

**March 29, 1988**

**Record of a Conversation of M. S. Gorbachev with  
the General Secretary of the Italian Communist  
Party [PCI] Alessandro Natta**

**Citation:**

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**Summary:**

Gorbachev explains to Natta about issues with the Soviet withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan, including disagreements with the United States on the plans for the coalition government.

**Credits:**

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**Original Language:**

Russian

**Contents:**

Translation - English

M. S. GORBACHEV. Regarding Afghanistan. The signing of the agreements in Geneva is grinding to a halt through the fault of the US and Pakistan. However, we will continue. Our representatives have said to the Pakistani delegation that the Soviet Union can act alone in this role. We firmly intend to settle the situation which has developed around Afghanistan politically.

[Italian Communist Party leader] A[ntonio] RUBBI. Will the Afghan issue be raised at Shevardnadze's meeting with Shultz in April<sup>[1]</sup> and what are the prospects of discussing this issue at the summit meeting in May of this year?

M. S. GORBACHEV. The issue of Afghanistan has been repeatedly discussed with the Americans, including during my visit to Washington. They wanted us to name a time for the withdrawal of our troops. We did this, and Washington agreed that the US for its part would stop helping the rebels. The American side has long insisted that it is impossible to talk about forming a transitional government while Soviet troops are in Afghanistan. In this event it "would be formed on 'Soviet bayonets.'" We accepted this point of view. But the Americans suddenly began to say that such a government needed to be created before the troop withdrawal. It's true that they then had to return to the previous position. We had already agreed at the first stage to withdraw a considerable part of the troops. That is, we accommodated them here. And the Americans thought up yet one more obstacle-"symmetry" in halting aid. Then we said to them: we will aid Afghanistan on the basis of long-concluded treaties. To demand of us that we stop these actions is the same as our side demanding the US cease US military aid to Pakistan. This is how they're maneuvering. But we have firmly decided to work actively in favor of a political settlement and bring the matter to an end.

A. NATTA. There are forces in America which are absolutely and definitely interested in the USSR remaining in Afghanistan.

M. S. GORBACHEV. We know this. But in other countries for various, often contradictory, reasons there are forces which also do not desire the withdrawal of Soviet troops. There are even such forces in Africa. The substance of their reasoning boils down to the following: "you're abandoning Afghanistan; it means you're also abandoning us."

A. NATTA. There are substantial forces which are worried about what will happen in Afghanistan after the withdrawal of Soviet troops. It is very important that there be no big trouble there.

M. S. GORBACHEV. We don't want a pro-Communist regime in Afghanistan. We want to preserve good-neighborly relations with this country with whom we've had decades of collaboration and a border totaling 2,500 km. Right now the Afghans themselves need to make a very serious analysis of Afghan society. It is obvious that those groups who came to power in 1978 made a mistake in evaluating the situation and thought it possible to leapfrog several stages in the development of the country. The question right now is of involving all the ethnic forces in running the country and taking economic and political pluralism into consideration. In other words, we now see that the theoretical mistakes of the Afghan comrades in 1978 led to political mistakes, to a "superrevolutionary character" [sverkhrevolyutsionnost].

A. NATTA. I don't want to return to polemics. And I didn't want to raise this question. But you know our point of view. The PCI is convinced that the deployment of troops to Afghanistan in 1979 was a mistake. But this is not a mistake of the current leadership. We are now convinced that the Soviet Union has made a completely correct decision directed at national reconciliation in Afghanistan and the withdrawal of the troops.

M. S. GORBACHEV. In concluding the conversation I would like to express deep satisfaction at its substance and the atmosphere of our meeting. I hope that in the future our meetings will take place in the same spirit of trust and respect. Please pass cordial greetings to the Italian Communists and the workers of Italy. As before, my promise to visit Italy remains in force.

A. NATTA. Genuine thanks for the conversation. I wish you, Cde. Gorbachev, and all the CPSU leadership great success in your work and in implementing the policy of perestroika.

[\[1\]](#) George P. Shultz visited Moscow (as well as Kiev, and Tbilisi) on 21-24 April 1988 to discuss preparations for the U.S.-Soviet summit meeting in May.