

February 11, 1988

**Record of a Conversation of M. S. Gorbachev with
Indian Minister of Defense Krishna Chandra Pant**

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Summary:

Gorbachev and Pant discuss Soviet and Indian foreign relations and the situation in Afghanistan and neighboring Pakistan.

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[M. S. GORBACHEV]. Please pass to Rajiv [Gandhi] that I very much value our cooperation and our exchanges of information through various channels about the situation in the region where both we and you have very important interests.

I would also like to ask you and the Ambassador to send to Prime Minister Gandhi one observation having perhaps a global character, an observation which is not superficial but born as a result of serious analysis. We see that the reactionary circles in the West-as distinct from realistic circles-are very worried about that the pioneering [initsiativnaya] policy which the Soviet Union, India, the Non-Aligned Movement, and progressive forces are now following. These forces are trying to consolidate right now and are looking for ways to seize [perekhvatit'] the initiative and disrupt movement along the path which leads to strengthening security and improving international relations. This is not to the militarists' tastes.

Therefore they have begun to literally attack the Soviet embassy and the General Secretary personally and are doing everything in order to denigrate his policy both in domestic affairs and in foreign policy. We see that Rajiv Gandhi and other progressive figures have not been ignored. This is a very serious fact which needs to be considered. Right now the periods of euphoria and panic have passed for them, and they are consolidating. For example, the Soviet Union, India, and other progressive regimes for them are like a bone in their throats.

At the same time it is impossible not to see anything else. Our joint efforts and our peace initiatives are enjoying ever greater support in the world and are drawing all realistically-minded people to our side. This is a very important factor whose significance is growing. Therefore there is every reason to look at the future optimistically.

K. Ch. PANT. Thank you, Mr. General Secretary. I recall with great pleasure your visit to Delhi, the time we spent together, and the thorough conversations with you.

I recall not only your official statements but your numerous statements in personal conversations with me. A great impression was made on me by the fact that your words correspond so harmoniously with your actions both in Soviet domestic and foreign policy. Probably many of the thoughts you then expressed came hard. But you have not retreated from your chosen path and follow it firmly.

It should be said that I share your optimism in connection with the positive processes in the world which are the result of your efforts. A new generation is recognizing the imperatives of the nuclear age and it understands the need for changes in the world which would be in accord with the turbulent changes in science and technology. I think that you gave this new generation a charter of values, a charter of concepts which could touch chords in the souls of people.

M. S. GORBACHEV. Thank you for this important thought and this assessment.

K. Ch. PANT. The desire for peace was very strong earlier; however it was quite amorphous. But you have managed to put it on a clear path.

The [the December 1987] signing of the agreement on intermediate and shorter-range missiles [INF Treaty] was an important step forward. Now we await with impatience the next step you have been talking about-the achievement of an agreement on strategic weapons.

M. S. GORBACHEV. You know the impression is being created that neither Congress-both the Democrats and especially the Republicans-nor even the closest

circle of the President will allow him to reach this agreement.

K. Ch. PANT. Yes, this is also possible.

M. S. GORBACHEV. They evidently have already distributed roles among themselves. Nevertheless, we favor the achievement of such an agreement as soon as possible. We will drag them along the road of disarmament.

K. Ch. PANT. If they don't come to an agreement then they will have to defend their position, and this will not be easy.

M. S. GORBACHEV. Yes, this is so. And the election campaign will leave an imprint on the entire situation.

K. Ch. PANT. Of course. But at the same time the number of supporters of peace in the US is growing, especially among ordinary Americans.

We are maintaining close contact with you about Afghanistan. I cannot say anything new right now. I can state that we consider the initiative you have taken to be a bold step which will in the final account facilitate the elimination of this dangerous hotbed of tension.

M. S. GORBACHEV. Right now a group of our comrades is there with special authority from the Politburo. They report that, after the latest steps we took, Najib is looking at the situation more optimistically. I think this man has great potential, and he will show himself in a new situation.

I think that we and you need to maintain contact, exchange opinions, and see to it that the situation does not get out of control and develop in an undesirable direction.

