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**Record of Conversation between M.S. Gorbachev
and Prime Minister R. Gandhi**

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Summary:

Gorbachev and Rajiv Gandhi meet to discuss various issues. Begin by noting the effect of Western radio propaganda within both India and Soviet Union. Gorbachev notes the "voices" of Western radio stations broadcasting in the Soviet Union, aiming to undermine perestroika. After touching on economic initiatives in India, Gandhi singles out, among problems in India, the "weakening of public morals." Blames this problem on the "onslaught of the Western--and first and foremost, American-- mass media." Both sides criticize militarism at base of US foreign policy, and US emphasis on rolling back communism. Conversation concludes with analysis of Afghanistan situation; Gorbachev explains measure USSR is taking to solidify Afghan government, and Gandhi recommends caution when dealing with tribal factor in Afghanistan. Both sides speak on Pakistan's reaction to situation.

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Gorbachev: It is a good thing that now, at the moment when the whole world and our countries are going through a responsible moment in their development, we have the opportunity to meet and exchange opinions. Such discussions between us on a personal basis are simply indispensable. One can say without exaggeration that the things we agreed to in Delhi-both the [27 November 1986] Delhi Declaration [on the principles of a nuclear weapons-free and non-violent world] and our agreements in terms of bilateral relations-all of this has already started to work and is working for the world and for the benefit of our mutual relations. The Soviet-Indian phenomenon of course has its history, its traditions. But at the present stage of world development, taking into consideration the fairly tense situation which has transpired in the world, it gains a special significance. This is already something greater than the friendship of the two peoples. It is an example of how one could and should build relations between countries, to build them realistically and practically in this complicated world.

I have to say that in this connection one encounters both positive and negative aspects in terms of [people's] attitude towards what the Soviet Union and India are doing. Our efforts are welcomed by our peoples. We sense this mood here in the Soviet Union, and I think it is shared by the wide masses of the Indian population. People support the existing character of our relations. We also feel the support of a huge group of countries- progressive countries, development states, and even the realistic circles in the West. At the same time it is obvious that the reactionary forces in the West see a danger for themselves in our relations. This deals a blow to their views as to how relations should be built between different countries in the world.

Therefore, we are seeing a conflict between two concepts, two types of thinking. And this explains many things, including what happens inside India.

I am being warned, advised not to go because, in the opinion of the authors of these letters, the rightists in the US can do anything.

If you listen to the "voices" of the Western radio stations, which broadcast to the Soviet Union, 30-40 percent of these broadcasts are direct provocations. They are directed towards undermining perestroika, provoking suspicions and doubts. They spread rumors that there are three conflicting groups in the Politburo, which struggle among themselves. On even the latest Plenum, they started a loud propaganda campaign with the aim of sowing doubts in the success of our efforts, in that they can be solved. They forecasted a political squabble at the Plenum.

There are also direct appeals to different population groups, different nationalities, for example, to the Latvians, Estonians, Ukrainians, to protest, voice their grievances, demand secession from the Soviet Union. They look for disgruntled groups, even finance them, so that they take to the streets and protest. All of this failed. They achieved nothing, but the campaign continues.

I think you face similar facts in India. The same thing is happening in different countries of Eastern Europe, everywhere, where regimes and policy exist which do not satisfy the West. Therefore, I think that you, too, have to carry on a difficult struggle. That said, the roots of the phenomena with which you have to struggle are not in India alone. Of course, there were and are groups in India which do not like something in domestic and foreign policies of the government, but the spring is wound from the outside.

There is only one conclusion: we have a difficult struggle ahead. But we are convinced that the best means against these conspiracies is a dynamic, progressive, consistent internal and external policy.

Gandhi: I agree with you.

Gorbachev: In this connection we attach great significance to the activity of the party in all spheres-in the economy, social policy, and in the spiritual area. We are strengthening our ties with the masses. And this allows us to prevent any attempts to shake and divide our society. These attempts are doomed to failure in the conditions of a strong, united society of struggle with all negative manifestations in the circumstances of glasnost. And, of course, we pay much attention to strengthening the political leadership-the Central Committee, Politburo, government.

I would like to start our conversation with this, i.e. to talk about the mutual interconnection of things.

Gandhi: This is completely correct. First and foremost, I would like to thank you for a very warm welcome. Every visit to the Soviet Union, to Moscow, for me means the renewal of the old bonds of friendship, not only friendship between the USSR and India but also our personal friendship. Thank you for everything you have done for this visit. Many thanks for all that you have done for my children. I've just spoken with them, they are very glad.

Gorbachev: How did you find them? Did they become stronger?

Gandhi: Yes, they look great. Especially my daughter became stronger. They both benefited from an active lifestyle, swimming, and rest.

Gorbachev: Yes, children also suffer from the stresses that we feel. Of course, we already have experience, we are prepared for it, we handle the stress. But they do not take the strain lightly. I pity them.

