

December 9, 1987
**Conversation between M. S. Gorbachev and Ronald
Reagan on Afghanistan (Excerpt)**

Citation:

"Conversation between M. S. Gorbachev and Ronald Reagan on Afghanistan (Excerpt)", December 9, 1987, Wilson Center Digital Archive, Gorbachev Foundation, Moscow. Provided by Anatoly Chernyaev and translated by Gary Goldberg for CWIHP <https://wilson-center-digital-archive.dvincitest.com/document/117244>

Summary:

Gorbachev and Reagan discuss the withdrawal of Soviet troops in Afghanistan.

Credits:

This document was made possible with support from Leon Levy Foundation

Original Language:

Russian

Contents:

Translation - English

R. REAGAN. The regional issues relate primarily to other issues, first among them—Afghanistan. This is, first of all, about the presence of Soviet troops in Afghanistan. We know one another's point of view, and I would welcome it if you would announce a withdrawal of Soviet troops. I think such an announcement should have been made long ago. Without doubt, the situation in Afghanistan is difficult, primarily for you, and we could help you, guaranteeing that no other governments in this region would threaten you in Afghanistan. We will do everything in our power to guarantee that Afghanistan will be an independent, neutral country, and we hope that Soviet troops will be withdrawn from it by the end of 1988...

M. S. GORBACHEV. Our order of priorities coincides with yours. Therefore I will begin with Afghanistan (...).

Regarding Afghanistan, within the framework of the Cordovez mission, there exists an agreement of principles about non-interference and guarantees from the US, the USSR, and Pakistan, and it would be good if Iran were on the list. There exists a plan for the return of the refugees, and guarantees are being given to the mujaheddin in Pakistan and Iran. All this will help. The issue of the timing of the troop withdrawal remains open. President Najibullah has suggested—and consulted with the Soviet Union about this, although this is his own suggestion—that Soviet troops leave over the course of 12 months with the understanding that this timeframe could be reduced by 2-3 months if everything goes smoothly, but from the very start the process should be tied to national reconciliation and the creation of a coalition government. But only the Afghans themselves should decide the issue of the nature and composition of such a government. I share your idea about an independent, neutral, multi-party Afghanistan. It is in this very framework that a society is now being formed in Afghanistan. Afghanistan is not a socialist country. It is a semi-feudal pluralistic society. How they are to live and develop is for they themselves to decide. But you understand that the issue of Afghanistan is not a simple issue. We have a more than 2,000 km border with them and therefore we need a friendly neighbor. But I can assure you that the Soviet Union is not hatching plans to create bases in Afghanistan. We have not been thinking about this. We think that it is necessary to conclude the process begun there on the basis of national reconciliation. And the Afghans have even said they are ready to give half of the posts in a government of national reconciliation to the opposition, including the post of prime minister. We support this but the decision is to be made by the Afghans themselves. Neither you nor we can decide how to divide up these posts. I think that if we advised our friends to act in the direction of national reconciliation, and you also conscientiously [akkuratno] advised this to those with whom you maintain relations—we know you have such capabilities since not long ago you received some opposition leaders—this would not be bad.

Speaking of the withdrawal of our troops, I will say that we are interested in this and have already begun to withdraw our troops. But you ought to cease financial support and weapons aid to the opposition. I can say that on the same day as the withdrawal of Soviet troops is announced they will not participate in military operations except for self-defense purposes. You yourself understand that the situation can be most unpredictable. It would be good if you and we agreed about cooperation and demonstrated this to the world. We favor an indigenous [narodivshiysya] neutral regime in Afghanistan, a regime that would not be unacceptable to either of us, nor to the Afghans. Therefore let us agree about this and we will inform Najibullah and you, the opposition, about this.

R. REAGAN. We will try to exert influence on them. However, the president of Afghanistan has an army, and the opposition does not. Therefore it is impossible to ask one side to put down its weapons at the same time as the other keeps theirs. It seems to me that they need to meet together to find a political solution.

M. S. GORBACHEV. I think that there are real preconditions to solving this problem.

Let our experts think about it...

By the way, Iran is also taking aim at Afghanistan. If we put too much pressure on Iran, then they could respond somehow in Afghanistan.