

June 13, 1988

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

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Summary:

Gorbachev and Najibullah discuss perestroika and the reforms taking place in the Soviet Union, and the ongoing withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan.

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M. S. GORBACHEV. I welcome you to Moscow, Cde. Najibullah. I congratulate you on the successful conclusion of your strenuous journey. I know that you have been working well and productively.

At the present time I am sort of staying in the "underground." It seems that periods of "underground" work are needed in the Soviet Union. Two weeks remain until the start of the XIX All-Union Party Conference.[\[1\]](#) The concluding stage of preparations for it is underway - work is concluding on the report of the CPSU CC General Secretary and other documents of a Conference which doubtless will be an important political event.

I think that it was interesting for you to familiarize yourself with the main points of the CPSU CC for the XIX All-Union Party Conference. This document describes the platform for discussion about the problems of the development of socialism in our country and an attempt has been made to analyze what is acceptable and necessary to further strengthen it and what is not.

A key issue at this conference of landmark importance will be reform of the political system. Of course I have in mind not the breakup of the government machinery as Lenin described in his work *Gosudarstvo i Revolyutsiya* [The State and Revolution] but its restructuring.

We have to think deeply and comprehensively about the role of the Party at the stage of perestroika, considering that much in this area has been messed up [podnaputali] and the Party has been overburdened with functions not inherent to it. As a result the Party is not always on top of the situation as the political vanguard. But inasmuch as no one can replace the Party in such a capacity serious oversights and blunders have been committed and here and there even mistakes in domestic and foreign policy. Perestroika has brought to the fore the imperative to sharply increase the leading and organizational role of the CPSU, which is especially important in the conditions of a single-party system when there is no other force capable of replacing the Party. The Party has been called on to work out a theory and strategy to develop our society, domestic, and foreign policy. It has been entrusted with the tasks of ideological support, education, and personnel placement.

In this context we must solve the problem of creating political mechanisms which would guarantee the well-founded, reliable fulfillment of the functions of direct management of the country and economic activity by other bodies. Therefore we are again, for the fourth time, advancing the slogan "All Power to the councils [soviets]!" intending in this regard a considerable increase in the role and authority of these fully-empowered [polnovlastnyye] bodies of popular representation. We ought to analyze their functions and missions specifically and secure all this legally and economically. This is the second link of the reform of the political system.

And naturally the problems associated with assuring the constitutional rights of Soviet citizens, the activity of labor unions, the [Communist youth organization] Komsomol, and other public organizations are being deeply thought through, proceeding from the realities of a one-party system. The creation of a socialist law-governed state founded on the supremacy of law needs to be concluded. The linchpin of the entire reconstruction of the political system is opening the road to a real inclusion of the people in managing the government. Of course, these provisions are written in basic party documents. But at the present stage the participation of the people needs to be turned into an inseparable part of the political system.

We have to carry out legal reform and make changes in the electoral system. The CPSU Charter needs to be changed and additions made to the USSR Constitution.

There are great expectations in connection with the Party Conference in our society.

That is why it can be said that the Conference is "doomed" to success.

Eh. A. SHEVARDNADZE. Israeli Prime Minister [Yitzhak] Shamir, too, talked about this in particular in a conversation with me in New York.

A. F. DOBRYNIN. Reagan has also repeatedly stressed his interest in the upcoming Party Conference.

M. S. GORBACHEV. American editors have been giving this advertisement for my book about perestroika: "Reagan read this book from cover to cover." Obviously this is having an effect on Americans who know that Reagan generally doesn't read books.

All in all, we are passing through a critical stage in Soviet history. And we can not lose it.

I have described to you, Cde. Najibullah, the chief provisions of the main points with which CC of our Party is going to the Conference. A settlement of the situation in Afghanistan is a very important part of perestroika and an important part of our policy and yours. And we need to be successful in what we decided together. With this point of view I welcome your present visit.