Gandhi: Now about what is happening in India after your visit [in November 1986]. By the way, we remember it as a most important turning point in the further improvement of relations between our countries. During our last two conversations I spoke about those forces and groups in our countries which are closely connected with certain Western circles. I said that we will have problems in this connection because these forces have considerable capabilities. And, indeed, in many ways the problems with which we have been faced in the last four months are connected precisely with this. Although, honestly speaking, this is not the only problem. As you once said, their business is to create problems, and ours is to take care that these problems do not arise. And this is our main weakness-a complete absence of the inside party structure.

Gorbachev: We have a strong party.

Gandhi: Our party suffered a great deal in 1969 when it underwent an ideological split. That year, an organized core of the party split off and moved to the right from us. At the same time, the mass base of the party, headed by my mother, chose a more progressive road. Beginning from that time we feel a split in our elections. Thus, in 1971 my mother won the elections in a landslide, but this was not the result of the party's efforts but reflected her personal popularity. And after 1971, when our government unveiled great work directed at overcoming poverty and providing aid to the population, these efforts did not result in increasing the authority of and respect for the party because they were associated with the activity of the government, not

the party. As a result, the party did not keep the situation under control. The situation worsened, which led in 1975 to the declaration of emergency, and in 1977 to a defeat in the elections. Of course, there were many reasons for this defeat. But the main reason was that, lacking a strong party, we could not counter the arguments of the other side in any way.

[...]

Because of the absence of a truly organized party structure, ideas are associated with the government and not with the party. And, besides, there is no mechanism on the basis of which the ideas and the program of the party would be used by the government, which would be implemented in its activity.

There is another complicating matter. It is connected with the activity of the mass media. And there is a certain parallel with what you were talking about. The mass media in our country belongs to the private sector. Their ideology and positions are sharply different from our own. We have to constantly take this into account.

In the last two and a half years, from the moment of the coming to power of the current government, we undertook many serious initiatives in the interests of developing our economy. Our "perestroika" is similar to yours. We managed to reach pretty good results. The rates of growth in industry and in the economy as a whole have increased. Of course, our economy has weak spots. But when we face difficulties, we try not to retreat but look for opportunities to fix the situation by means of active measures. For example, last year we faced as serious a problem as a significant excess of our imports over our exports. There were voices calling for sharp curtailment of imports. However, we understood that many of our import goods have importance for the growth of our economy. Therefore, we decided to take the road of active expansion of export. And we reached some success-exports increased by 17 percent.

Of course, we have a lot of problems in India. But I would single out one of them, the most important one-the deficit of ideology, the weakening of public morals. They have been undermined to a large extent. And here one cannot help but speak about the real problem, which is caused by the onslaught of the Western-and first and foremost, American-mass media. Our society has been poisoned by a purely pragmatic approach to life. Political parties to a large extent lost their ideological identity in the pursuit of quick success. Even the left parties often act on the basis of conjectural considerations, and not on the basis of principles. As a result they cooperate with the right parties, with groups which have nothing in common with them, which have no platform except for conjectural benefit.

I think that the pressure that we are subjected to results to a large extent from India's taking a firm, principled position on many large questions. The strengthening of friendship between the Soviet Union and India, which is becoming more and more noticeable, also plays a role. At the same time, I think that the fear is caused not so much by the possibility of some strategic alliance between the USSR and India, which could create problems of military character or influence the balance of forces. The Soviet-Indian friendship is not to everyone's taste because it shows that the so-called international rules of the game can be changed. If there is truly a desire, it is completely unnecessary for countries of different systems to oppose each other. On the contrary, they can cooperate rather than be antagonistic, even as they remain different.

Gorbachev: That's exactly right.

Gandhi: Our relations contradict the very essence of those arguments which are

being advanced by the United States. In the US, every question is considered from the point of view of rolling back communism. All of this intimidation with the "Soviet threat," constant conversations about the capture of power by communists, about the destruction of a way of life. If the people see that the Soviet Union does not pose a threat about which they have been told for the last 30-40 years, this means that one will have to change the approach itself, the method of policy formulation. And the US is not prepared for it yet.

Gorbachev: In any case, the current generation of the American leadership. Indeed, also the next echelon of the American political figures.

Gandhi: Yes, this is so.

Gorbachev: They have too much pragmatism and too little philosophy in their policy. But if policy merely reacts to the latest events, it condemns itself to wavering, to instability.

Gandhi: Moreover, when this happens in a powerful country like the US, it has much more serious consequences than in the case of some small country. Perhaps such a policy is beneficial to America, but the world is paying a hefty price for it.

Gorbachev: This policy is strongly subject to the influence of militarism.

Gandhi: I have thought about it for a long time, and I must say that I do not fully understand the sources of this policy. And what kind of policy is it? There is the White House, the State Department-it has its own policy, the Pentagon, the CIA. Each agency has its own foreign policy. Then there is the Congress, the Senate, the media, which have huge power. Today I read a very interesting article which states that the American media has in essence started to nominate their candidates, unwilling to leave this choice to the political parties.

[...]

