

Record of Conversation between M.S. Gorbachev and Prime Minister of India R. Gandhi

July 2, 1987

[....]

M.S. Gorbachev.

Thus, about Afghanistan. You know about some things. I also want to report that a lot of new things have been happening recently. We are engaged in an active exchange of views with the Afghan leadership, including through closed channels. Recently E.A. Shevardnadze made an unannounced visit there, as well as Cdes. Kamentsev and Kryuchkov.

Right now, the Afghan leadership believes the policy of national reconciliation needs new impulses, to protect it from disruption by a counterrevolution or the mujahideen. The Afghans have freed themselves from leftist slogans and leftist programs, from the idea of transitioning from a tribal system directly to communism, bypassing all stages. Now they set themselves more realistic goals and adhere to more realistic approaches.

They are preparing new proposals to expand the regime's social base, to change the nature of power in the country, so that it reflects the complex, motley structure of Afghan society. Right now, they are working to create new parties that would reflect the interests of the various layers of Afghan society. They are prepared to share power and portfolios in the government. They are inviting the current regime's opposition, which is in Pakistan as well as in Europe, to join them in a coalition. In other words, they are carrying out the line they formulated, and which received our support, and, to the best of our knowledge, your support as well. This is a line for the creation of an independent, non-aligned Afghanistan that would be friendly with all its neighbors, and not a springboard for the United States.

The Afghan leadership now has a broad program. It will become increasingly legitimized. There are plans to extend the ceasefire for another six months. Real steps are being taken to change the situation, to transition to a new power structure that would fully reflect the nature of Afghan society.

R. Gandhi. The tribal factor is very complicated. There are a few areas in our country with tribal structure society. I spoke about this a great deal with African leaders, they also have a lot of regions of this kind. A tribal structure differs very sharply from society where it does not exist. Therefore, we must be particularly careful when we offer them any kind of solutions. In India, we have very small states that are home to three-four tribes. We have their representatives in our Party. However, the conflicts between them are so strong that our common ideology cannot overcome them. That is why I think we must be extremely cautious when taking any steps in Afghanistan. It would be very important for the Afghan government to keep this in mind in order to prevent the weakening of society, so it does not become a springboard for external forces.

M.S. Gorbachev. Until now, they only nominally took it into account. The current leadership puts forward ideas and takes steps realizing the importance of this factor. They are

talking with tribal leaders, holding local jirgas, preparing for a general Afghan jirga. Consultations with the tribes are conducted on a broad basis. This is Najib's strong side. He actively seeks contact with various powers, tribes. Karmal proclaimed slogans of communism, slogans that were far from the realities of Afghan society. The current leadership looks at things more realistically.

Secondly, major steps are being taken in the social sphere. Efforts are aimed at making life easier for people. In this regard we are helping the Afghans. Assistance is being provided to various strata of society, more favorable conditions are created for merchants, tradespeople, artisans, the Islamic clergy. All this work covers a wide spectrum. At the same time, we are telling the Afghans: there is no time to lose, get things moving as much as possible while we are still there.

R. Gandhi. What is Pakistan's reaction to all this?

M.S. Gorbachev. Pakistan is torn. The Pakistanis understand the difficulty of maintaining a confrontation with the Soviet Union and India. They would like to get in direct contact with us on these issues. We are getting corresponding signals, including from the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Recently there was another interesting signal, which is apparently timed to your arrival in Moscow. A group of Pakistani generals, clearly not without the blessing of Zia-ul-Haq, appealed to our military attaché. They asked to convey to Gorbachev personally that Pakistan will never allow American bases on its territory. This, of course, is a gesture of a symbolic nature, so to speak, but as such it deserves attention.

R. Gandhi. If the situation is as they say, then there should not be any difficulty to conclude a peace and friendship treaty that we offered to Pakistan.

M.S. Gorbachev. This is, apparently, a game. At the same time, I think behind this gesture there is a real understanding of the situation.

The situation is rather complex. It was influenced by our talks in Delhi and all the statements we made in support of Afghanistan and about Pakistan's actions. As far as we know, the fact that neither you nor we made any threats to Pakistan made an impression. Instead, we appealed to Pakistan to think the situation over and take a more realistic position. Apparently, large segments of the Pakistani population were impressed by the fact that we did not dismiss Pakistan, and did not follow the path of accusations.

I have to say that all Cordovez talks about is withdrawing troops. Pakistan does the same. But we know that when the Pakistanis made a concession in Geneva and reduced the term by just one month, they got a lot of trouble from the Americans.

So, if we talk about the main obstacle to speeding up the political settlement of the Afghan problem – it is the position of the United States. The Americans understand that keeping tension in Afghanistan pushes Pakistan into their arms. Moreover, they want the current situation to continue, because it allows them to discredit the Soviet Union [...].

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[Translated by Anna Melyakova for the National Security Archive.]

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