

December 10, 1987

Conversation between M.S. Gorbachev and Ronald Reagan on Afghanistan (Excerpt)

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Summary:

Gorbachev and Reagan discuss the withdrawal of Soviet troops in Afghanistan. Gorbachev asks that on the day they begin the withdrawal the United States also cease supporting the opposition forces.

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Russian

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M. S. GORBACHEV. Yesterday I touched on the Afghan issue. I will say frankly: I have noticed from your side a certain restraint and unwillingness to get involved in discussing the ideas I expressed about solving the Afghan problem. Therefore I would like to stress that we are ready to talk seriously with you on this topic; moreover, to agree on several principal aspects.

If you want, then we will not make this agreement public. The Soviet Union would name a specific date for the withdrawal of its troops, and the United States would obligate itself to halt aid to known Afghan forces. That is, we would act synchronously. On such-and-such a day we would begin the withdrawal and on the same day you would cease aid to the forces in the opposition. When we name a day then it would simultaneously signify that from that date our forces would not participate in combat operations except in cases of self-defense. I again stress that we don't want Afghanistan to be pro-Soviet or pro-American. We think that it should be a neutral country.

It seems to me that such a suggestion provides a basis for our cooperation in resolving the Afghan issue. But I have developed the impression that the US takes the following position on this issue: the Soviet Union is "tied down" in Afghanistan, and let them get out of there however they want, and the United States will criticize all the time and then impede the withdrawal of our troops.

If you actually take such a position then it will be hard for us to find a common language. All the same, let's think together about some businesslike approach and joint practical steps. In our summary document we could write down in a general way that we discussed the issue about Afghanistan. (...)

R. REAGAN. In reply to the ideas you expressed I'll try to explain to you what difficulties we have in regard to, let's say, Afghanistan or Nicaragua. The present Afghan government has its own armed forces. If we agree with you that the Soviet Union withdraws its troops and we halt aid to the freedom fighters in Afghanistan, then they would end up disarmed before Afghan government troops and would be deprived of any opportunity to defend their right to participate in a future government. Therefore we think that within the framework of our decision with you the Afghan government troops should also be disbanded. This would allow both sides to take part in a discussion of the settlement process on an equal basis...

G. SHULTZ. Regarding the Afghan issue, we think the working group has made a step forward. The Soviet side let us know that the issue of troop withdrawal is not tied to the conclusion of the process of national reconciliation. This process will take quite a lot of time and the Afghan people themselves will determine through what stages it must pass. It means that one element that has been lacking until now can be included on the agenda at the next stage of the Geneva talks, namely the withdrawal of Soviet troops.[\[1\]](#)

M. S. GORBACHEV. On condition that it is tied to the issue of American aid to opposition forces; that is, the day of the start of the troop withdrawal should be the same day that American military aid stops. If such an agreement is reached, then Soviet troops will cease participation in military operations and observe a cease-fire from the start of the withdrawal. The rest (creation of a coalition government, etc.) the sides will do and implement, whether by themselves or using the mediatory mission of Cordovez.

I can repeat what I said this morning - we want the new Afghanistan to be neither pro-American nor pro-Soviet, but a non-aligned, independent country. If we agree to withdraw our troops and the US does not stop financial and military aid to the opposition forces then the situation would only deteriorate further, which would make it impossible for us to withdraw troops. Therefore we tie troop withdrawal to the

cessation of aid to opposition forces and outside interference.

I think that our discussion of this issue was good. I propose that henceforth we put this discussion on a more practical basis and begin a specific discussion about it.

G. SHULTZ. Yesterday in the working group the Soviet side welcomed US support of the Accords already reached in the Geneva talks. We said that one important agreement is lacking between us at present, namely the time of Soviet troop withdrawal.

M. S. GORBACHEV. [Translator's note: possible a word missed due to a spurious character at the beginning of the sentence] [More] about cessation of American aid to Afghan opposition forces. Let's agree on the time and announce it. But if you need additional time to think, please, think. But right now we are inviting you to make a specific joint step.

It would allow [us] to verify how sincerely the US administration is trying to ease the situation in Afghanistan. For us this verification would have great importance inasmuch as it would allow us to correctly assess US actions in other situations also.

G. SHULTZ. At the Geneva talks a proposal was made that the United States could halt deliveries of lethal weapons to Afghan freedom fighters 60 days after the start of the Soviet troop withdrawal.

One more issue remains unresolved, namely how the process of national reconciliation will proceed, in parallel with the Soviet troop withdrawal or whether the Soviet side agrees to include in the summary document a point that both sides support the Accords on Afghanistan which were reached at Afghan-Pakistani talks in Geneva.

Eh. A. SHEVARDNADZE. We are not tying the issue of the timing of the Soviet troop withdrawal to the process of national reconciliation, which naturally will be a long process. We confirmed this again yesterday.

M. S. GORBACHEV. It can be said in the concluding document that after conclusion of a summit meeting the USSR and the US will begin specific work on this issue through diplomatic channels with the participation of interested parties.

G. SHULTZ. We do not object.

[\[1\]](#) Several rounds of UN-sponsored talks on Afghanistan between Pakistani and Afghan officials had taken place in Geneva since June 1982. The tenth round of the negotiations opened in Geneva on 26 February 1987.