

April 7, 1988

**Record of a Conversation of M. S. Gorbachev with
President of Afghanistan, General Secretary of the
CC PDPA Najibullah, Tashkent**

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Summary:

Najibullah and Gorbachev discuss the situation in Afghanistan, the politics of the new government, plans for the withdrawal of Soviet troops, and the Geneva Accords signed in 1988 to facilitate it.

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M. S. GORBACHEV. I welcome you, Cde. Najibullah, in a fraternal way as President of a friendly Afghanistan, our neighbor, and as General Secretary of a party close to us. Considering the occasion and the intention we have come a long way for this meeting. We now stand at a threshold beyond which lies the signing of the Geneva documents and where a new, difficult, and, I would say, unique stage is opening up, requiring a very well-considered policy, creative [neordinarnyye] steps, and very flexible tactics from both of us.

I see the political meaning of our meeting today at this critical moment as again demonstrating the collaboration of the USSR and Afghanistan and the leadership of our two countries to the peoples of our countries and the entire world.

Second. We can already foresee that regardless of how the situation develops after the signing of the Geneva documents – acutely or relatively quietly – great responsibility will rest on the Afghan leadership and first of all on the President of Afghanistan. We think it our duty to welcome the President at this moment and give him every political, moral, and practical friendly support, proceeding from the principles and traditions of collaboration we have developed with the Afghan people in these difficult years for Afghanistan.

We proposed holding a meeting trying at this moment to even further back up the President and support him before the entire world. Naturally, this requires not only moral and political support but also aid in other categories.

And I see even one more task for today's meeting in examining specific aspects arising before the signing of the Geneva documents and the practical issues of preparing Afghanistan for a new situation. And we don't have to begin from zero here. All the members of the Politburo have received information from Eh. A. Shevardnadze and V. A. Kryuchkov about the conversations during these days with you in Kabul. The Soviet leadership also knows about the conversation held here in Tashkent. Hence we will act right away, as we say "taking the bull by the horns," finish deciding, and clarify everything that remains.

After such an introduction I want to again greet you here and give you the floor.

NAJIBULLAH. Deeply respected, dear Mikhail Sergeyeovich! Dear comrades! For me, the representative of the Afghan people and the party and government leadership, expressing the interests of the country it is a great honor to meet with you and discuss the fate of Afghanistan which now has drawn the gaze of all humanity.

We can rightfully say that our relations rest on a firm foundation laid back in V. I. Lenin's time. The fine, beautiful edifice of our friendship has risen on this foundation. The new floors of this building of traditional friendship are rising today by your hands, Mikhail Sergeyeovich, and these floors are being built from even stronger material. I share your point of view that our meeting in Tashkent opens a new page in the history of the friendship and collaboration between our countries and fills them with new substance. This is instructive for everyone.

You know that in the meetings with Eh. A. Shevardnadze in Kabul, we carefully examined all issues affecting the domestic and foreign aspects of the Afghan problem. I want to express great gratitude for the valuable advice given by Eh. A. Shevardnadze. I and my comrades have comprehensively examined the results of these talks and unanimously approved them. Afghan-Soviet relations are now at a qualitatively new stage.

I would like to state some ideas in development of the conversations in Kabul. We have a need to consult with you regarding the issues of the further organization of

presidential authority, the structure of presidential government, and the Geneva process. But first of all let me briefly tell you about the situation in and around Afghanistan.

I note with satisfaction that, thanks to the constant efforts of our government, several hopeful factors are appearing in the progress of the situation in the country. Many features of the policy of national reconciliation are acquiring an irreversible character and are being realized in practice. Generally speaking, the policy of national reconciliation has become comprehensive. The fact that it has received recognition in Cambodia and Nicaragua also confirms that at its base it is correct and objectively reflects reality.

The main feature of the situation in Afghanistan is the desire for peace. Figuratively speaking, the people see the light at the end of the tunnel. The policy of national reconciliation has permitted [us] to fuse the interests of people's power, that is, the establishment of peace, with the interests of the peasantry, which comprises the opposition's base. The initiative in carrying out the policy of national reconciliation and its propaganda are in our hands, and the path to victory passes through this policy. But, naturally, we are backing our steps in the political area with steps in the military and economic areas. If we want to defend our system, then it is necessary to raise the people's standard of living, and this is impossible without comprehensive aid from the USSR.

