

Politburo Session, 23 February, 1987
Notes of Anatoly S. Chernyaev

Gromyko: The Mujahadeen are getting stronger. We aren't able to use our tanks in the mountains. We are forced to retreat. The situation is getting worse. Nothing is going to be decided, one way or the other, if our troops stay another half year. If this round of negotiations with Cordovez is fruitless, it will just lead to a consolidation of the Mujahadeen's position. They will consolidate in the territories that they have captured. We may, therefore, have to consider the timetable to get the troops out accordingly. I repeat, for emphasis, that the situation is only going to get worse unless we finalize an agreement with them.

Shevardnadze: A pullout will not be possible in under two years. Every day is important for building up the Afghan army. We cannot step back from our agreed-upon obligations as to when we would pull our forces back. Najibullah will not understand that.

Gromyko: There's no way we're going to be able to close the Afghanistan-Pakistan border, so we need to end this war. The border problem is actually a small matter in comparison with our main task, but Najibullah is stubborn. We need to send our representative to the negotiations between the Pakistanis and Cordovez, maybe Kryuchkov.

Shevardnadze: Most important is that we do not allow the Najibullah regime to fall. That is of the utmost importance!

Gorbachev: It's a tricky situation. We went in, but how to get out—our heads are splitting from this. Of course we can just pull out fast, without thinking of anything and blame the former leadership who started all this. But we cannot act this way. India is worried, Africa is worried. They believe that it would be a blow against the reputation of the Soviet Union in the national liberation movement. They say to us—if you run away from Afghanistan, imperialism will start an offensive.

There is another, internal matter to consider here. A million of our soldiers have went through Afghanistan, and it turns out, all for nothing. The mission is not accomplished, and we will not be able to account for our actions to our people. They will say that we have forgotten about the casualties and we have forgotten about the reputation of this country. There will be bitterness: for what then were those lives lost? We must keep Najibullah in power— that much is a necessity. It's a state that we have a border with, and it is our neighbor. If we cannot strengthen our neighbor, then what good are we? If we begin shifting this all now, if we rush—the regime there will fall. There is already a visible panic amongst the Afghan cadres. Najibullah has said that, supposedly, Gorbachev has promised to bring in another 500,000 men to Afghanistan. That is all his speculations, but Najibullah has taken these steps to make sure that no panic ensues.

... We should not exclude America from the negotiations, up to making some deals with the Americans. We should also stick it to Pakistan, make sure they really know that there is nowhere they can get away from the Soviet Union. Or, maybe we should even invite Zia-ul-Khaq (the Pakistani president) to meet with me in Tashkent, and maybe even "pay" him for this? We need

to be flexible yet shrewd in this no matter what, otherwise it would end in mass slaughter and Najibullah will be thrown off right away. We must continue the negotiations and be sure there is no break-down in the process. Who knows, we may have to still make concessions on the withdrawal schedule.

Are there any doubts about what I have just said? (voices, 'No!', 'No!') Then that's how we're going to act.

[Source: The Gorbachev Foundation archive, Moscow, Fond 1, Opis 2
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