

**November 3, 1987**

**Record of a Conversation of M. S. Gorbachev with  
the General Secretary of the Central Committee of  
the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan  
Najibullah**

**Citation:**

"Record of a Conversation of M. S. Gorbachev with the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan Najibullah", November 3, 1987, Wilson Center Digital Archive, Gorbachev Foundation, Moscow. Provided by Anatoly Chernyaev and translated by Gary Goldberg for CWIHP  
<https://digitalarchive.umd.edu/document/117243>

**Summary:**

Najibullah and Gorbachev discuss a recent all-party conference of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) and plans to hold a coalition meeting (Loya Jirga) at which a new Afghan constitution will be adopted and a new president elected.

**Credits:**

This document was made possible with support from Leon Levy Foundation

**Original Language:**

Russian

**Contents:**

Translation - English

M. S. GORBACHEV. First I want to thank you for the warm feelings you expressed in today's speech. Your sincere words will find a path to the hearts of all the Soviet people, especially our women and mothers.

I am glad for the opportunity to meet with you and exchange opinions, although briefly. Of course, we will hardly be able to talk about much. Nevertheless there are questions which ought to be discussed.

I greet you on our holiday. We are glad that in the persons of the DRA delegation we greet representatives of a neighboring country with whom we have established a long friendship. At the same time we welcome our new friends from Afghanistan, keeping in mind the new spirit of our mutual relations. It can be said that the old and the new Afghanistan are embodied in this.

You heard the report. We worked on the report a great deal. Very serious effort, thought, and significant analysis was required. Its preparation required several months. If you paid attention, all three sections of the report were connected by the single thought of our past and the present day, our present concerns. Of course, we could have deferred an analysis and assessment of the historical events of past years and done them separately. But we needed to do them for the present day. Therefore we had to deal with them.

Much of what has to be decided today in the process of perestroika traces its roots back there in history. Therefore it's necessary to look into history, into one or another event, and construct our policy accordingly.

As regards the third section of the report, "Great October and the Contemporary World," everything is also explained in it inasmuch as our domestic interests are compatible with common human interests. We need a normal international situation.

Strictly speaking, the report is therefore called "October and Perestroika: the Revolution Continues." It reveals the essence of the task which we have seen before us: the cause of October needs to be continued, drawing lessons from the past. And to create good foreign policy preconditions for deep changes in society. This is what we wanted when going to this festive meeting. It is possible that someone expected something else. But this is just what we needed. We still have to enhance the ideas described in the report very seriously.

But how are things in Afghanistan? I congratulate you on your election to the post of Chairman of the Revolutionary Council. It is good that this was done.

I would like to find out, how the measures are being implemented which you developed for placing people to augment the leadership echelon? I congratulate you on the successful completion of the all-party conference of the PDPA. At one time the information which came from Afghanistan concerned me. The conference placed critical tasks before the country.

It is very important right now not to permit discord in the leadership and in the Party itself in the face of such tasks. It is necessary to take people into the headquarter's apparatus who could be sent to the provinces so that they could work there.

How did Lenin act in his time? He sent [Grigory Konstantinovich] Ordzhonikidze here, [Sergey M.] Kirov there, and [Josef] Stalin and [Mikhail] Frunze over there. I have named only several of the important figures of our Party and government. But so it was with officials of lesser rank. All of them headed key sectors, which was dictated by the demands of a crucial stage in the development of the Revolution and the

conditions of the Civil War. Such revolutionaries were needed, not those who occupied "warm chairs" and received profits.

It is necessary to send energetic people invested with authority to work in newly-liberated regions of Afghanistan and, yes, to the provinces which have long been under the control of people's authority, giving them help there from local party and government personnel, elders, and other representatives of the population, regardless of their party affiliation and political coloration—everyone who favors national reconciliation. And then such a representative will be surrounded by local people and local authorities. Here ties between local authorities and Kabul, and coalition forms of government will be created.

NAJIBULLAH. First of all, on behalf of the members of our delegation permit me to express to you, dear Mikhail Sergeyevich, and all the Soviet leadership, our heartfelt thanks and appreciation for the invitation to take part in the festivities on the occasion of a glorious date, the 70th anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution. All of us are under a deep impression from your report, which could rightfully be called an action program for the international communist and workers' movement and all peace-loving people of the planet.

Turning to the works of Lenin again and again, we find answers to the burning issues which life presents us with.

Your report, which we will continually and comprehensively study, is such a source of creative inspiration and a school of Leninist thought for all revolutionaries.

