

**Excerpt from Record of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and George Shultz
April 22, 1988 Moscow**

GORBACHEV: Now, about Afghanistan. It seems to me that now the positions have become clearer. The Soviet Union, Afghanistan - and I mean its current government - are in favor of Afghanistan being a neutral, non-aligned state. As far as Iran is concerned, Prime Minister Mousavi recently had received a messenger from Zia-ul-Haq. They spoke about the necessity to depose the current regime and create a union of Islamic countries on a fundamentalist basis.

SCHULTZ: I do not think Pakistan wants that.

GORBACHEV: This is Iran's position. This is what Mousavi said to Zia's messenger. I do not know how he responded.

It appears to me that the United States and Pakistan lack realism. Zia and the United States are still tempted to try and overthrow the current regime in Kabul. This is where I see the main danger.

I would like to express the following thought: if the Soviet Union only had in mind the preservation of what is currently in place, and did not allow for anything different-- no coalition, no recognition of the rights of the opposition, it would have been unrealistic. It would not have been in line with the exchange of opinions that you and I had about the future of Afghanistan that we envision as a neutral, non-aligned state.

I do not know now how the Afghans will act. Especially now, when we are leaving, it all became less clear. But we do not get all our information from Najibullah; we receive a lot of interesting information through other channels. But, to the extent possible, we will act in the context of those exchanges of opinions you and I had.

Of course, we have no direct agreement in that regard between us; we are just acting as guarantors of the settlement. Nevertheless, we attach great importance to the way the United States is acting in this region. After the signing of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, the Geneva Accords are a big event.

By the way, I forgot to ask. Will this treaty be ratified?

SCHULTZ: Yes, it will be ratified.

GORBACHEV: Good.

Therefore, right now, after the Treaty, the question[s] of how we are going to act in this region, how we are going to untie this knot assume a special importance. This is a test case of whether

we will be able to develop our collaboration or it all will go back to the old approaches. And this is important not only for the two of us. The whole world is watching us. A precedent is being created.

Our conclusion is as follows: if you decline to cooperate with us in achieving the goal of making Afghanistan a neutral, non-aligned state, if you prefer a different approach, it will be very difficult for us to engage with you on other issues. And the world will say that it is risky to rely on Soviet-American guarantees.

So, what is the main difference between our positions? We, as much as we can, sympathize with Najibullah's efforts to form a coalition. You sympathize with the cause of deposing him, putting another regime into place, based on an entirely different "coalition." I think that it would be a serious danger to the process of political settlement if you started seeking benefits for yourself, if you did not abandon the temptation to get an Afghanistan that is convenient for you, instead of creating a neutral, non-aligned government there.

See, it is easy to talk to me. I am not blowing smoke the way diplomats do, I am using a clear political language, saying what I think.

SCHULTZ: We support the idea of a neutral, non-aligned Afghanistan. We want Afghanistan to achieve a certain level of internal stability, above all things because we want there to be the conditions necessary to allow refugees to return home safely, to use the fruits of the agreements that we are the guarantors of. We do not know where the Afghans will arrive in the process of settling their internal matters, it is a mystery for us. However, they will arrive somewhere.

Afghanistan has historically been a country of great diversity, a country of tribal instincts, which is hard to tame with the power of a central government. We will see later how it turns out in the end. But we are in favor of a neutral, non-aligned Afghanistan that would occupy its place in the region and would play a reasonable, responsible role.

We support providing assistance to refugees and providing economic assistance for the purposes of rebuilding the country. We support Cordovez's efforts in creating an interim government. But, I repeat, I simply do not know how various groups within Afghanistan will settle the matter.

GORBACHEV: Okay. I would also like to highlight another aspect that is looming on the horizon right now. Now, the "alliance" intends to move to Iran. And you provide them with military assistance. What is it, assistance for Iran?

SCHULTZ: No, thank you very much (both laughing).

GORBACHEV: I just wanted to point out this interesting moment in passing. Well, we will entrust the remaining questions to you and E.A. Shevardnadze.

SCHULTZ: We will do our best.

GORBACHEV: I will appreciate any progress. I will be disappointed if there is none. Right now, we need really great efforts to turn the relationship in the right direction. Otherwise, we may lose everything we have achieved and leave it scattered in the wind. In order for this not to happen, it is necessary to act reasonably and thoughtfully and not under the influence of a moment, of emotions.

Please give my regards to the President. Tell him that I am very pleased with our conversation. Pass it on to him that we are in favor of continuous progress in our relationship, we are against building our policies on the basis of some impulsive reactions. I would really appreciate if, at the beginning of his visit, the President told me the same thing I told him during our one-on-one conversation in Washington: let's not engage in mutual accusations, let's make real policy. I came to Washington to make real policy.

SCHULTZ: Okay.

E.A. Shevardnadze and I will continue our efforts in preparing the meeting at the highest level. We discussed the question of whether we need one more ministerial meeting. I am in favor of such a meeting.

GORBACHEV: And I would also like to say that you need to work even harder in order to make a meeting at the highest level substantive and meaningful, as we have discussed.

SCHULTZ: And we want it, too.

GORBACHEV: Our conversation today was a meeting of old friends. And I am glad that this meeting took place, this conversation with people who understand the significance of the Soviet-American relations. We are all in favor of improving them, because the time has come, [our] life has led us to this.

SCHULTZ: I agree with you. As usual, I highly appreciate the opportunity and the privilege to meet and talk to you. I know that the President is waiting for this opportunity, as well. Thank you.

Translated by Dayana Sarova for the National Security Archive

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