Your speech at the UN General Assembly session and other steps taken in New York have aroused great interest.^[2] There is positive reaction, the theme of which is the thought that President Najibullah is a leader with whom we ought to do business. All this is important for molding world public opinion in the right direction. Now the public will not very much accept hostile inventions about what is going on in Afghanistan on faith and will try to know the truth.

We know from the Cuban comrades that they are quite satisfied with the results of your visit. The Cubans also give high marks to the decision of the Soviet leadership to withdraw troops from Afghanistan...Before this they were constantly sounding out the issue, referring to the presence of Soviet troops in Afghanistan tying the hands of the Cubans as regards the withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola.

NAJIBULLAH. They talked in these terms in the course of the plenary discussions.

M. S. GORBACHEV. Everyone sees what is happening as a result of the withdrawal of our troops from Afghanistan. As regards us, Cde. Najibullah, the Soviet Union will henceforth do everything necessary to support you. There are no problems here and there cannot be. But however we help you, no matter how much we support you, the troops will be withdrawn. This needs to be kept in mind.

Therefore it is especially important that there be no panic among the Afghan comrades. And there needs to be unity. Otherwise you will end up as a sect of political figures divorced from reality and life. It is still a long way until the ideals proclaimed by the PDPA are realized. A long path will need to be traveled for this [to happen]. Ideals are not established by simple mechanical means. You need time and a corresponding level of development of a society.

If you do not understand, if you are frightened by reality, then everything can be lost. You need to reach higher levels of a political outlook and think about the fate of the country, and not about incomes, portfolios, and selfish interests. The time has come to look at the situation in Afghanistan realistically. It is time to share power in practice and form management mechanisms on the basis of the realities of Afghanistan with the participation of all political and social forces. Otherwise, this is not Marxism.

Remember how Lenin acted in such conditions. That's why everyone refers to Lenin and finds answers from him left and right. Because Lenin promoted political and ideological goals, relying on specific, real life, not taking any dogmas into consideration. He understood deeply when it was necessary to compromise and maneuver. A classic example was the conclusion of the [1918] Brest [-Litovsk] Peace [Treaty]. But what efforts this cost him! But at the same time when it was necessary he was a decisive revolutionary.

Now it is necessary, considering all the aspects of the situation in Afghanistan, to act consistently in all fields, including [the] diplomatic [one]. But the main thing is work in the country itself. I am getting the impression that the focus of events is shifting to Afghanistan. The domestic armed opposition is appreciably gaining strength. Therefore it is necessary to concentrate efforts in this direction and involve the commanders of armed formations, both in the upper echelons of power and in local bodies. There is no other way. If this is not done there can be a catastrophe.

We can regulate the tempo and intensity of the withdrawal of Soviet troops, no matter that the mujaheddin "are rubbing their hands." Moreover, the continuing violations of the Geneva Accords by Pakistan permit us to do this. We will react to this. Right in Kandahar the withdrawal had barely stopped and right away they reacted. We will act in a similar matter in all cases when there are attacks on our troops. If necessary powerful strikes need to be launched on the rebel bands. I told [USSR Minister of Defense] D. T. Yazov about this. Let them know that it is not permitted to play with us. In a word, both the carrot and the stick need to be employed.

It seems that Hekmatyar is leaving his post. [National Islamic Front leader Pir Sayyid Ahmad] Gilani is replacing him.^[3] This figure is evidently different from Hekmatyar. He follows a wait-and-see policy in order to begin larger operations after the withdrawal of Soviet troops. This ought to be closely followed. But it's important not to lose time while our troops are still in Afghanistan. And we still have time - two months remain until withdrawal of 50% of the contingent of Soviet troops and even more until complete [withdrawal].

The main problems ought to be solved during this period. Don't lose time on "agitation" of our comrades in Kabul. Don't be shy about raising questions directly with Moscow. We'll examine them. The help of the Soviet ambassador and our other representatives is always at your disposal. But when doubts arise in conversations with them ask them directly whose opinion they are expressing - their own personal [opinion] or that of the Soviet leadership. In addition, if the opinion of the Soviet leadership reaches you and you, Cde. Najibullah, as a man, as the leader of a country, have other ideas, inform us. We will study them here carefully and report our point of view.

