

Record of Conversation between Gorbachev and Thatcher
April 5, 1989

Thatcher: Yes, I visited the South of Africa. Currently, the fate of the settlement for which you so actively worked is in question as a result of fighting. However, it is not very surprising. Similar events took place during the initial period of implementation of the agreement granting independence to Zimbabwe. Nonetheless, the situation is dangerous. We need to do everything possible in order to control the situation, not to let the settlement to be destroyed.

Gorbachev: Yes, it is very important, and I think it would be possible to keep the situation under control. We are making every possible effort, we are staying in contact with SWAPO [Southwest African People's Organization]. Others also make active moves. You made a very good statement.

Thatcher: Yes, I was very concerned. When the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the South African Republic informed me that according to intelligence information (which was confirmed later), SWAPO units intended to enter Namibia and that South Africa was going to withdraw troops from the camps in order to counter SWAPO, I said to him: "Don't do it." I told him that it would be possible to do that only if there was such a request from United Nations representatives. I told them that the main goal now was to establish facts and to stop such actions.

Gorbachev: Cooperation in the resolution of regional conflicts is a very important task. And in this context I have to tell you that we are somewhat disappointed by the U.S. behavior on the issue of Afghanistan. We agreed with President Reagan that we would make Afghanistan the example of cooperation in resolving similar problems. We, from our side, fulfilled all our obligations. I said to the U.S. President that we did not need Afghanistan as a base for our troops, and we had proven it by withdrawing our troops.

Thatcher: [...] What are your impressions from Cuba? It seems that this is a country which was not touched by the wind of perestroika either in its foreign or internal policy.

Gorbachev: I will inform you of my impressions tomorrow. Interesting impressions. I found that Fidel is a strong and experienced politician who feels the trends of the times. It has already been seen in Cuba's role in the South African conflict resolution. Tomorrow we will speak about it in detail.

Thatcher: This is interesting. I, honestly, do not see any special signs that would show that the new winds have touched Cuba. Cuba interferes in Central America, and it has military presence in 14 African countries.

Gorbachev: But it is withdrawing troops from Angola and Ethiopia.

Thatcher: Oh, the situation in Ethiopia is terrible.

Gorbachev: And what about the 14 countries--isn't it an exaggeration?

Thatcher: No, although certainly in some small countries the Cuban presence is very insignificant.

Gorbachev: Well, in this case, Great Britain is present literally everywhere, including Africa.

Thatcher: I visited a camp in Zimbabwe where a small unit of British troops teaches Mozambique citizens how to fight RENAMO [Mozambique] terrorists following a request from the government of Mozambique. I saw a completely unbelievable picture there: the British training the Mozambique with Kalashnikov automatic rifles in Zimbabwe. RENAMO is one of the most cruel terrorist organizations. They are not just your simple bandits. It is a well-armed terrorist group, equipped with the most modern means of command and communication, and radio interception devices. I came to a conclusion that it was a much stronger enemy than I thought before.

Gorbachev: But somebody has to have an interest in it?

Thatcher: Do you mean financing? RENAMO is being financed by the Portuguese who escaped to South Africa, and partially by the Americans. I think not all the Americans realize what a cold-blooded terrorist organization it is.

I discussed this topic with presidents Chissano and Mugabe. Chissano is in a very difficult situation. He is trying to establish a contact with RENAMO via the President of Kenya. As far as Mugabe is concerned, he does not show any initiative in terms of political settlement, even though you would think he should be interested in it--the presence of the Zimbabwe's troops defending the railroad in Mozambique is very expensive. But he would join a political settlement only if he was asked.

Gorbachev: Maybe he is constrained by some internal political reasons?

Thatcher: I did not have such an impression, but he is definitely constrained by something.

So far, the situation remains very difficult. In Malawi I visited a refugee camp, which is filled with hundreds of thousands of Mozambique nationals, and they continue to cross the border.

Of course, we need to help the Mozambique. However, as I have just said, the enemy is very strong. We send them food aid, but the Mozambique citizens have to choose what to guard--the railroad, or the villages where the food is delivered. Otherwise RENAMO captures all the delivered food aid.

Gorbachev: To my regret, the same often happens with our assistance to Afghanistan.

[\[Source: Archive of the Gorbachev Foundation, Fond 2, opis 1. Notes of A.S. Chernyaev. On file at the National Security Archive. Translated by Svetlana Savranskaya\]](#)