Speaking of our work, I would like to note that, as a whole, the all-party conference went successfully. But serious shortcomings in our political, organizational, and ideological work were clearly identified in the process of its preparation. As before, the conservative forces remaining in the Party, relying on old methods and forms of work, are trying in every way to prevent the new from sprouting and do not want to cooperate in the process of reconciliation. These shortcomings have deep roots caused by the existence of a gap between word and deed in the PDPA. We understand that it is impossible to achieve the implementation of planned ideas with declarative statements and slogans alone. The consciousness of party members needs to be changed in a decisive manner. From this point of view the importance of the all-party conference is quite great. We are again convinced of the need to get seriously busy with educating the party cadre and all its members.

We well understand your recommendations expressed in December of last year and during the meeting this June about the need to consolidate the Party and its unity, and we will strive to implement them in practice. However it ought to be recognized that the situation still existing in the PDPA is the reason for the stagnation of the implementation of the policy of national reconciliation. But the main and hopeful result of the all-party conference was that it gave a mandate and instructions to the party leadership to intensify work to step up the reconciliation process.

Some words about the progress of implementing this policy. I think there is no need to give numbers and other statistical data. The main conclusion is that this policy enjoys growing support from our people. Today only the farthest-right wing of the counterrevolution does not respond to our peace-loving proposals.

M. S. GORBACHEV. But the groups in Iran and Pakistan have managed to join their forces together. By the way, who is the head of this union, what party does its leader represent?

NAJIBULLAH. Actually, as a result of direct pressure from the Americans and the

Pakistani administration, the counterrevolutionary organizations have announced they have united and elected a single leader, [Muhammad] Yu[nus]. Khalis. He heads the Islamic Party of Afghanistan and at one time split from [radical Islamist mujaheddin (Hizb-i Islami) leader] G[ulbuddin]. Hekmatyar's[1] ILA. However, we know that, in spite of formal unification, the counterrevolutionaries still have not managed to overcome serious existing differences.[2]

I would like to inform you, Mikhail Sergeevich, of several of our short-term plans. In a month we plan to hold a Loya Jirga at which we will adopt a constitution for the country and elect a president. Afterwards it is intended to hold elections to a National Council, which will form a government. In this connection I would like to consult with you regarding the following issue.

In the course of conversations with Cde. Eh. A. Shevardnadze, we discussed in general terms the question of the content of the first address of the president after his election by the Loya Jirga. It seems to us that this speech ought to first of all reflect the thought that the president is the exponent of the interests of all the people and all the social sectors of the population, and not narrow party interests.

In addition, it ought to be noted that our Revolution is national democratic in nature, but not socialist. Therefore in the present and succeeding stages the constructive participation of all political forces and all sectors of the population—the clergy, ethnic entrepreneurs, the intelligentsia—is urgently required in the solution of nationwide problems, firstly ensuring peace, which is what the PDPA is calling for.

M. S. GORBACHEV. Correct.

NAJIBULLAH. One more important point connected with the role of the PDPA. I intend the PDPA representative to be elected to the post of president, and it will be stressed in the address that the president embodies and defends the interests of the entire people, and all groups and sectors of the population, and not [just] the Party.

M. S. GORBACHEV. This needs to be done. The candidacy itself of the president is the result of compromise and therefore it should reflect all interests. In other words, the president is the national leader.

NAJIBULLAH. The necessary attention will also be devoted to stating a position about such issues which are traditional for our society as "Jirga" democracy and the customs of the people.

M. S. GORBACHEV. This is correct, for the Jirga joins together real authorities on whose opinion the support of the government depends to a large degree.

NAJIBULLAH. The issue of creating conditions for the withdrawal of Soviet troops occupies a special place. It will be stressed that, in calling upon the Afghan people to create coalition forms of government, the leadership of the country is trying to ensure the necessary preconditions to turn to the Soviet government on a whole range of issues connected with the times and schedule of such a withdrawal.

M. S. GORBACHEV. Right.

NAJIBULLAH. It is evident that the thought also ought to be expressed that the armed forces of the country firmly watch over the revolutionary achievements, express the interests of all the people, and defend the independence sovereignty and territorial integrity of Afghanistan. They are subordinate to the president as supreme commander.

In addition, the address is to note that in conditions where a new constitution is in effect in Afghanistan various political parties receive the right to be established and function on condition that their paramount goals will be the attainment of peace, a cessation of bloodshed, and the progress of the country along the path of social and economic development.

M. S. GORBACHEV. But is this principle contained in the present draft of the constitution?

NAJIBULLAH. Yes, we have stipulated the introduction of a multiparty system.

One more point. Considering that the ethnic issue is an acute one in Afghanistan we plan to stress in the address the readiness of the country's leadership to do everything necessary to solve it. It will be announced that at the present stage the most important task is the achievement of national reconciliation. Therefore we are appealing to all ethnic minorities to help translate this policy into practice. If the policy of national reconciliation is successful conditions will arise to ensure the genuine equality of all ethnic groups and tribes of the country, even as far as giving them national autonomy and the right to self-determination.

