

Politburo Session, January 21, 1987
Anatoly S. Chernyaev Notes

About the Results of [Eduard] Shevardnadze and [Anatoly] Dobrynin's Visit to Afghanistan.

Shevardnadze. In the country and in the provinces they created authoritative organizations for reconciliation. They are working actively. There is a special committee for refugees. Many [rebel] bands—although they are not big—stopped armed struggle. Najib leaves a very good impression. However, not everybody supports him, even in the leadership. Some people are vacillating. But, as he rightly puts it, he does not have different people. He has taken the initiative into his own hands. I think that the leaders of the mojahadeen made a miscalculation having declined reconciliation. The economy of the country is in a state of destruction.

Very little is left of the friendly feelings toward the Soviet people, which existed for decades. Very many people have died, and not all of them were bandits. Not a single problem was solved in favor of the peasants. In essence, [we] waged war against the peasants. The state apparatus is functioning poorly. Our adviser assistance is ineffective. Najib was complaining about the petty patronizing on the part of our advisers.

I am not going to discuss now whether we did the right thing by going there. But it is a fact that we went there absolutely not knowing the psychology of the people, or the real situation in the country. And everything that we were and are doing in Afghanistan is inconsistent with the moral face of our country.

Gromyko. Inconsistent—that we went in?

Shevardnadze. And that too. The attitude toward us is more negative than we think ... It is good that we sent agencies to Afghanistan. But we need a political decision. Otherwise we will reap the fruits of a serious political and military defeat. Now the factor of time decides everything. Najib is counting days—how many are left?

And we spend 1 billion rubles a year on all this. The sum is enormous, and we have to take responsibility for that. And [we need] to count once more in all details, how much Afghanistan costs us right now, at this moment. Nikolai Ivanovich does not have such data so far. In the United States they counted that the war costs us 2 billion rubles, and the Japanese think that it costs us 3 billion rubles per year. I am not even talking about the human lives.

Gorbachev. The Indians think that we should not withdraw our troops completely, or in any case, to “move fast without rushing.”

Shevardnadze. The words addressed to the people do not reach the people. The people do not have radios ... In a word, it is still not too late to make a final determination. The main thing is material and political support for Najib. There is no other solution.

Gorbachev. We are not going to discuss now how did their revolution emerge, how we reacted, how we went back and forth—to introduce the troops or not to introduce the troops.

Gromyko. Yes, yes.

Gorbachev. Now we have to start from what we have there and what measures we should take.

Gromyko. I agree with the characterization of Najib.

A hired army is an unknown quality. Our material assistance will not bring any substantial changes in the situation. Assistance and the troops—yes. And after we withdraw ... We have to weigh, what kind of assistance will we provide then. We have to do everything to withdraw. But what will happen to the revolution and to Najib? I do not believe that the question of Afghanistan is being decided in Islamabad. It is being decided in Washington. We have to start a conversation, a closed one, with the Americans, about the Durand line. [We] should not stop contacts with India on this issue ... There is very little that we can achieve here with China.

Probably, with Najib's consent, we should make an effort to create some kind of coalition government acceptable to us ... Recall the advisers who are not appropriate for implementing our new line.

Ryzhkov. Eduard Amvrosievich's report gives us a realistic picture. The past information was not objective. The situation forces us to approach this problem seriously once again. We should not simplify anything. Najib's personality is of course important ... But ...

The society is illiterate. The revolution resulted in the deterioration of the situation for the people. We have to take a firm line to withdraw from there within two years. It is better to pay in cash, in kerosene, not in men. Our people do not understand what we are doing there. Why are we sitting there for seven years.

We cannot just leave and throw everything to its fate. This would repulse many countries from us. We have to undertake [certain] steps so that when we leave, the course would lead to a creation of a neutral friendly Afghanistan.

What steps should we take? The Army. Why not a hired army? What would prevent them from deserting? Good money. They do not believe in slogans ... All in all, I would not reject the idea of a hired army out of hand.

I support the proposal to invite Keshtamand (the Prime Minister). To listen what requests they have. And to count how much overall we spend for Afghanistan. It would be better for us to give them weapons, ammunition. And let them fight on their own, if they want. And in parallel to actively lead the [process of] political reconciliation. We should utilize everything: the contacts with Pakistan, with the USA. And to follow our line, without retreating.