Gorbachev: Now, about Afghanistan. Some things you know very well. I would also like to inform you that many new things have happened in recent times. We are carrying out an active exchange of opinions with the Afghan leadership, including through closed channels. Recently [Soviet Foreign Minister] E.A. Shevardnadze was there with an undeclared visit, also comrades [Deputy Prime Minister and Chairman of the Foreign Economic Commission Vladimir M.] Kamentsev and [Deputy KGB Chairman Vladimir Alexandrovich] Kryuchkov.

Now the Afghan leadership believes that the policy of national reconciliation must be given a new impulse so that this process cannot be undermined by the counterrevolutions and the mujahedeen. The Afghans have freed themselves from leftist mottos and leftist programs, from the idea of the move from a clan system, bypassing all the stages, directly into communism. Now they put more realistic tasks in front of them, follow a more realistic approach.

New proposals are being prepared to widen the social base of the regime, to change the character of authority in the country so that it reflects the complex, motley structure of Afghan society. Now they are taking the matter towards the creation of new parties, which would reflect the interests of the different layers of Afghan society. They are prepared to share power and portfolios in the government. They offer the opposition, the opponents of the current regime based in Pakistan and in Europe, to join them in the framework of a coalition. In other words, the policy is being implemented which was formulated and which we (and as far as we know, you

also) supported. This policy is to create an independent, non-aligned Afghanistan which would be friendly to all of its neighbors and would not be a platform for the United States.

Now the Afghan leadership has a broad program. It will be legalized more and more. It has planned to extend the ceasefire by another half a year. Realistic steps are being taken to change the situation, move to a new structure of power which would fully reflect the character of the Afghan society.

Gandhi: The tribal factor is very complicated. Our country has several regions with a tribal structure of society. I had many conversations about this with the African leaders; there are many regions like this there as well. The tribal structure sharply differs from a society that lacks it. Therefore, one must be particularly cautious when we offer some solutions. In India we have small states in which only three, four tribes reside. There are also their representatives in our party. However, their contradictions are so strong that even a common ideology cannot overcome them. Therefore, I think one should act with extreme caution in Afghanistan when taking any steps. The Afghan government should take this into account in order not to allow a weakening of society so that it does not become a spring board for external forces.

Gorbachev: Until now, they have only formally considered this factor. The current leadership puts forward ideas and takes steps, realizing the importance of this factor. Negotiations are being conducted with the tribal chiefs, local jirgas [tribal assemblies] are being conducted, and an all-Afghan jirga is being prepared. Consultations with the tribes are being carried out on a wide basis. This is [General Secretary of the Central Committee of the People's Democratic Republic Party of Afghanistan] Najib's strong side. He actively engages in contacts with various forces and tribes. [Former General Secretary of the Central Committee of the People's Democratic Republic Party of Afghanistan Babrak] Karmal proclaimed communist mottos, mottos far removed from the realities of the Afghan society. The current leadership looks at things more realistically.

And secondly, large steps are being taken in the social sphere. Efforts are directed towards making people's lives easier. In this sense, we are helping the Afghans. Help is being provided to various layers of society, and more favorable conditions are being created for the merchants, traders, artisans and the Islamic clergy. All of this work covers a wide spectrum. But at the same time we are telling the Afghans that one should not lose any time: unfold the business in a more active fashion while we are there.

Gandhi: And how does Pakistan react to all of this?

Gorbachev: Pakistan is thrashing about. The Pakistanis understand the difficulty of keeping up the confrontation with the Soviet Union and India. They would like to have direct contacts on these questions. We are receiving appropriate signals, including from the Minister of Foreign Affairs. There was another interesting signal recently, which was probably timed with your visit to Moscow. A group of Pakistani generals, clearly not without the blessing of [President of Pakistan] Zia ul-Haq, approached our military attaché. They asked to convey personally to Gorbachev that Pakistan will never allow American bases on its territory. This is of course a gesture of a symbolic character so to speak, but it warrants attention as such.

Gandhi: If things are as they say, there should not be any difficulty in concluding an agreement of peace and friendship, which we are offering to Pakistan.

Gorbachev: This is probably a game. At the same time, I think that there is a real understanding of the situation behind this gesture.

The situation is fairly ambiguous. The situation was influenced by our talks in Delhi and all the declarations, which we came out with in support of Afghanistan and in relation to Pakistan's activities. As you know, they were impressed by the fact that neither you nor I spoke out with threats addressed to Pakistan but called upon it to rethink [its policy] and take a more realistic position. Probably wide segments of the Pakistani population were impressed that we did not brush Pakistan aside, did not take the road of accusations.

One should say that [UN Undersecretary-General for Special Political Affairs Diego] Cordovez narrows the whole business to the withdrawal of forces. Pakistan does the same thing. But we know that when the Pakistanis made a concession in Geneva and decreased the timeframe by only one month, they took a serious scolding from the Americans.

So to speak of the main obstacle in the way of speeding up the political settlement of the Afghan problem, it is the US position. After all, the Americans understand that the continuation of tension in Afghanistan is pushing Pakistan into their embrace. Besides, they want for the current situation to continue because it allows them to discredit the Soviet Union's foreign policy. Therefore, the US policy is a large obstacle.

[...]

The conversation was continued over dinner.