very strict limits to openness and defends the Army's role in quelling domestic unrest in the Caucasian Republics and Central Asia. The use of Army and Internal troops in those cases was justified in the face of banditism, terror, and a conspiracy of the domestic enemies of socialism. Varennikov has defended universal conscription against those calling for a territorial-militia system on the grounds that the armed forces are still a school of Soviet patriotism and a melting pot where the sons of the nations that make up the USSR learn to live together. One of his chief concerns has been to maintain the quality of the Soviet officer corps during the current period of force reductions. The mistakes of the early 1960s cannot be repeated, no competent young officers should be forced out of the service. Those officers who do retire must be provided for. At the same time, this cannot be done at the expense of serving officers. Varennikov is particularly concerned about housing retirees but notes that thousands of officers with families now in service have no quarters. Since officers get no housing allowances, this creates its own hardship for these officers and their families.

²⁶ Valerii Vavilov, "Svet v kontse tonnelia," [A Light at the End of the Tunnel] Krasnaia zvezda, (23 May 1989).

²⁷ V. I. Varennikov, "'U nashei armii -- odna pochetnaia funktsiia'," ["Our Army has One Honorable Function] Krasnaia zvezda, (15 June 1989).

He concludes with a call to struggle against those who want to drive a wedge between the Army and society. Under perestroika the Army remains true to its duty of defending the socialist Fatherland. "Army service," he asserts, "as long as the necessity for it continues, remains the obligation and sacred duty of the Soviet man."²⁸

In conclusion, General of the Army Varennikov is one of the last of that generation of officers whose military careers and professional views were shaped by direct combat experience in the Great Patriotic War. The son of a professional soldier, he is himself a very competent professional, combining the talents of troop leader and general staff officer. As Chief of the Soviet Ground Forces he is very likely to continue to patronize the careers of talented "right flankers" whom he will try to groom for Army leadership over the next decades. His handling of Afghanistan suggests that he is a very effective strategist who understands the connections between war and politics and has the will and ability to put strategy into practice. At 66 years of age, he is one of the old guard in a rejuvenated Ministry of Defense and General Staff. His success in Afghanistan has won him the confidence of Gorbachev. The chief question concerning his future impact on the Soviet Ground Forces will depend upon the length of his tenure.

²⁸ Ibid.

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