It ought, however, to be admitted that we are required to increase the effectiveness of the Soviet aid and reorganize the entire mechanism of its use. This is a high-priority area, together with the Geneva Process. We can get specific tangible advantages in it.

Speaking of foreign policy, I stress that the constructive position taken by the Soviet Union and Afghanistan has forced the enemy to go on the defensive, which has created additional opportunities. A letter received from Shultz, which Eh. A. Shevardnadze showed me, is evidence that the US and Pakistan are concerned that they do not lag behind the settlement process.

There are broad opportunities to develop our initiative, although naturally in order to get concessions we will have to give some ourselves. We are doing that. Concessions have to be made for the successful conclusion of the Geneva Process. At the same time new opportunities will be created for bilateral collaboration between us.

M. S. GORBACHEV. In the Politburo we asked ourselves the question: what alternative would be more advantageous - have the Americans sign the Geneva Accords where both we and they take on certain obligations, or [they] refuse to sign them when we are implementing the withdrawal of troops under a scenario most favorable to us [?] All the same, we've come to the conclusion that it is desirable to sign the Accords.

The signing of the Accords could create a framework so that events do not take on extremely acute forms. When there are obligations of parties there are opportunities to put pressure on those who shirk them. And we still intend that it would be very disadvantageous for both the US and Pakistan to refuse to sign the Accords. They have unmasked themselves in the eyes of the entire world. And that being the case we have a situation where we can make accommodations and compromises.

Thus, we have chosen the first alternative as the main one. But we should also have our approaches in reserve in case the signing of the Accords breaks down. This will be a more difficult option, but it also has its strong points.

In any case one thing is clear - and we are convinced that we have an understanding

in this – the real situation in and around Afghanistan needs to be used in order to move the policy of national reconciliation along to the end. You have now said that in Afghan society, in all its sectors, including the opposition, the trend toward peace and a normalization of the situation is gaining strength. But this means that the people are tired of war. This is the trend.

There is a strong trend which has formed in Soviet society – a desire to finish with the Afghan problem by means of a political settlement. And this desire is being transformed into an appropriate policy. Right now there is a real chance of achieving a settlement in and around Afghanistan and opening the road to progress and a peaceful life to the Afghan people.

We do not exclude that the succeeding stages of the process will develop in acute forms. But we think that if we act wisely and judiciously we can avoid such acute forms. The time has come today when arrangements for broad pluralism in politics and ethnic and religious relations will have decisive importance for the country.

When you and we together formulated the policy of national reconciliation we were already talking then about expanding the social base of the regime. You will remember what discussions this provoked in the PDPA and Afghan society. Some simply turned out to be incapable of understanding the policy of national reconciliation and acting in this situation. But this was a stage of policy formation and now there will be a more difficult step when the “mujaheddin” appear next to the PDPA as a major component of the realization of the policy of national reconciliation and those who stood on the other side of the barricades appear in government and public life. Representatives of other parties which were seen as enemies for many years will appear next [to the PDPA]. Now it will be necessary to share posts with them and organize a new power structure.

This again calls for discussion. Again the policy of national reconciliation will undergo a serious test. And here again it is important not to become bewildered. You have said correctly that it is especially important to reinforce this policy with corresponding socioeconomic measures. Proposals in this regard are being formulated in the Soviet-Afghan Commission on Economic Cooperation, the Soviet part of which is headed by V. S. Murakhovskiy. We will help you without fail and help you thoroughly. But the President and his colleagues need to think about where all our aid needs to go.

But there are many other problems. For example, comrades have been telling me that 11,000 hectares of irrigated land are not being worked, that the peasants do not use them. Why are these lands not put to use or leased? We’re doing much in this regard right now in our own country. This factor can also be used in Afghanistan. In general, it’s important to use the capabilities you have more fully. Afghanistan is fully capable of building an economy based on its own resources, using our aid.

We are ready to give practical aid, especially to move quickly in accommodating refugees. But all the impediments in Afghan society need to be removed and the road opened to private enterprise, primarily small property owners and tradesmen. In five years China increased their grain harvest by 100 million tons only thanks to giving land to the peasants there.

But I have interrupted you. Please continue.