M. S. GORBACHEV. I think that such an announcement would be appropriate for your problems.

In Lenin's time, 5,000 soviets [councils] were formed in rural areas populated by ethnic minorities. There's the flexibility of Lenin's ethnic policy for you!

Will the president be elected at the Loya Jirga?

NAJIBULLAH. Yes.

M. S. GORBACHEV. This means the Loya Jirga elects the president. But what then?

NAJIBULLAH. The Loya Jirga will first of all adopt the new constitution and then elect the president.

M. S. GORBACHEV. Will the Loya Jirga also remain after this? But how is it proposed for the president to be elected subsequently?

NAJIBULLAH. The upcoming Loya Jirga will be convened only to fulfill the above tasks. After the president's term expires in five years, a Loya Jirga will be convened again.

M. S. GORBACHEV. One more question. How will the representation from all the provinces of Afghanistan in the Loya Jirga be ensured? Or [will it be] partially, only from those which are in the government's sphere of influence and then it will not be fully legitimate [nepolnotsennaya]? Can you estimate how many representatives there will be in the Loya Jirga?

NAJIBULLAH. On the eve of the departure of our delegation to the Soviet Union, a meeting of Commission to Prepare a Draft Constitution was held. Individual members of the Commission proposed holding elections of representatives to the Loya Jirga via mass public organizations.

M. S. GORBACHEV. What is meant by this? Will elections of representatives from all

provinces of the country be held, or will regions where the bandits are spreading terror not name their representatives?

NAJIBULLAH. Although it was stipulated that the elections are to be held throughout the entire country, the principle of election of representatives to the Loya Jirga which was proposed does not agree with the traditions of democracy which exist in our society. Therefore I proposed – and it was adopted – to grant the right to the population of each province to elect 10 representatives apiece as they see fit. We don't want to impose our will on the population.

M. S. GORBACHEV. I support your point of view. It is very important to ensure genuine popular representation in the Loya Jirga. But you're going to the Jirga by a difficult route. The counter-revolution will oppose its success. To what extent have you thought out the problem of ensuring the necessary support of Jirga representatives? For example, on the issue of the president?

Other issues also arise: who will open the Loya Jirga? Where will the candidacies be discussed? Evidently this means the creation of a sort of Council of Elders which could nominate three or four candidates?

NAJIBULLAH. Yes, exactly.

M. S. GORBACHEV. This means one or two candidates from the PDPA, let's say, Najib or Gorbachev. But what about the Council of Elders? Will it have the right to discuss with the opposition the possibility of its nominating its own candidate?

NAJIBULLAH. The irreconcilable opposition will obviously not do this. As regards those who are ready to support national reconciliation then without question they will get this right.

M. S. GORBACHEV. This is important. Possibly some liberally-minded figure can be prepared and even choose a candidate from among the most inveterate enemies. But soundings should have already been necessary to do this. It is impossible to permit the counter-revolution to then have an opportunity to say that it was left out of participating in the election of a president, which was all cooked up by the PDPA, and accuse you of fraud.

But how will the government be formed?

NAJIBULLAH. The president appoints a prime minister, who is charged with forming a cabinet of ministers. The government will be approved by the National Council, which should give it a vote of confidence.

M. S. GORBACHEV. This means an approach is needed here which is appropriate to the problems of creating a coalition government. You need to know beforehand who is to be given the post of prime minister. If the post of president remains with the PDPA, the prime minister should be a representative of an opposition party. If the chieftains of the counter-revolution and Zahir Shah refuse to accept this proposal, then select a suitable candidate from among prominent authorities who have recently entered into cooperation. Have him be a figure with little talent [malokompetentnyy deyatel']. But it's necessary to show such courage here.

Generally speaking, Cde. Najib, an exceptionally important and critical stage is beginning. Unfortunately, we don't have the opportunity to discuss all the problems before us in detail since I have a meeting scheduled with Cde. János Kádár.

I want to suggest to you: think about all these suggestions. We will also think [about them], consult with the Soviet embassy, and with the commission headed by Eh. A. Shevardnadze.

All possible alternatives associated with the implementation of the policy of national reconciliation ought to be considered—both the election of the president of the country, the appointment of the prime minister, and the formation of a coalition government, which needs to be done so that the Loya Jirga actually reflects the entire spectrum of political forces of present-day Afghanistan.

Describe your thoughts, views, and ideas and send them to us. And we, for our part, will be ready accordingly. In a word, everything needs to be discussed again. But in general, from what you are saying, everything is going in the right direction.