Ligachev. We cannot bring them freedom by the military way. We have suffered defeat in this case. And Eduard Amvrosievich's information is for the first time objective, even

though it is a hard one. Somehow we did not think about the consequences, and relied on the military approach. I believe the policy of national reconciliation is the right one. The first day have shown that it was the right step. The preparations have begun. We have already gained some things.

Of course, we should leave in such a way so as not to allow a destruction of the progressive forces. We have to make all efforts to help them create an army. The thought of a hired army is acceptable.

If we pose this question to the people: what is better—to let the men die, our soldiers, or to give them all kinds of assistance? I think all to the last man will speak in favor of the second way.

We have to undertake work to organize the economic life of that state. Revitalize their economic life. To propose a plan, and not just a one-time assistance.

Because in the years of the war, we have not created anything there ...

And to work on the direction of Pakistan, with India, with China, with America. But to leave like the Americans left Vietnam—no, as the saying goes, we are not yet “ripe” for that.

Marshal Sokolov. The military situation has deteriorated recently. The number of shelling of our garrisons has doubled. They are mainly shooting from the hamlets, calculating that we would not fire at the settlements in response.

The recent days have shown that the reaching out to people with the idea of national reconciliation has been lagging behind the development of the situation. There is no work being done with the population.

This war cannot be won militarily.

There are some individual cases when small bands stop their military ambushes. They sense that the people are tired of the war. We can take advantage of this to push through the idea of national reconciliation.

It is too early to dramatize the situation. Too few days have passed from the moment when the idea was put forward.

The first task is to put pressure on the Afghan leadership to reach out to people with the program of national reconciliation. If that does not happen—the army will not achieve anything there.

The Afghan army costs us 3.5 billion rubles. And 1.5 [bln rubles] more is planned for this year. They have everything to fight as they should.

... To withdraw three regiments, but, as some people propose, to continue aerial attacks from the Soviet territory? One is inconsistent with the other.

The 40th army has already lost 1,280 men in 1986.

...The decision to withdraw should be implemented firmly, but meanwhile, we should utilize all other means—diplomatic, along the KGB lines, public relations, political [means], and material assistance. And not to retreat from the adopted line.

We have to sort out the economic assistance: they are asking for three times more than they need. Yes, we will have to help. But—so that there is [some] benefit. In 1981, we gave them 100 mln. [rubles] of free assistance. And all of that went to the elite. And there was nothing in the hamlets—no kerosene, no matches.

Chebrikov. We are discussing the Afghan question more than other [issues]. Comrades have figured it out well. It seems like we received a lot of new material. However, if you look at the [previous] documents, all this has been already presented before.

There are no new discoveries about the situation. All this, Mikhail Sergeevich, you have already said to Karmal. That's how the idea of national reconciliation emerged. The knowledge of the situation was always there. But we did not always act right—so that it would produce some way out. Najib has agreed to this step (national reconciliation) finally. We pressured Karmal to do it for a whole year, and with no result.

Big changes have taken place in Afghanistan after January 15.

We should not discount the importance of the fact that some bands are stopping military actions. Today in *Pravda*, there is a report about 400 representatives, who came to Kabul. Refugees started returning. Although Pakistan does not let them through. The refugees are saying that they are tired of living in exile for eight years. We should take advantage of this moment.

Gorbachev. Maybe it is for the better that it does not let them through. (Pakistan not letting the refugees through). Najib does not know what to do with them. And they are a factor of concern in Pakistan and Iran.

So, we confirm our firm line. Not to retreat since we started [this].

It is hard to draw conclusions from the steps we have taken recently. Our principal decisions that encompass all the problems will push the process forward.

I told Najib that they have to strengthen the army, that we will support it, and that they should talk with the traders who receive our goods, so that the population saw that it is our goods, our assistance.

[Let us] act on all directions. Figure out seriously where [to send] and how to use our assistance, to launch foreign policy mechanisms through Cordovez, through Pakistan. To try [to talk] with the Chinese, and of course to work for an agreement with the Americans. There is the tiredness of Afghanistan everywhere—in Afghanistan itself, and in Pakistan, and in our country, and in the entire world.

When we went into Afghanistan, we were bound by ideological aspects, we assumed that it was possible to jump up three stages at once—from feudalism to socialism. Now we can look at the situation openly.

And [let us] carry out a realistic line. We have accepted everything in Poland—the Catholic church, the individual peasant agriculture, the ideology, and the political pluralism. Reality is reality. The comrades are right in saying: it is better to pay cash than the lives of our men. [Let us] push Najib and to finish it all in two years.

We entrust the Commission (for Afghanistan) to draft our decisions.

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