NAJIBULLAH. With the signing of the Geneva Accords we will gain additional opportunities to expand the policy of national reconciliation both in domestic and foreign areas. The American side, as Shultz said in his letter, will not halt their attempts to give the counterrevolution weapons aid. But under conditions in which we

have expanded and are continuing to expand the social and political base in the country, the counterrevolutionary movement will increasingly lose the nature of political terrorism and become simply criminal.

In order to maintain the initiative we intend to carry out a number of political measures which we are preparing considering the upcoming withdrawal of Soviet troops. We talked about this in detail with Eh. A. Shevardnadze in Kabul. This point was reflected also in the draft of our joint statement about the results of today's talks. For example, I am thinking, considering the upcoming Soviet-American summit in Moscow, whether it is possible to examine the question of some part of the Soviet military contingent be withdrawn from Afghanistan as a goodwill gesture. This would be perceived positively both in our country and in the whole world.

Such a withdrawal could be implemented before Reagan arrives, regardless of whether the Geneva Accords are signed or not.

M. S. GORBACHEV. Do you have in mind beginning on 15 May, as it was agreed?

NAJIBULLAH. Yes. In other words, it's not necessary to wait the 60 days between the signing of the Accords and its entry into force.

M. S. GORBACHEV. I understand this, hence in maintaining the 15 May date we keep our word and don't present a gift to Reagan.

NAJIBULLAH. It's necessary there not be the impression that Reagan arrived and exerted some pressure regarding the troop withdrawal.

M. S. GORBACHEV. As a gesture the withdrawal could begin before his arrival, that is, 15 May. Let's think about it. But I'm in favor of this in order to adhere to our statements of 8 February^[1] with the understanding that we are acting according to our own program and not to please Reagan.

NAJIBULLAH. One principal difficulty arises with the signing of the Geneva Accords - the formulation about the border.

M. S. GORBACHEV. I know what you're talking about. This is a consequence of the colonial policy of the English who in particular created border disputes. But now this all needs to be looked into.

Eh. A. SHEVARDNADZE. The English deliberately left this problem so that disputes would arise.

M. S. GORBACHEV. We are trying to do a good deed but they're trying to use this issue against us and you. But we'll act so that everything is normal.

NAJIBULLAH. I am sure that it will be so. The issue of the "Durand Line" is, of course, complex. The English drew this line, dividing the Pushtun tribes and creating a situation which is a source of tension. Amir Abdur Rahman himself, who at the end of the last century signed the agreement with the English, did not recognize this line. He signed the agreement to get a monthly allowance of 12,000 rupees from the English.
[2]

M. S. GORBACHEV. It would not be bad to use this method on occasion even now (everyone laughs).

NAJIBULLAH. Not one government in Afghanistan has yet recognized this "Durand Line" as the border. And if we do this now, an explosive situation would arise in society. Therefore we have tried to select a formula such that an Afghan-Pakistani agreement about non-interference would not signify official recognition of the "Durand Line" by us or cause any concern among the Pushtuns. We found such a formulation in the end.

There was a tough battle for a day with Zia ul-Haq but he was forced to agree to it. We had already started to congratulate one another on this success. But then something unforeseen happened - the "rose" in our garden bloomed (I have in mind [Afghan foreign minister Abdul] Wakil's conduct in Geneva). Nevertheless, we are resolving all the difficulties all the same, since at one time we were close to recognizing the "Durand Line," generally speaking.

M. S. GORBACHEV. I understand this well since you were in the Afghan delegation that arrived in Moscow in October 1985. I said back then that one could not hurry. Now the situation is such that some outcome needs to be found according to a formulation. You, as a Pushtun president, have found it. What does Minister of Foreign Affairs Wakil think?

NAJIBULLAH. He is against it.

M. S. GORBACHEV. It turns out that he is more Catholic than the Pope himself.

NAJIBULLAH. Absolutely correct. In this regard, he is a proverb - the kasha is hotter than the cauldron.

M. S. GORBACHEV. It seems to us that Wakil is an honest man. Perhaps it turned out that he has been at the talks in Geneva for a long time and ended up removed from what was going on in Kabul? Perhaps - and this is completely natural - he is not always and is not completely informed about everything?