NAJIBULLAH. I agree with your suggestion. But now I would like to briefly touch on two more topics. Of course, the address ought to reflect a position regarding the issues of the further economic development of the country and Afghanistan's foreign policy.

M. S. GORBACHEV. It is advisable to describe the approach to economic problems so that the desire of the leadership to do everything necessary in the interests of the broadest sectors of the population, and in the interests of the peasantry, clergy, and ethnic entrepreneurs is obvious to everyone.

NAJIBULLAH. Agreed. Regarding foreign policy issues, I would like to say the following. The personal representative of the UN Secretary General, Cordovez, recently sent us his scenario for future talks about a political settlement. Obviously Cde. Shevardnadze ought to be consulted about this question.

M. S. GORBACHEV. But what do you think of Cordovez' proposal?

NAJIBULLAH. There are unacceptable aspects in it for us but there is a grain of reason, a positive momentum [pozitiv], which ought to be used. I think that we could send you our ideas on this account in writing.

M. S. GORBACHEV. Good, write them. We'll think about them and consult. It's possible that Eh. A. Shevardnadze will come to you.

The time is such right now that it's necessary to think very well and act. And the iron needs to be struck while the fire is hot. The people need to be drawn to your side so that the dynamism of national reconciliation is not lost. The counterrevolution has not yet really united. So this does not turn out like a train which starts moving and gains speed, and suddenly brakes and is stopped.

M. S. GORBACHEV. And think about one other thing. We could have told this to Reagan. The Americans seemingly want to take part in the political settlement of the Afghan problem. I do not believe in their sincerity. But everything is possible. In the twilight of its term, the Reagan administration wants to show that—together with the Soviet Union—it is contributing to a settlement of the situation in such a hot spot as Afghanistan. But, of course, they would like a settlement to be achieved in which the PDPA is shunted into the background, although it is already clear today that peace in Afghanistan can be achieved only by considering that the PDPA is an equal among other political forces. Nothing else will work.

We are telling the Americans that we are ready to support their participation in the settlement process. But in doing so they must proceed from current realities, that is, recognize that a government, an armed forces, a security service, a Ministry of

Internal Affairs, etc. exist in Afghanistan. We are stressing that this is reality, as real as the existence of the opposing force. So let's find ways to solve the problem.

But you need to look not at the Americans, but promote the process, widely opening the door to the creation of a coalition inside the country.

On the whole, you've held a good party conference. Now your task is to urgently implement the decisions made and go forward. As regards those in the PDPA who do not believe in national reconciliation, these skeptics need to be given a good pension or sent abroad.

Not everyone is grasping the challenges [zadachi] raised at the party conference. But it became clear after the discussions what this is—national reconciliation.

NAJIBULLAH. Two requests in conclusion, if you'll permit me. First, as you know, we decided to create a zone free of rebel bands in the north of Afghanistan. A need arises in this regard to conduct a "cleansing" in this region using USSR KGB Border Troops. At the same time we have also requested consideration of the question of granting aid in solving the economic problems of this region.

Second. On the way to Moscow I visited Volgograd, a city which was raised from the ruins after the Great Patriotic War. Not long before this I had the occasion to visit Kandahar which we also have to rebuild anew. Therefore I turn to you with a request to help us build one more housing construction complex.

M. S. GORBACHEV. We will consider these requests without fail.

But I have in turn a request of you—inform us of how matters are going with the use of the free supplementary Soviet aid. Are we being hasty with the allotment of 2 billion rubles? Information is coming to us that the aid is not reaching the people for some reason.

NAJIBULLAH. We are not yet using the goods which are coming into the current year free aid account. We are still using the remainder of the 7,000,000 rubles aid previously given us. The losses here were 2%. We are trying to tighten up control. We have been able to reduce losses to some degree although this is still insufficient.

M. S. GORBACHEV. It's necessary to closely follow how it is being used so that there is no misuse. And the people should feel this. This should actually be your fund. It should be in your hands. It's good that you went to Kandahar and promised to help rebuild the city. You could have given an order to give the necessary aid to the population from this fund.

But if the fund is administered by a bureaucrat then it'll all trickle into the hands of his relatives, through clan and family ties. In a word, it'll end up with those who handle its distribution.

Whoever is abusing authority needs to be punished and imprisoned. And let everyone see that he is a thief, although possibly it is not considered a sin according to the Koran to embezzle aid received from an atheist.

NAJIBULLAH. Permit me to express gratitude to you, Mikhail Sergeyeovich, and all the entire Soviet leadership for the constant aid and support.

M. S. GORBACHEV. Send our greetings to your comrades and wishes to firmly go

along the chosen path.

[1] Also spelled Hikmatyar.

[2] On 18 October 1982, Yunus Khalis [Khaless] was elected spokesman of the seven-party mujaheddin alliance.