

January 22, 1987
Notes from Politburo Meeting, 21-22 January 1987
(Excerpt)

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Summary:

Gorbachev and his advisors discuss new Afghan president Mohammad Najibullah and the possible drawdown of Soviet troops.

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SHEVARDNADZE. Najib makes a very good impression, but not everyone supports him, even in the leadership. Some comrades are vacillating. But he speaks correctly when he says he has no other people. He has taken the initiative into his own hands. I think that the mujaheddin[1] chiefs have miscalculated in refusing to talk. The country's economy is in ruins.

Little remains of the friendly feelings toward the Soviet people which existed for decades. A great many people have died and not all of them were bandits. Not one problem has been solved to the peasantry's advantage. The government bureaucracy is functioning poorly. Our advisers' aid is ineffective. Najib complains of the narrow-minded tutelage of our advisers.

I won't discuss right now whether we did the right thing by going in there. But we did go in there absolutely without knowing the psychology of the people and the real state of affairs in the country. That's a fact. And everything that we've done and are doing in Afghanistan is incompatible with the moral character of our country.

GROMYKO. It's incompatible that we went in?

SHEVARDNADZE. And this, too. The attitude toward us is more negative than it seemed to us.

And we're spending a billion rubles a year for all this. An enormous sum, and responsibility needs to be taken for it. And count up again in every detail how much Afghanistan costs us at the present time. [Soviet Premier] Nikolai Ivanovich [Ryzhkov] doesn't have such data right now. But in the United States they think we'll need 2 billion a year and the Japanese think 3 billion. I'm not talking about the lives of people.

GORBACHEV. We won't talk right now about how this revolution came into being, how we reacted, and how we vacillated about whether or not to deploy troops.

GROMYKO. Yes, yes.

GORBACHEV. Right now we need to proceed from what we have at the present time and what steps need to be taken.

GROMYKO. I agree with the description of Najib...

Probably with Najib's consent some kind of coalition government agreeable to us needs to be created...It would not be suitable to the pursuit of our new policy to recall our advisers.

RYZHKOV. The report by Eduard Amvrosiyevich [Shevardnadze] gives a realistic picture. Previous information was not objective. The situation forces us again to approach the problem in a serious way. Nothing needs to be simplified. Najib's personality is important, of course...But...

GORBACHEV. Each village there is full of such personalities.

RYZHKOV. It's an illiterate society. The Revolution led to a worsening of the people's situation. We need to pursue a firm policy of getting out of there in two years. It's better to pay with money and kerosene, not with men. Our people don't understand what we're doing there. Why we have been there seven years.

It is easy to leave, [but] we can't just throw everything to the whims of fate. Many countries would forsake us. We need to take steps so that when we leave, affairs proceed toward the creation of a neutral, friendly Afghanistan.

What steps should be taken? An army. Why not a paid army? What will prevent it from deserting? - Good money. They don't believe in slogans (...) Generally speaking, I would not reject the idea of a mercenary army out of hand.

It is better for us to hand out weapons and ammunition. And have them fight themselves if they want to. Actively guide a parallel political settlement. Everything needs to be used: contacts with Pakistan and with the US.

[Yegov] LIGACHEV. We cannot bring them freedom by military means. We have suffered a defeat in this cause. And the information of Eduard Amvrosiyevich is the first objective [information], although it is grave. We didn't consider the consequences and set our hopes on the military way. I think the policy of national reconciliation is correct.

If the question is put before the people: is it better to let our people, our soldiers die, or to give every kind of aid? I think that every person to the last man will favor the second path.

And to work on the Pakistani avenue, with India, with China, and with America. But to leave like the Americans did from Vietnam-no, we still have not come to this, as they say.

Marshal SOKOLOV. The military situation has recently become worse. The shelling of our garrisons has doubled. They are fighting mainly in villages, counting on our not retaliating against population centers.

It is impossible to win such a war by military means.

The first task is to force the Afghan leadership to actively bring the program of national reconciliation to the population. If this does not happen, the army will be of no use.

The Afghan army has cost us 3.5 billion rubles. And another 1.5 billion [rubles] are planned for this year. They have everything they need to fight.

In 1986 the 40th Army lost 1,280 men.

To analyze economic aid: they are asking for three times more than they need. Yes, we ought to help. But there must be a benefit. In 1981 we gave them 100 million [rubles] in free aid. And it all stayed with the elite. In the villages there is no kerosene, no matches, nothing.

CHEBRIKOV. We discuss the Afghan issue more than others. The comrades have analyzed it well. It's as if we've received much new material. But if we lift the documents, all of this has already been described.

There are no [new] findings about the situation. Mikhail Sergeyevich [Gorbachev], you've been telling this to Karmal.

GORBACHEV. Thus, we confirm our firm policy. We will not retreat once we have

started.

Act in all avenues. Seriously analyze where and how to use our aid, and start up foreign policy mechanisms through [UN Special Envoy Diego] Cordovez and Pakistan. Try to do business with the Chinese and, of course, with the Americans.

When we went into Afghanistan we were wrapped up [zakol'tsovany] in the ideological aspects and calculated that we could jump over three stages right away: from feudalism to socialism. Now we can look at the situation openly and follow a realistic policy. For we accepted everything in Poland-the Church, the individual peasant farms, the ideology, and political pluralism. Reality is reality. The comrades speak correctly: it is better to pay with money than with the lives of our people.

[1] Also spelled mujahedin, mujahedeen, or mujahidin.