[Some] friendly advice to all Afghan comrades and first of all to you as President, who has the necessary political experience, intellect, and knowledge: you need to act independently.

There are specific issues which we need to discuss with you. As has already been noted the timetable of the troop withdrawal can be adjusted considering the actual situation. But in this regard you need to proceed from the fact that we will withdraw the troops without fail. In this context the most important task is to speed up measures to strengthen the army and special security force. I know about your requests, especially about the security force.

It is important to strengthen political work in the armed forces with material incentive measures and take steps to build up material resources. Eh. A. Shevardnadze, V. M. Chebrikov, D. T. Yazov, and the heads of other ministries and agencies are examining

all the problems you raise. Part of them have already been decided. Eh. A. Shevardnadze will inform you of them.

Some of the problems, for example about foodstuffs, will remain for the time being since we do not have the capability to satisfy these requests. As soon as such a capability appears we will examine it again and make a decision. I note in this regard: it is necessary to use the available resources with maximum effectiveness and do everything so that the aid being offered is not squandered.

An important avenue of work should be stepping up contacts with realistic, sober-minded forces of the opposition and everyone who is ready to enter into talks. I have the impression that you personally have enormous capabilities for creative [nestandartnyye] steps in this area. Your opposition has half as many relatives (laughter).

You could argue in favor of your position that in present conditions an opportunity has been opened to the Afghans themselves to solve their own problems. Appeal to the need to understand the groundlessness for Afghanistan of a policy of confrontation with the Soviet Union, with which there is a common border of 2,500 km.

And have the opposition not entertain any illusions regarding Zia ul-Haq and the present rulers of Iran, who are not abandoning plans to dismember Afghanistan. They [offer] no guarantees of the independence, territorial integrity, or sovereignty of Afghanistan but the Soviet Union does, regardless of whether our troops are there or not. If you cast aside ideological differences then the Soviet Union and Afghanistan, one can say, are destined to collaborate. Our bilateral relations have deep roots and are completely in accord with the national interests of our countries. The Soviet Union is genuinely interested in a good neighbor living and working on its southern borders. And how can Pakistan and Iran help Afghanistan? Not at all. They will only try to chop off a piece of the Afghan pie.

In connection with the Geneva settlement, at the present time the Western countries are trying to construct something like a "Marshall Plan" through the UN. In other words, to create a base to penetrate Afghanistan on the rails of economic aid. Don't stray from cooperation in the implementation of such a program. It is possible there are positive aspects from the point of view of expanding contacts with the West and the UN. But maximum caution ought to be displayed here and be on your guard so you are not "swaddled" as happened in Angola and Mozambique. Progressive revolutions have long been underway in these countries but they cannot yet get out of the powerful embraces of the West. As soon as [Angolan President] Dos Santos tries to do this, they will practically seize him by the throat.

NAJIBULLAH. Dear Mikhail Sergeevich, first of all I want to express genuine gratitude for the opportunity that has been afforded to discuss our problems and tasks with you and consult with you regarding issues which the Afghan leadership has to decide at this critical historical stage of the development of Afghanistan. I thank you for the explanation of the main points of the CPSU CC for the All-Union Party Conference. I am convinced the Conference will be equal to a Congress in its importance.

Briefly about the trip to New York and Cuba. In our view, the work done was quite useful both from the political and propaganda points of view. Of course, it would be premature to expect immediate political dividends since time is required for quantity to become quality.

I am happy to fulfill a request of Fidel Castro and pass on his warm comradely greetings to you, Mikhail Sergeevich. I think that he has a feeling of genuine respect for you. For example, Fidel Castro told me that the policy of national reconciliation in

Afghanistan developed jointly with Soviet comrades has so impressed him that he would even like to revive [Cuban dictator Fulgencio] Batista in order to engage in national reconciliation with him.