When I was in Washington I informed the Americans that we are ready to withdraw our troops from Afghanistan and discuss practical steps in this regard; the Americans avoided discussing the substance of the issue. They would like to maintain the present situation in Afghanistan, for it allows them to maintain their presence in the region and strengthen their position, in particular in Pakistan.

But it ought to be noted that Reagan's team [komanda] took into consideration and welcomed the fact that the Soviet Union is not tying the issue of creating a coalition government with the issue of the presence of our troops in Afghanistan. It seemed to them that the presence of Soviet troops allows us to influence the situation in Najib's favor. But the Pakistanis are already saying now that they will not sign an agreement until a coalition government is created.

Earlier they thought that our announcement of our readiness to withdraw our troops from Afghanistan was only a propaganda slogan. However, now when we and Najib announced the troop withdrawal and when India supported this step they are openly interfering. They see that the Soviet Union, Najib, and India are acting confidently and think that they "have agreed on how to act." Therefore they have now begun to maneuver.

[Indian Diplomat] T[riloki]. N[ath]. KAUL. But you've taken the wind out of their sails with your step.

K. Ch. PANT. At the same time there are also grounds for concern. Earlier the Americans gave them, and now, first and foremost, Pakistan. In insisting on the

interconnection of these two issues it is pursuing matters toward the creation of a government of fundamentalists.

M. S. GORBACHEV. Absolutely right.

K. Ch. PANT. And this is in no one's interests but Pakistan's.

M. S. GORBACHEV. Yes, we and you need to think about this seriously. And not only think, but do something.

K. Ch. PANT. And so we think that you have come forward with a good initiative and now need to follow the situation attentively.

M. S. GORBACHEV. We have created a special group which is dealing with this. The Minister of Defense and other comrades are its members.

K. Ch. PANT. One more aspect of the situation: there are many weapons there now. The Americans have created large reserves in Pakistan of which the Afghans could avail themselves. Is it impossible to arrange that these weapons be destroyed within the framework of the agreements? For if the "Stingers" fall into the hands of terrorists and are used against civilian aircraft there will be chaos.

M. S. GORBACHEV. Yes, this is actually a difficult issue. But if we raise it then they can say-and what about Soviet weapons in Afghanistan? And then the process could be dragged down since we don't want to leave Najib naked.

Pass to Rajiv that we understand in the most serious way his idea about the need to strengthen the Kabul government in a military sense and consolidate its positions in Afghanistan. Everything possible is being done for this.

Of course, it is difficult to foresee everything. The Americans, and not only they, can also aggravate [the situation]. Why, we will think, how [are we] to behave in this case. Then they will completely unmask themselves.

K. Ch. PANT. Some words about the situation on the Indo-Pakistani border. Clashes occurred in September and October in the region of the Siachen Glacier. We repelled the attacks of the Pakistani forces; however there were casualties. Right now the situation is relatively quiet. But we have information that possibly they are preparing for new attacks.

M. S. GORBACHEV. I think that Prime Minister Gandhi expressed a very correct thought when he said that our countries should act so that Zia and the Pakistani regime have as little freedom of maneuver as possible.

K. Ch. PANT. There is one aspect causing very serious alarm which you know about. This is the problem of the creation of nuclear weapons by Pakistan.

Pakistan is getting enormous aid from the US. Of \$4 billion, \$1.8 billion is military aid. Right now the Pakistanis are on the threshold of obtaining nuclear weapons. This is our assessment and yours, too. This creates a very serious problem. We have acted honestly and done everything in order to avoid a further aggravation of this issue. However, a situation is being created right now where blackmail is possible.

Of course, we don't want the resources needed for socioeconomic progress to have to

be used for such ends. However our security is paramount. Therefore we have a dilemma before us. Our public is reacting to this very sharply. I could not fail to mention this in a conversation with you.

M. S. GORBACHEV. This is the continuation of a conversation which we had in Delhi. I think that it is very important to firmly hold a principled position. This will prevent the adventurers in Pakistan from realizing their plans. I think that the assessment of the situation which we gave in Delhi remains the same. But the situation needs to be watched all the time.