NAJIBULLAH. No, we regularly inform him about everything. But he is somewhat of a hothead. Of course, they often think that wisdom and composure come to a man with age. But in our situation we have to be as wise in 40 years as those who have reached 80. This is no time for emotions right now.

M. S. GORBACHEV. I know that the opinion in the Afghan leadership on this issue was unanimous.

NAJIBULLAH. We held a special meeting of the Politburo yesterday. I openly informed all the members of the Politburo about doubts that had been raised about Wakil. The comrades asked only one or two clarifying questions and expressed the opinion that the formulation which had been found is to our advantage. By the way, this is the formulation of Wakil himself. He only wanted that it not be in the second article of the Accords about non-interference but in its preamble.

On the whole I want to again stress that with the signing of the Geneva Accords we will be able to come closer to a quieter version of the development of the situation.

M. S. GORBACHEV. Did you also prefer this version?

NAJIBULLAH. If the Geneva Accords are signed, then we will get strong additional opportunities to strengthen the policy of national reconciliation. We will try for an easier, quiet version.

M. S. GORBACHEV. This would be very desirable. But it's necessary to prepare for the worst. But if we talk about this version, then what are main, most key problems? How can final success be ensured, even in such conditions?

NAJIBULLAH. First of all, in the difficult version the issue of a withdrawal of troops on a bilateral basis ought to be considered. We have also prepared a number of other proposals which we told to the Soviet comrades in Kabul.

M. S. GORBACHEV. First, do I understand, is this the creation of a security force and the redeployment of Afghan troops around primary facilities in order to ensure their manageability [upravlyayemost']?

NAJIBULLAH. Absolutely right. We need to create a security force, redeploy forces, and create a concentration of them.

M. S. GORBACHEV. We will help solve the problems of financing and weapons supply issues. Even in the most difficult and severe conditions, even under conditions of strict monitoring [kontrol'], we will completely supply you with weapons in any situation. We are using every mountain in Afghanistan for this.

NAJIBULLAH. We have a saying: even the highest mountains have their roads.

M. S. GORBACHEV. Further. In order not to lose time, consolidate the structure of presidential power along the lines: President, governors, other bodies. But do you have people suitable for appointment as governors?

NAJIBULLAH. There are such people and we are already working in this direction.

M. S. GORBACHEV. This is very important. I understand that candidates to the positions of governor-general need not be PDPA but can be representatives of other parties or opposition groups.

NAJIBULLAH. That is what we are proceeding from. We will try to include more people who are neutral.

M. S. GORBACHEV. This is a very important issue. If you appoint PDPA representatives to all 25-30 governor's posts, then everyone will say: there's your pluralism for you, there's your policy of national reconciliation. Your prestige will suffer and so will we, since it will seem that all this was encouraged by the Soviet Union. The president should be above the interests of the PDPA. He should represent the national interests. They are watching you in the entire world. And you need to be very precise.

NAJIBULLAH. We are trying to act in such a tone. We have prepared appropriate steps but did not want to hurry because of elections to the National Council which began on 5 April. We did not want to somehow complicate the holding of elections. Of the 30 candidates for governor only three represent the PDPA and the rest are from the most diverse sectors and political forces. We are appointing these three comrades to those provinces where there are very strong party organizations.

M. S. GORBACHEV. This is good.

NAJIBULLAH. We plan to introduce this structure in the provinces: a governor and his three deputies, one of which is a PDPA member and two are local authorities.

M. S. GORBACHEV. But you need to leave [some] leeway [rezerv] of positions for the opposition for the possibility of additional steps, considering the policy of national reconciliation.

NAJIBULLAH. We intend to do this including at the level of deputy governor.

Eh. A. SHEVARDNADZE. And in the National Council.

M. S. GORBACHEV. The problem of refugees especially needs to be worked on. It requires more specific solutions. A good welcome of refugees in Afghanistan and providing them with everything necessary will shrink the base in which the opposition operates. As I have said to you, we are ready to help in this. But you should take a position with regard to land and [with regard to] supplying them with construction materials.

NAJIBULLAH. Last week we had an expanded meeting on the issue of refugees. We are preparing to receive 1.2 million refugees, counting, of course, on your financial and material aid. We are approaching this issue not simply from an organizational point of view but are examining it as an important political problem, especially considering that the refugees are speaking out against the leaders of the counterrevolution more actively.

