

February 27, 1987

**Record of a Conversation of M. S. Gorbachev with
Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs Giulio Andreotti
(Excerpt)**

Citation:

"Record of a Conversation of M. S. Gorbachev with Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs Giulio Andreotti (Excerpt)", February 27, 1987, Wilson Center Digital Archive, Gorbachev Foundation, Moscow. Provided by Anatoly Chernyaev and translated by Gary Goldberg for CWIHP <https://digitalarchive.umd.edu/document/117234>

Summary:

Gorbachev and Andreotti discuss issues in the Middle East, including Soviet plans in Afghanistan and a possible international conference on the Middle East.

Credits:

This document was made possible with support from Leon Levy Foundation

Original Language:

Russian

Contents:

Translation - English

[G. ANDREOTTI] The issue of Afghanistan. Obviously, you know that in recent years resolutions regarding the Afghan issue have been adopted in various forums of the European Community [EC]. We noted that recently the Soviet Union made a series of new announcements. I particularly have in mind a message to the Islamic Conference which I personally value highly. This was a very skillful political move. It is therefore not surprising that the countries of the European Community have gained the impression that a solution of the Afghan problem is coming which everyone has always advocated and considered necessary to confirm their opinion and to call upon the Soviet Union to continue moving along this correct path.

M. S. GORBACHEV. I want to make one comment. We have information from very reliable sources which I think we can consider reliable. The US has set itself the goal of obstructing a settlement in Afghanistan by any means, for if America is not successful it will be deprived of an opportunity to present the Soviet Union in a bad light in the eyes of world public opinion. If this is so, and, I repeat, we are almost convinced that our information is reliable, the matter takes on a difficult nature.

Eh. A. SHEVARDNADZE. Even the Pakistanis are telling us of the pressure that the Americans are putting on them.

M. S. GORBACHEV. Yes, the Pakistanis are complaining that the Americans are putting pressure on them to obstruct a settlement. I earnestly request that you not let the Pakistanis down, for then the Americans will finally crush them.

G. ANDREOTTI. (Laughs) Thank you for the confidential information. I know about this. The Pakistani Minister of Foreign Affairs is my personal friend. He was a prisoner in Italy.

M. S. GORBACHEV. This means that our information agrees with yours.

G. ANDREOTTI. But it's impossible to forget that there are various forces in America. Other and, I think, the most influential American circles are undertaking other steps, for example, to cancel the sanctions against Poland. I also know about the trip which [Undersecretary of State John C.] Whitehead made through the Warsaw Pact countries not long ago. And he had very open conversations with the Poles. I think that it would be in both our and your interest that America have ever increasing influence in determining the political course of the country.

M. S. GORBACHEV. We also see this. We follow US policy very closely and respond to signals which come from reasonable, realistic circles. Naturally, we understand that these circles also represent and defend US interests. We do not preclude rivalry and competition with America, but on a realistic basis. Generally speaking, we have a positive frame of mind but not everything depends on us.

G. ANDREOTTI. Some words about an international conference on the Middle East. I am personally advocating serious preparations for a conference. During meetings in the US I even used the expression "preparations for preparations." For if there are no serious preparations for an international conference then it will be doomed to failure from the beginning. Such carelessness is impermissible.

M. S. GORBACHEV. We are of this same opinion.

G. ANDREOTTI. You obviously know about the differences with the Israeli leadership, including those which are public. The prime minister and the minister of foreign affairs often come out with not simply contradictory but even diametrically opposed statements.

I would like to clarify that in a document approved by the EC there is nothing written about the need to renew diplomatic relations between the USSR and Israel. We requested that this desire be sent to the Soviet leadership confidentially, so to speak, "in their ears." This was my suggestion. I stated frankly that this issue is very delicate, and it is not necessary to make public statements.

On the other hand, Israel is probably right in some regard when it questions how a country that does not have [diplomatic] relations with it can participate in an international conference on the Middle East. Possibly you could reexamine this issue since you maintain diplomatic relations with dozens of countries which have the most diverse economic, social, and political systems. I well understand your difficulties connected in particular with the psychology of the Arabs. But right now several Arab countries are beginning to move in the direction of recognizing Israel. If the fate of the conference possibly depends on the issue of restoring diplomatic relations between the USSR and Israel, would it not be worth doing this?

I also know about the difficulties with the Palestinians. We ourselves also suffer from them. Who should represent the Palestinians, [Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) Chairman Yasser] Arafat or not? We support Arafat inasmuch as we do not see anyone else who could be the representative of the Palestinians in present circumstances. Mr. Gromyko once said to me that Arafat is the "black cat" in your relations with Syria. But where is another representative right now who could represent the Palestinians instead of and better than Arafat?

M. S. GORBACHEV. We see both of these problems. If one talks about our relations with Israel then possibly at some stage of a movement toward a conference in the course of this process we could return to this issue. But not right now. It does not seem possible to pull this question out from the general context of the present situation.

As regards the PLO, we also are of the opinion that this is a reality which needs to be considered. If the interests of the Palestinians-and the PLO represents them-are cast aside then nothing will be achieved by any conference. There are things from which it is impossible to escape. The Soviet Union favors the PLO being a constructive participant of the Middle East process. We maintain relations with many Arab regimes in the course of which the PLO situation is also discussed. We call upon them to preserve the PLO as an organization representing the interests of the Palestinian people. But you know it is easier for all of us to fly off together to another galaxy than for the Arabs to agree among themselves.

G. ANDREOTTI. This is correct. Many people, when they talk about an international conference, mention as a difficulty the issue of whether the Soviet Union should participate in it or whether the PLO is the sole representative of the Palestinian people. I think that the main issue which should be decided is where should the country be located which is granted to the Palestinian people. They have suffered so much. The question now is not of your recognition of Israel. Possibly in the course of preparations for the conference we would be able to use the argument about restoring diplomatic relations between the USSR and Israel to exert pressure on Shamir. But resolve the issue at the conference itself.