M. S. GORBACHEV. (Laughs) I get the allusion. Generally speaking, Fidel Castro is different than [Cuban revolutionary and guerilla leader Ernesto] Che Guevara. Without question, the people love him and he enjoys enormous authority. In a word - he is a legendary personality, but legends should be constantly nourished somehow.

NAJIBULLAH. I agree with your statement. Now some words about trends in the development of the situation in Afghanistan. The beginning of the withdrawal of Soviet troops has complicated the military and political situation in the country. The situation has worsened in a number of border provinces; an increase in the infiltration of caravans from Pakistan with weapons is being observed, and depots and bases are being created on our territory.

M. S. GORBACHEV. The recent destruction of two depots is a good thing. This is how you need to act henceforth.

NAJIBULLAH. The main goal which the irreconcilable opposition is trying to realize is the seizure of a provincial capital which has an airfield. If this is done the main axis will be the seizure of Jalalabad or Kandahar where combat operations have been especially active recently, and also the creation of an airlift to receive American military aid, bypassing Pakistan. At the same time the enemy has intensified psychological warfare which is producing its own results and influencing the population of Kabul and other regions.

In the Headquarters of the Supreme High Command we have developed measures to launch strikes on counterrevolutionary groups in the regions of Jalalabad and Kandahar and are preparing operational subunits with a strength of from five to seven thousand men.

It needs to be noted that negative processes are being aggravated by the latest outbreak of disputes in the PDPA CC Politburo and in the leadership as a whole. Many of our comrades voted in support of the policy of national reconciliation at party conferences and plenums. But right now when the matter has reached practical work and really sharing power with the opposition, they are evasive or openly resist. The passivity of members of the Party leadership is having a negative influence on the mood of ordinary PDPA members, especially in the army.

As a result, desertion has recently increased, including absconding with weapons. In these difficult conditions the natural and normal process of self-purification of the PDPA has begun - casual and vacillating people who joined the Party only to realize their own egoistic ambitions are leaving it. We intend to maintain this trend because, in our view, such a purification will be only to the PDPA's advantage.

I want to stress the timeliness and the importance of your address to the PDPA leadership. Your message was deeply and comprehensively discussed at the Politburo. The comrades entrusted me with passing our message of reply to you. (Passes the message of reply from the Afghan leadership to M. S. Gorbachev.)

M. S. GORBACHEV. Since you left this message with our comrades before your departure for New York I have familiarized myself with it. You acted correctly in suggesting that all your colleagues in the leadership sign it.

If the notion of dividing the PDPA into independent "Khalq" and "Parcham" parties,

which individual comrades are expressing, takes over, this will be doomed to catastrophe. This would be a blow to the position of the President and would make your work more difficult. You would have to leave the Party. In the final account all this would turn into a catastrophe. It's necessary to remember the folk wisdom which says that a fish rots from the head.

NAJIBULLAH. I completely agree with your opinion. I would like to touch on international issues further. At the present time we are proceeding from the position that Pakistan is not fulfilling and indeed is not demonstrating readiness to fulfill the Geneva Accords. As regards Iran, it is occupied with the problems of the Persian Gulf and the attention of Iranian leaders is being deflected from Afghanistan by the Iran-Iraq War, in spite of all the hostility of their positions.

M. S. GORBACHEV. Some days ago Zia ul-Haq sent me a message in which he virtually disclosed embraces of friendship, lying with the tears of tender emotion. He officially invited me to visit Pakistan. In his step there is obviously a tactical stratagem and a recognition of reality. He needs to consider the possibility of what will happen to Pakistan if the Soviet Union, India, and Afghanistan pressure him from three sides.

NAJIBULLAH. When did the message arrive, before the recent events in Pakistan?

M. S. GORBACHEV. Yes, literally days before.

NAJIBULLAH. It seems to me that your visit could be exceptionally useful in terms of [putting] appropriate pressure on Pakistan.