There is one more important field in our activity – contacts with the opposition, which have now become more active. We are trying to draw the broadest possible sectors of the opposition into the process of peace talks and are especially intensifying work with the counterrevolutionaries inside the country. Almost a third of the counterrevolutionaries maintain illegal contact with us. In the process, not only detachments associated with the moderate groups of the “Alliance of Seven” but also of the groups of Hekmatyar and Rabbani are entering into contact with us. This process will obviously intensify with the signing of the Geneva Accords. Only 50,000 active counterrevolutionaries oppose us. And when the enemy tries to present the “Alliance of Seven” as a united force, this is not so.

M. S. GORBACHEV. The strength of counterrevolutionary detachments is sometimes set at more than 200,000.

NAJIBULLAH. Yes, altogether the counterrevolutionaries number 270,000 men. A third of them are talking with us; 50,000 are irreconcilable; and the rest are taking a wait-and-see position. Relying on the results of Geneva, we can attract the passive part of the counterrevolutionaries to our side.

M. S. GORBACHEV. Evidently this option needs to be played out: how to act if a parallel government is created in Afghanistan, or in some part of it. And it will try to seize one province after another and displace the legal government of the country.

NAJIBULLAH. After the withdrawal of Soviet troops the situation in a number of regions will without doubt become difficult. Our comprehensive plan envisions that we will conduct work among the population which has fallen under opposition control together with a concentration of the armed forces. We will send in the armed forces in certain cases. In a number of provinces, besides redeployment, we envision the creation of powerful organizational nuclei, including in those regions which border Pakistan.

If we are to speak openly, we have not heretofore enjoyed special influence in many regions and have sent organizational nuclei there, but they were weak and could not

act. Actually, these organizational nuclei dropped in from Kabul were not working bodies but controllers [kontrolery]. It turned out that we tried to attract the population by using force. If we act considering the specifics of our society, then we will create organizational nuclei on a new basis so that they actively help us or at least serve as a sort of buffer. Now I would like to talk about Zahir Shah.

M. S. GORBACHEV. Has he begun to distance himself?

NAJIBULLAH. By nature Zahir Shah is conservative. However, he is interested in getting his place in the process of reconciliation.

M. S. GORBACHEV. It is good that your attitude toward him is better than the "Alliance of Seven," which has written him off. You can score some points in this matter.

NAJIBULLAH. We will do just that. The factor itself of Zahir Shah should work to split the "Alliance," especially considering that the extremists do not agree to his candidacy. However, some extremists are trying to establish contacts with us while rejecting the candidacy of Zahir Shah.

Analyzing the situation further, I want to note that the enemy continues to strengthen his forces, bring in caravans with weapons, and create his reserves in various regions. We are preparing to launch strikes on bases and depots and intercept caravans. But we associate the larger scale of operations with the results of the talks in Geneva. We are also considering the possibility which you have been talking about: the enemy could create a government in one of the regions of Afghanistan in order to turn to the Americans with a request for recognition.

M. S. GORBACHEV. At one time in one of our previous conversations we were talking about how Lenin acted in emergency situations. I was talking then about the Leninist policy with regard to the mid-level peasantry which ensured that it switched to the side of Soviet power and, essentially, ensured the defeat of Kolchak and the counterrevolution.

Being so busy with military and structural problems and searching for contact with the opposition, I think it's necessary not to forget the religious aspect. When the ethnic groups see that you show concern for them, they will respond with reciprocal steps, for in the final account they too are in favor of peace so that their people can quietly till their land. This is a decisive factor which also does not contradict the Koran.

In our country the Orthodox Church has seen much in perestroika which is compatible with its views, since we are cleansing society of distortions, fighting against drunkenness, calling for respectfulness and industriousness, and acting for peace. The Church openly says that it supports the Party's policy. There will evidently be a meeting with [Patriarch] Pimen and other members of the Synod in connection with the millennium of Christianity in Russia.

All this needs to be considered, for a policy built outside realities is not viable, is doomed to vacillations, and leads to disappointments.

NAJIBULLAH. Not long ago we had a closed meeting with representatives of Hekmatyar at which we had a very free conversation. They told me that in Islamic issues I had gone so far forward that they could give me a membership card in their party, that is, the Islamic Party of Afghanistan.

