

Politburo Session, 13 November, 1986
Notes of Anatoly S. Chernyaev

Regarding the further measures in Afghanistan

Gorbachev: My intuition tells me—something is worrisome. I am afraid we are losing time! Everybody is getting used to it. I guess they say, well, there is a war going on, everything in its turn, such is life. “The strange war!”—soon they will attach this term to us.

Najib has the right thing in mind: he thinks that there needs to be a consolidation of the political leadership as well as directing full attention to the peasants.

... Since we have taken a position, comrades, we need to stick to it. This is war, after all! We've been at war for 6 years already! Some are saying that if we carry on like that, it is going to go on for another 20 or 30 years. That's what it will be!

First of all, this is casting doubt on our military capability. Our generals are not learning their lessons. It could be that they just cannot apply themselves fully there! But we do have the past experience from Angola, Ethiopia, and Mozambique. There must be a learning curve. They took lessons from Vietnam... Here you cannot move large formations or tank armies. We need to find the keys to this war.

People are asking themselves: what, are we going to be stuck there indefinitely? Or maybe we should just end this war? Otherwise we're going to be ashamed of ourselves in all respects.

Our strategic goal is to complete this war and pull our forces out in one or, at most, two years.

Gromyko admits that neither the social conditions nor any of the other circumstances were analyzed sufficiently when we “agreed to provide military support” to Karmal. He is suggesting that we now turn to the king (*who has emigrated to Italy*), then convince the Americans to make joint efforts, to reach out to London, and to establish contacts with Pakistan.

The situation is worse than it was 6 months ago. We can't put this off any longer. Time is not on our side.

Our goal is to make sure that Afghanistan is not a hostile nation, but rather a neutral state. We must salvage what we can of the social situation. Most importantly, we need to end the war and get our troops out. Let us sign a treaty if we need to, and so on.

Chebrikov: We have not been able to seal the border around Afghanistan, nor have we been able to get as much done as we could have. (The Dushmen) have changed their tactics. They have gone underground. They are bristling everywhere.

Nothing will be solved through military means, we need to step up our efforts to find a political solution. Najib still hasn't been to Moscow. With Karmal, however, we had five high-level

meetings. This fact serves Karmal's goal in the opposition. We have to invite Najib to come and to decided everything together with him.

We're interfering with his efforts to replace the personnel instead of telling him decisively to do as he knows and thinks necessary... since we trust him.

Instead of thinking about what is most important—how to end this war, we are mired in details.

Gorbachev: I thought that we had already authorized Najib to do just that.

Shevardnadze: We must end this war, and to do that we need to have negotiations on all directions. We need to set the time-table for withdrawal. If we do not set it [publicly], the negotiations will collapse.

Our comrades, both here and in Afghanistan, just cannot get used to the fact that they are dealing with a sovereign state. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Defense, and other agencies are simply not used to it. This is why our position—let Najib decide it all himself—is not working.

We should give him full freedom of action. And concentrate our authority in one center—otherwise it is not clear who is in charge there—the KGB or the army.

We are not going to be able to do anything until the Afghan leadership is fully independent.

We need your decisive word, Mikhail Sergeevich.

Gorbachev: We set the goal clearly: we need to facilitate this process so that, in the end, we have a friendly, neutral country, and pull out of there.

Dobrynin: We need an Afghan version of the Reykjavik summit. We should give Najib full freedom of action ...

Gorbachev: Why are raising this question again? Why aren't all of you doing this, anyway? What office has passed a decision that directly contradicts the Politburo's decision?! If there is something that does not fit right, you should sit down and discuss it (*to the representatives of various agencies*).

...And then: Najib's Politburo did not support him with the idea of national reconciliation... But we do have a conception. We confirmed it at the Politburo, but there is no implementation of the concept.

(*Apparently addressing Akhromeyev—A. Ch.*) We got ourselves into this mess—we did not calculate it right, and exposed ourselves in all aspects. We weren't even able to use our military forces appropriately. But now it's time to get out ... We've got to get out of this mess!

Akhromeyev: (*makes a brilliant report—A. Ch.*) After seven years in Afghanistan, there is not one square kilometer left untouched by a boot of a Soviet soldier. But as soon as they leave a place, the enemy returns and restores it all back the way it used to be.

We have lost this battle. The majority of the Afghan people support the counter-revolution now.

We lost the peasantry, who has not benefited from the revolution at all. 80% of the country is in the hands of the counter-revolution, and the peasant's situation is better there than in the government-controlled areas.

Gorbachev: In accordance with the line that was agreed upon in October 1985, our goal is set clearly: to speed up the measures that would ensure that we have a friendly nation there and leave. Yet, on all fronts, our political, diplomatic and economic measures have not achieved any progress whatsoever. Karmal had a simple policy: to just sit there and govern, and to leave the fighting to us.

There was panic in Kabul when they learned that we are going to leave.

Tabeyev (*the Soviet ambassador to Afghanistan*) was replaced in order to show them that we serious about the Afghan independence. But what has become of this? We are still doing everything ourselves. Our comrades are used to it. They are tying Najib by his hands and feet.

To sum up, the realization of the conception is proceeding poorly.

We need to get out of there and leave behind a friendly, neutral nation. Najib has to have a social base for this, there has to be some extensive diplomacy, not to mention a strengthening of the Afghan army. How we handle this is a matter of life and death for Nadjib and his allies after the leave.

There are two points that must be squarely met for this:

- 1) We need to get completely out of there within two years, and pull 50% of troops out each year.
- 2) We need expand the social base of the regime, and for that to ensure a real balance of political forces in the leadership. Then let them boil in their pot with all their eastern pluralism.

We should conduct business with their entire Politburo. We will have to deal with Karmal, and even reach out to those who consider each other 'bandits'—although 80% of them are like this.

We must put the matter of our withdrawal bluntly before them and give them a timetable: 50% the first year, and 50% the second year.

We should enter into direct negotiations with Pakistan. There are already 3 million refugees there from Afghanistan. It could turn out to be a real mess.

... It is not like we want socialism there. Plus, the U.S.A. is not going to send in its armed forces if we leave. What does that mean if there's not going to be any American landing-strips or army bases in Afghanistan? Let the Afghans make decision on all the rest themselves.

Akhromeev: (confirms that the U.S.A. is not going to send its forces to Afghanistan.)

Gorbachev: That is why we need some brave decisions that would tie the Americans to our line.

[Let us] invite Najib here in December.

[Let us] create a group in the Poliburo on Afghanistan, and put Shevardnadze as its head. Chebrikov, Talyzin, Murakhovskii, Sokolov, and Tabeev will be members of the group.

Addresses to Kryuchkov (*Deputy Chairman of the KGB*): It will not be an ordinary affair to take the troops out after having sent them in? Yes! But nobody objects to it. Is that so? Agreed.

The first person who should be fired for the failures in the realization of the conception is Murakhovsky (*in charge of supplies to Afghanistan—A. Ch.*). Instead of sending notebooks to schoolchildren, he is sending tons of steel, and kilometers of rail-line...
(*spoken as if a joke—A. Ch.*)

[Source; The Gorbachev Foundation archive, Moscow, Fond 1, Opis 2
Translated by Jayson Stoinski and Svetlana Savranskaya, for the National Security Archive]