M. S. GORBACHEV. I am not going there. But if there is some positive movement in the position of the Pakistani administration then it's possible to consult and propose to Zia ul-Haq that we meet somewhere.

NAJIBULLAH. I agree with you that if there are constructive elements displayed in Zia ul-Haq's policy a meeting between him and the Soviet leadership could be useful.

M. S. GORBACHEV. We have repeatedly said to the Americans that the Geneva Accords concerning Afghanistan are a touchstone of the US readiness to actually improve relations with the Soviet Union. The latest information indicates that the US Administration is displaying increasing realism in the analysis of the situation in Afghanistan which is based on data of American representatives in Kabul, understanding the staying power of the present regime, and that it cannot simply be removed. Yet not at all long ago they had different assessments. But the smallest allusion to differences in the Afghan leadership and disputes which occur will immediately become known to the Americans. Therefore I advise you to warn your comrades that they be more careful and chatter a little less.

NAJIBULLAH. Thank you for the friendly advice.

Returning again to foreign policy problems, I want to note that, unfortunately, the Geneva Accords have not yet brought the expected cessation of outside interference. I raised these issues in conversations with UN Secretary General J. Perez de Cuellar and D. Cordovez. They promised to take the necessary steps to activate a monitoring mechanism and assured me that Pakistan had reportedly expressed readiness to take all measures in their power.

In a word, the first 15-20 days after the start of the withdrawal of Soviet troops were quite difficult: a certain tension arose in the Party and we displayed an unnecessary

haste in our steps. But right now work is getting down to normal and we see our miscalculations and also our capabilities more clearly. A unique breathing spell has come when each of the sides is organizing. In my view, we need scarcely expect large-scale combat operations from the armed opposition in the near future. Fearing the Soviet troops, the armed formations will try to amass their forces and at the same time step up propaganda work, sabotage, and terrorist activity. Moreover, the disputes between the foreign and domestic forces of the counterrevolution are growing stronger.

M. S. GORBACHEV. The armed formations which are operating inside Afghanistan are less extremist. They need to consider that they are in plain view of the people.

NAJIBULLAH. Exactly so. Of all the [rebel] groups the most active are those of the Islamic Party of Afghanistan, which G. Hekmatyar heads. They are concentrating their main efforts on the Kabul axis, trying to sow panic among the capital's population with shelling and terrorist acts.

It should be noted that at the present time the population of Afghanistan as a whole is displaying a notable caution and a desire to get their bearings on the situation. It is waiting to see if the present government holds out or not. This also refers to armed formations created of rebels who crossed over to the government side.

We are acutely faced with the problem of achieving a decisive turning point in the psychological mood of the population. But this can be done only by launching decisive strikes on irreconcilable groups. This is the psychology of the Afghan people. If they see that we could teach the rebels an exemplary lesson then the balance will swing in our favor. In this regard I would like to ask you to approve several large-scale military operations. The armed forces of Afghanistan would take a direct part in waging these combat operations. Soviet troops would be in the second and third echelons. This would boost the morale of the personnel. And victory in such operations would give them confidence in their ability to defeat the enemy by themselves.

M. S. GORBACHEV. This can be done only if an attack is made on our troops. In this case our retaliatory actions would be confirmation of the statement we made that we will react to violations of existing agreements by the other side in an appropriate manner.

NAJIBULLAH. We will diligently put the policy of national reconciliation, which is gaining increasing popular support, into practice. The recent changes in the upper echelons of government, the appointment of authoritative representatives of the population by governors, and the creation of a coalition government have evoked a favorable response.

At the same time we intend to continue working with Afghan emigrants, in particular former King Zahir Shah, although considering the situation main reliance will all the same be placed on establishing contact with the domestic opposition.

M. S. GORBACHEV. Now you need not only to have intentions but to already be working.

NAJIBULLAH. We also will resolutely overcome intra-Party differences and attempts by individual comrades to abandon and avoid supporting the leadership.