Eh. A. SHEVARDNADZE. But how did they react to your election as president?

NAJIBULLAH. They said that I needed to agree to two things – to accept a membership card of their party and give up the post of president. They said in this respect that while in Moscow I were to declare publicly that I am ready to sacrifice my life and the post of president for the sake of peace. I replied to them that I could think about the first. But they were too late about the second. I told them, you say that 80% of the territory of the country is under your control. Why then did you not take part in the Loya Jirga which elected the president since you could have voted in the Loya Jirga for another person and he could have been elected president. When I said that I was ready to give up anything, I was General Secretary of the Party, but not president. Now when I have become president I cannot betray the trust of the people.

M. S. GORBACHEV. Probably they have also begun to display greater realism.

NAJIBULLAH. The policy of national reconciliation is also influencing their positions.

M. S. GORBACHEV. The people will not support the fundamentalists.

NAJIBULLAH. We have our own “fundamentalists;” one of them is in Geneva right now (he has Wakil in mind).

Permit me to touch on the situation in the PDPA CC Politburo and Secretariat. Briefly put, the membership of these bodies has been confirmed, and there are no grounds for concern. We are trying to work actively on a collective basis.

M. S. GORBACHEV. In any event. You and your comrades should have clearly in mind that both the president and the others are always in the people’s sight. The alignment of forces can be different but if an emergency situation arises, we will come to the rescue and do everything necessary. Let them know about this.

NAJIBULLAH. I am very grateful.

M. S. GORBACHEV. I am saying this just in case. We are not immune. But our Afghan friends should act confidently.

NAJIBULLAH. Fortunately, I can again say that the situation in the leading bodies of the Party is improving.

M. S. GORBACHEV. It is important in order that efforts not be wasted on clarifying relationships at this difficult stage.

NAJIBULLAH. By the way, Hekmatyar’s representatives both directly and indirectly tried to find out how matters are with unity in the leadership.

M. S. GORBACHEV. You see that this issue is of interest to both them and us but from another point of view. Each is pursuing their own goals.

They asked me in the West how matters are with unity in the Politburo. Generally speaking this is constantly tossed up by imperialist centers in order to inflame our population. They say that there are two, three, four groups in the Politburo, and some say that there are even five. They reason this way: if discussions are going on, it means that there are enemies of perestroika.

Another topic which is tossed up are relations between ethnic groups. They splashed out so many fabrications in connection with the events in Armenia and Azerbaijan.[3] They declare that the first person responsible for spilling blood is Gorbachev. But they are silent about the fact that Gorbachev's address facilitated the normalization of the situation. This is not to their advantage. Returning to the theme of Islamic fundamentalism I will say that they are trying to toss this topic up on us here, in Uzbekistan.

NAJIBULLAH. Our old acquaintance Karmal is also busy with this matter; he states that M. S. Gorbachev remained isolated.

M. S. GORBACHEV. The policy of perestroika in the USSR is a realistic policy, expressing real needs. The people understand it. A parallel can be drawn here with the policy of national reconciliation being followed by the Afghan leadership. Of course, a strong political will and decisiveness are required. But what your comrades were telling me before the meeting with you shows that the process is going in the right direction.

Please pass on that we welcome the solid work by the PDPA CC Politburo and Secretariat under the leadership of Cde. Najibullah. Whoever acts in this manner is a real revolutionary. Those who are worried about their own income, who wallowed in mercantile ideas, have left this path. You need to be free of them. Right now when Afghanistan is at a turning point it is impermissible to think about income, payment, and portfolios. A revolution requires total commitment [samootdacha]. And at such times one need not fear strong, loud words.

NAJIBULLAH. The problem of forming a presidential form of government is very important but we do not have experience here. But considering the peculiarities of our society, the factor of the president has greater significance for us than the factor of general secretary. It seems to me that it's necessary to create a small, but very active presidential staff which would ensure communications with the people. There is a basis for this staff but the work has not been completed. We cannot decide how presidential and executive power are to relate to one another. During the conversations in Kabul we asked you for help in forming a presidential form of government. As Eduard Amvrosiyevich noted, this issue is of course within our own competence.

M. S. GORBACHEV. In fact, we cannot dictate what you have. There is no analogy here; moreover, we ourselves have been very thoroughly occupied with improving the structure of the leadership. We can, of course, send comrades who could help organize the purely technical work of the presidential office.

