

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

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Summary:

Gorbachev and his advisors discuss building a coalition government in Afghanistan before the withdrawal of Soviet troops and also the lack of acceptance of the Soviet-backed People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA).

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SHEVARDNADZE reports: expressing serious worry and alarm at the state of affairs: the policy of national reconciliation is producing a certain result, but very modest.

GORBACHEV. (After [General Valentin I.] Varennikov's report) Thus we won't go into a new Afghanistan with the present regime. The regime should be transformed. But how are we to act? You say that the Afghan army is not able to perform its role independently, but what then about a withdrawal of our troops?

VARENNIKOV. The policy of national reconciliation is dying out.

GORBACHEV. But we have already told Najib to do everything himself and not run to us for advice. He sees that a national reconciliation will not be reached, yet he does nothing. This is a typical Karmalism.

You're right: it will turn out like the soldier thinks there, that they're forcing him to fight for us and not for his homeland.

VARENNIKOV. There's generally no sense of a homeland there. There's kin, the tribe, and the clan; a soldier fights for [his] family because a large part of the territory is under the rule of the mujaheddin.

GORBACHEV. The mujaheddin, too, proceed from what you're saying.

VARENNIKOV. They are an illiterate people, but we are agitating for socialism and imposing the idea of a national democratic revolution. But they don't understand any of this there in Afghanistan.

There are tendencies toward stagnation. More could have been done in five months.

KRYUCHKOV. It's impossible to withdraw, flee, and throw everything away. I understand the Politburo policy this way: shift everything onto Afghanistan and have them learn to manage to act independently. Otherwise [it will be] a bloody slaughterhouse. The problem is not just that the word "democratic" in the name of the Party (PDPA) is not suitable. The Party can be renamed. But it needs to be kept in mind that the very concept of "Party" is strange to an Afghan. But Najib is first of all the leader of the entire Party. But without the government he is nothing to Afghans. And "Islamization" needs to be added to the Party's appearance.

GORBACHEV. Yes, this is a realistic approach. We are obliged to conduct a realistic policy. And this needs to be remembered: there can be no Afghanistan without Islam. There's nothing to replace it with now. But if the name of the Party is kept then the word "Islamic" needs to be included in it. Afghanistan needs to be returned to a condition which is natural for it. The mujaheddin need to be more aggressively invited to [share] power at the grass roots. No one is stopping this from being done. But Najib should speak as President and Chairman of the State Council. The personal factor has great importance there.

If Najib is nominated for the post of President then have him right away proclaim another program and not [one] around the PDPA.

Who can we work with there if not with Najib? But [if] we turn away completely, though, everything will slip away [and] they'll say to us: the Soviet Union betrayed us.

It's clear that the Afghans will not rally around the PDPA. They will not accept it. And

[we] need to talk now not about a second wind in Afghanistan but a last. If we exclude a prospect connected with Najib then we have lost everything. It'll turn out as with Karmal. And then what—we'll withdraw troops and bug out? We'll leave bruises all the same. But it's necessary so that there will be fewer of them and that it not be painful. We need to think about ties with the King. We need to avoid the formula that a coalition government is only to be based on the present government. And not to make Najib "No.1".

AKHROMEYEV. A leading role for the PDPA will never happen . And if we take that point of view there will be an endless war which we will never win. A coalition government is possible but not with the PDPA having a leading role, only with its participation, where it does not have decisive influence. Let there be a "bourgeois government" there for about a year supported by our bayonets.

GORBACHEV. If we tell them this right now, they will simply flee.

GORBACHEV. It would be a mistake if we simply cleared out of there. We will not explain to our people why. But in Afghanistan, whoever is on the side of the mujaheddin will long remember how we were killing them and those who are with Najib, that we put everyone on the level of their enemies with one stroke. And we will not get a friendly Afghanistan. At the same time it is impossible to continue this war endlessly.

Accordingly, we need to find a political solution which will not exclude any military operations. To put it another way, the policy of national reconciliation is the correct one. But how to flesh it out? Specific steps are needed. In this form it comes to nothing. A broader spectrum of diverse forces needs to be contacted.

Right now the positions of the United States and Pakistan are hardening. This is in order to frustrate the policy of national reconciliation. We cannot disregard even one avenue.

1) Cordovez. Think hard how to do business with him and not break off contact.

2) We have not approached the United States of America in a real way. They need to be associated with the political solution, to be invited. This is the correct policy. There's an opportunity here.

3) Diplomatic steps in regard to the leadership of Afghanistan itself. There are chances of influencing them. They are afraid that we will simply bug out like the United States did from Vietnam.

4) Military operations. The tactics of territorial pressure need to be improved. Give weapons to local authorities. The Afghans are able to keep their word [if] they have their morale. It is important to try that our aid reaches them in the sense of supplying the soldiers with everything they need. Get the officers interested. Detachments exist in the field and more will spring up. But they will then act only in our favor when the whole process operates in the necessary direction.

5) What is preventing the opposition being brought into the government or local bodies of power at the grassroots? Invite them and make an announcement to this effect; get the word to the people that they are ready to do this.

6) The PDPA needs to be left a defined role and not pushed out. And let other parties be created, let's say, an "Islamic Party of Afghanistan". Let them combine all the forces capable of national leadership. In any case an Islamic element needs to be

inserted in the Party name. And also have the PDPA change its form and nature.

I do not want to say right now what place will be left for Najibullah. But by nature he is most probably leader of the government, since the president should be a neutral figure. And there should be something like a parliament with an influential post of chairman.

7. It is clear it will be impossible to get by with 2-3% in the government for the opposition. Realistically, if we want to achieve something, no less than 50%.

8. We should be finished with the Afghan issue in a year and a half. A firm deadline. And Najib needs to be told about this deadline. Warn him again: do as you yourself think and ask us less often. But tell our advisers: stop commanding there. And condition Najib so that he acts as he considers necessary and not send 20 questions a day to Moscow.