M. S. GORBACHEV. There is already a circle of people around the President who can be relied on. But it needs to be considerably expanded, contact made with

representatives of various forces, and rally them around yourself. You need to work more actively with the new Prime Minister [Muhammad Hassan Sharq],[\[4\]](#) with Layek, other comrades, and also with representatives of the patriotic clergy.

Eh. A. SHEVARDNADZE. Individual Soviet comrades have expressed ideas about the advisability of dividing the functions of the President and the General Secretary of the Party CC. This was not the opinion of the Soviet leadership and we have disavowed them.

M. S. GORBACHEV. I want to repeat what I have been saying: in such cases you could ask whose opinion the Soviet representatives are stating.

NAJIBULLAH. As Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces I will strive to keep all military matters under personal control. We are faced with big problems and we will need your assistance. I described my proposals in this connection to Eh. A. Shevardnadze and A. F. Dobrynin earlier.

M. S. GORBACHEV. I repeat: we will henceforth do everything to help you. But again I insistently call to your attention that you not squander our aid.

NAJIBULLAH. I would like to consult with you about this issue. In present circumstances the policy of exerting appropriate pressure on Pakistan seems important. In these terms the sending of Eh. A. Shevardnadze's letter to the UN Secretary General was opportune. The USSR MID Statement of 29 May 1988 was very important. Moreover, in my view, appropriate steps could be taken through the Pakistani Ambassador in Moscow and also through third countries.

It is important to get the UN to have the groups of observers work directly in the border regions, in the zone through which the so-called "Durand Line" passes. As regards propaganda work, then it ought to be given a purposeful, active character, and to specifically expose Pakistan from the facts of [its] violations of the Accords. The main thing for us is to ensure the fulfillment of the Geneva Accords.

In conclusion I want to assure you, Mikhail Sergeevich, that we will do everything necessary in spite of current difficulties in order to preserve the gains of the Revolution, consolidate, and increase them.

M. S. GORBACHEV. You can always be confident that the broadest support will be given for your efforts on our part.

NAJIBULLAH. We consider the policy of national reconciliation to be part of the policy of perestroika of which you, Mikhail Sergeevich, are the initiator. The ideas of perestroika have international importance and go far beyond national boundaries. They have become exceptionally popular among the Afghan people and have been turned into a factor capable of strengthening their national pride. Therefore we fully understand the responsibility which rests on us at the present stage and will work persistently to translate the policy of national reconciliation and perestroika in Afghan society into practice.

M. S. GORBACHEV. It is important that everyone with whom you work and whom you involve in cooperation are imbued with the understanding that we have no secret, selfish designs regarding Afghanistan. Our policy has been and will be based on respect for the Afghan people, their values and traditions, and full recognition of the independence and sovereignty of Afghanistan.

The Soviet Union will continue to help you solve the problems of developing the

country, move Afghan society along the path of progress, and restore general international recognition of Afghanistan. We are genuinely interested that there be a loyal neighbor at the southern borders of the Soviet Union with whom our country has a longstanding friendship.

[1] The Nineteenth Party Congress took place in Moscow from 28 June to 1 July 1988. On the importance of the Congress, see Archive Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), chapter 6.

[2] Najibullah addressed the UN General Assembly on 7 June 1988. Najibullah warned that continued violations by Pakistan of the Geneva accord on Afghanistan could force a delay in the agreed timetable for Soviet troop withdrawal. See *The Washington Post*, 8 June 1988, p. A22.

[3] Gilani [Gailani] became spokesman for the seven-member mujaheddin alliance on 15 June 1988.

[4] Muhammad Hassan Sharq was appointed Prime Minister on 26 May 1988, replacing Sultan Ali Keshtmand, who became secretary of the PDPA Central Committee. See Ludwig A. Adamec, *Dictionary of Afghan Wars, Revolutions and Insurgencies* (London: the Scarecrow Press, 1996), p. 305.