The boundaries of functions need to be determined, including [those] at the provincial level. Inasmuch as all the remaining bodies will be formed on the basis of elections but the governor, as a person appointed by the president, is a representative of the highest central authority, he should look after how presidential decisions are being implemented in practice. You need to look for the correct forms and you need to look for them yourselves.

NAJIBULLAH. Our mistake in the past was that we created a structure of five bodies in the provinces instead of centralization. Proceeding from the recommendations of Soviet comrades we will create a system of undivided authority under the leadership of the governor.

One more issue should be under the constant attention of the president - the strengthening the armed forces on the basis on the policy of national reconciliation. Unfortunately, in spite of the fact that Soviet troops are being withdrawn the Afghan

army does not yet have the capability to wage independent operations and defeat the enemy. The level of material and technical supply of the army is high, thanks to your aid. However, there is an acute shortage of personnel, especially junior officers. Although a mechanism has been created for raising the standard of living of personnel, there has not yet been a complete turnaround [otdacha]. True, we are taking additional steps and are studying all possibilities to solve the personnel problem. There is just no way the army can bring its strength up to 200,000 men.

As I have already said, a redeployment of military units is being planned and a headquarters of the Supreme High Command will operate. Military councils have been created in corps and border brigades. We are constantly improving the structure of the armed forces, are creating "commandos" subunits, and are actively working on the formation of a special security force. This security force will be formed based on special MGB [most likely: WAD (Wizarat-i Amaniyyat -i Dawlati, Ministry of State Security)] units. Then we will bring the strength up to 33,000 men from the best MGB [WAD] and army units. The entire security force will undergo special training and have distinctive markings.

M. S. GORBACHEV. They will be based on brigades?

NAJIBULLAH. Yes. The security brigades will be deployed on four axes in Kabul. The main mission of the guard is to protect people's power and the primary centers, primarily Kabul, and ensure the security of the leadership. Generally speaking, the plans have been drawn up and work is proceeding but there are problems, mainly regarding material and technical supply.

M. S. GORBACHEV. We will consider all this in the Politburo. I think the economic and military issues will have to be considered separately.

NAJIBULLAH. It is important that the nucleus of our revolutionary army be composed of a special purpose security force which would prevent any coup attempts.

There is one more issue in the military area connected with military policy. The problem is that we have formed several units from bands which have crossed to our side. But they are worried right now that extremists will take revenge on them after the withdrawal of Soviet troops. They are asking us to help them with weapons and ammunition. We request the Soviet comrades consider this possibility.

Economics has special importance for solving domestic and foreign problems. Unfortunately, in spite of comprehensive Soviet aid, we are not able to carry out our plans completely. The growth of the revenue portion of the government budget rose 15% in recent years, while expenses rose 60%, especially for military needs. The national income rose only 6% total, instead of the planned 40%. Inflationary processes are developing, and the value of the Afghani is falling. Prices are rising 15-20%. An additional 9-10 billion Afghanis are issued annually. The state debt quintupled and is now 100 billion Afghanis.

M. S. GORBACHEV. And at the same time we're trading in bicycles, the output of a restored private enterprise, hence it is ruined.

NAJIBULLAH. I have been dealing with this problem in real earnest. I invited the owner of this enterprise to my office, which in itself is without precedent, and talked with him in detail. I asked him if he had any complaints or difficulties. He gave the same reply all the time, that he has no complaints or difficulties. Of course, I know that this is not so: he was simply afraid of the officials of the bureaucracy. Only at the very end of the conversation did he say that he had no telephone and that this was hampering his work. I promised to help him.

We are feeling a shortage of petroleum products, but the construction of a refinery in Shebergan [in northern Afghanistan] with a capacity of 500,000 tons a year has not yet started. The implementation of plans to increase the production of glass, paper, and various essential goods has also not begun. About 700,000 children are studying in schools, but only 30% of them have the necessary conditions for normal study. An additional 20 billion Afghani are needed for repair and restoration of the road network. I would like to ask you to help us in solving all these problems.

