

## **Excerpt from Record of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and James Baker**

February 9, 1990

[...]

**Gorbachev:** E. A. Shevardnadze told me that you had a good conversation about Afghanistan but that there was not much movement.

**Baker:** On our part, we have moved, but not enough for you.

I think, right now, some movement on the part of the U.S. is not the most important thing. Our influence on the Mujahedin is limited. Although, I have to admit, we have certain influence over Pakistan. We are in favor of political settlement in Afghanistan. And there is just one individual, one person, who stands in the way of this settlement. We cannot persuade the Mujahedin of anything until there is some mechanism guaranteeing that at the end of this transition process, there will be a different government. Therefore, I am arguing that the process should be started. Besides, we are not demanding that Najibullah step down before the start of the process. We only need to be confident that in the end result, he and his closest associates, not even the entire PDPA, will leave the stage. If we have that confidence, then we have a good chance to convince the Afghan interim government, the main Mujahedin leaders, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia to support the process of creating first a transitional government, and then a government of national reconciliation representing all the elements of the Afghan society and capable of governing the country.

I hope you know—I spoke many times about it—that we are not interested in an Afghan government that would be hostile to the USSR. We have no interest in a victory of the fundamentalists. But we will not be able to assist in the political settlement if we do not give assurances that in the end of the process this man, installed by foreign troops, would leave the stage. His authority is not any more legitimate than the authority of the Afghan interim government, which—and we admit that—is also not quite legitimate.

**Gorbachev:** Let them boil in their own juices over there. Maybe something will come out. We are now more on the sidelines. In any case, we cannot give orders.

**Baker:** We also cannot give orders to anybody. We would be able to do something only if we can say that in the end Najibullah would leave.

**Gorbachev:** He said somewhere recently that he does not demand guarantees that he would stay in power. But we cannot impose preliminary conditions.

**Shevardnadze:** After yesterday's negotiations I had an impression that we have the basis for discussions with the United States.

**Baker:** We would be glad to discuss this issue in detail. Maybe you could try to convince the government in Kabul to agree to hold Shura, to start the first stage.

**Shevardnadze:** Najubullah supports holding Shura, but in Kabul.

**Baker:** He already tried to convene Shura twice with no success.

**Shevardnadze:** But the Mujahedin also tried it and failed.

**Baker:** If Shura is allowed to take place, but in conditions where security is guaranteed, then maybe something will begin.

When you said “let them boil,” I thought that we have the same feeling. As we say in America, we don’t want any cheese, we just want out of the trap.

**Gorbachev:** Same with us. We want a settlement that would be acceptable for everybody in the region, including for Pakistan, India, Iran and so on.

**Baker:** Then let the process begin. Who knows, maybe something will come out. Maybe Najibullah ...

**Shevardnadze:** Najibullah proposes free elections.

**Gorbachev:** Don’t you always speak in support of free elections?

**Baker:** But he wants these elections held under his auspices, and that is unacceptable.

**Shevardnadze:** No, he wants these elections to be held under the UN auspices.

**Baker:** We will not be able to persuade the Mujahedin. This is a difficult problem.

**Gorbachev:** You know, today, when our relations and the situation overall reached a new stage, we are less concerned about this problem. I am concerned about the reputational aspect. Because starting from Afghanistan, we started to implement a new approach to regional conflicts, started to search for ways to political solutions. Therefore, it would be very good if we could complete this process to everyone’s satisfaction.

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