The development of bilateral Soviet-Afghan relations will have decisive importance for strengthening democratic rule and increasing the resources to oppose the counterrevolution. The question arises of how to replace our cooperation in military terms under conditions of the withdrawal of Soviet troops and afterwards. But we need to replace it with economic cooperation. We need to pay serious attention in these terms to the development of trade between the Soviet Union and Afghanistan.

We understand that we are asking for a lot of aid in the most diverse fields - from the delivery of consumer goods to direct financing. If you agree, we will send our proposals to the Soviet leadership.

Now one more issue, again in the military area, about whether it is possible to consider leaving part of the Soviet servicemen, for example, ten to fifteen thousand, to protect economic facilities and in training centers as well.

M. S. GORBACHEV. Considering that the Soviet military advisers are not among the troops it is possible to consider your request.

NAJIBULLAH. I'm talking about training centers and special technical groups to support the operation of airfields and roads.

M. S. GORBACHEV. This needs to be looked into. But, of course, all the requirements about including advisers in the troops are in the framework of the Geneva Accords. And then, naturally, when military equipment is delivered help will be required to assimilate it. This is normal everywhere it is delivered.

NAJIBULLAH. Possibly the principal aspects of this issue could probably be formulated in a new friendship treaty.

M. S. GORBACHEV. Yes, it's possible.

NAJIBULLAH. We are trying to solve problems connected with the training of military personnel and are doing it with our own resources but would like to expand collaboration and at a base in the Soviet Union.

In the worst case scenario we are providing for the creation of a reserve strongpoint in the north. Individual steps have already been taken, and we have informed the Soviet comrades of them. Much can be done here, from joint provision of security to still greater development of direct communications and giving new stimulus to border trade.

These are the main ideas which I would like to describe today and which were described in greater detail to the Soviet comrades in Kabul. I want to stress that in your person, Mikhail Sergeevich, and in your colleagues, we see the true friends of Afghanistan. It is very important that the entire world considers the Soviet Union and Afghanistan as a single whole and sees that how successfully the friendship between our peoples is developing and deepening. We feel your support and solidarity deeply.

We thank you from the bottom of our hearts. But we ourselves are not sparing efforts to carry out the tasks which lie before us.

M. S. GORBACHEV. Two days ago I talked with F[idel] Castro by telephone and told him of our upcoming meeting in Tashkent. Castro displayed great interest and expressed complete support for our steps and requested that I send you greetings. Castro said that he considers you simpatico and hopes that you like him. He added that, of course, that Cde. Najibullah cannot travel right now but let him remember that they are waiting for him in Cuba. Generally speaking, I felt like F. Castro was confident that Cde. Najibullah will lead the new Afghanistan.

Two days ago I talked with the Indian Ambassador in Moscow who sent me a message from R. Gandhi. We talked with him about issues of Soviet-Indian relations. I said that I would be meeting with you in Tashkent and that we would send corresponding information to the Indian side after I return to Moscow.

The Ambassador stressed that India and R. Gandhi personally were interested in strengthening Afghanistan in its non-alignment position in order that Afghanistan be a country maintaining friendly relations with the Soviet Union and India. He noted that the Indian side is actively facilitating this process. It is good that India and we are ready to help strengthen the positions of the Afghan leadership.

You and I met at a good time. We need to formulate our common position before the signing of the Geneva Accords, ensure they are signed, and the main thing - agree on joint steps at a new stage of development of the Afghan situation.

We will consider all the issues you touched on in the Politburo and try to solve them as much as the situation permits.

[1] On 8 February 1988, in a statement that was read by a broadcaster over national television interrupting regular broadcasting, Gorbachev announced that Soviet troops would begin pulling out of Afghanistan on 15 May if a settlement could be reached two months before that date, and that a withdrawal would be complete no more than ten months after it started. See Philip Taubman, "Soviet Sets May 15 as Goal to Start Afghanistan Exit," *New York Times*, 9 February 1988, pg. A1. For the full text of Gorbachev's statement, see *ibid.*, pg. A14.

[2] On 12 November 1893 Sir Henry Mortimer Durand, foreign secretary to the government of India, and Amir Abdur (Abdul) Rahman signed an agreement in Kabul that defined the borderline between Afghanistan and then British India. In 1979 the Afghan parliament repudiated the Durand Agreement.

[3] In early 1988, ethnic disturbances and unrest occurred in Armenia and Azerbaijan.