

February 22, 1988
**Record of a Conversation of M. S. Gorbachev with
US Secretary of State G. Shultz**

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Summary:

Gorbachev and Shultz discuss issues in the Middle East, including the Soviet withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan and the Iran-Iraq War.

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G. SHULTZ. In any case we have discussed all the issues in detail as never before. We have not come to any special conclusions. But we have worked to advantage. Our discussions are becoming ever more sophisticated.

Regarding the problems of Angola and Cambodia we have agreed that there are opportunities for cooperation. We discussed the problem of the Iran-Iraq conflict. I would be interested to hear your ideas on this account. This also relates to Afghanistan.[1]

We welcome your announcement regarding Afghanistan. We think that the situation is quite promising right now. We want the upcoming round of Geneva talks to be the last. We see that there is movement in this process. We want this difficult process to finally be concluded.

At the same time it is completely natural that our side wants to obtain certain assurances regarding the substance of this process. Yesterday I tried to explain what this is about. Yesterday we discussed this issue in detail and I would be interested to hear your ideas.

I'd like to talk about the Middle East, the region where I will be going soon.

M. S. GORBACHEV. First an idea of a general nature about the role of our countries-the USSR and US-in efforts to settle regional conflicts. I think that we should show the world an example of cooperation in these issues. If we establish such cooperation then it's possible to hope that conflicts will be resolved considering the interests of all involved countries.

G. SHULTZ. I can agree with this.

M. S. GORBACHEV. We will not loose the acutely painful knots which have accumulated in the world with other approaches.

I am saying this because I feel that you have maintained a negative attitude toward our genuine desire to work with you in solving these acute problems. Possibly the problem is that you developed this attitude long ago. But possibly the problem is the channel which, as we understand it, comes from the National Security Council. As before, there they think that the Soviet Union both today and tomorrow will remain a power with which the United States will collide everywhere in the world and is "guilty" of everything everywhere. If such an attitude remains then it is hard to count on progress and collaboration.

But a completely different conclusion can be drawn from that fact and [the fact] that both you and we are everywhere. And I've said this to you more than once and have said it publicly. If we and you are everywhere we are simply connected in searches for a balance of interests. Such an approach will stimulate searches and the finding of outcomes and solutions. That's our philosophy. It is important for an understanding of regional situations.

How is it specifically being interpreted, particularly in the issue of Afghanistan?

We came to Washington-and informed you first-of our plan of actions and invited you to work with us in a search for a solution to this acute, difficult problem. We received and considered your ideas regarding the fact that the accords at the Geneva talks should be achieved as soon as possible and our departure ought not to be tied to the formation of a coalition government in Afghanistan. Unfortunately, the discussion in Washington on this theme did not work out.

Nevertheless we think that our countries could collaborate in the situation around Afghanistan and could give an example of how to approach regional conflicts. We made our recent announcement in order to push you in this direction. After this you began to move.

But what is happening? Now you're rejecting the advice which you yourselves gave us. If we want to have a neutral, non-aligned, independent Afghanistan, then let the Afghans themselves discuss and decide what kind of government they should have. What is unacceptable here? Wasn't it you who were speaking about this all the time?

We've said that both your and our capabilities of influencing the situation will be limited after the signing of an agreement. And we see this already now. It's already more difficult to do business with our friends. Each of them thinks first of all about themselves, about their future, and the future of their country. And this is completely natural.

But it seems to me that we can play a role in settling this conflict. You wanted us to make an announcement about the withdrawal of our troops and set a date and timeframe for our withdrawal. We have done this. The path is open.

I welcome what you have said: the upcoming round should be the last. This is the only correct approach. When all is said and done we cannot dance to the moods and emotions of one or another side in this conflict. This issue is too important to the Soviet Union to please someone with silly dancing [pol'ka-babochka]. And all the same it is impossible not to see who has had enough of whose impudence-and I am not afraid of this word-to say that the Soviet Union's statement about the troop withdrawal from Afghanistan is all just propaganda.

G. SHULTZ. We are not saying that. We welcome your statement. We accept it as it is. I believed the seriousness of your intentions even a year and a half ago when Eh. A. Shevardnadze first announced them to me.

M. S. GORBACHEV. I want to again assure you that we have no intentions of establishing a springboard in Afghanistan to rush toward warm waters, etc. This is nonsense. We have never had such intentions and do not [now].

We want you to facilitate the quickest possible signing of the Geneva Accords so that Afghanistan is an independent, non-aligned, neutral country with the government that the Afghans themselves desire. And let's push matters from both sides in the direction of such a settlement so that it is bloodless.

G. SHULTZ. I agree with this.

M. S. GORBACHEV. You asked me to talk about the Middle East and the Iran-Iraq conflict.

G. SHULTZ. Permit me to say a few words to begin.

I won't repeat everything that I said yesterday to Eh. A. Shevardnadze. I was talking about what constitutes the essence of our concerns in the context of which we are following the Geneva Process. We want this process to work well. I have not changed my point of view in comparison with what I said in Washington about the difficulties of forming a coalition government.

M. S. GORBACHEV. It will not be formed either in Moscow or in Washington.

G. SHULTZ. Nor in Pakistan.

M. S. GORBACHEV. Especially not in Pakistan.

There are contacts taking place between Afghans now which we did not know about earlier. Things are happening there which neither you nor we know about. We need not imagine ourselves as unique masters of the destiny of Afghanistan.

G. SHULTZ. Good. I am ready to limit myself to what I have said.

Let's switch to the Iran-Iraq conflict.

M. S. GORBACHEV. Please pass to the President that we hope to work with the American side in the issue of an Afghan settlement.

The Iran-Iraq conflict. We think that in the course of searches for ways to settle the problem certain new elements of collaboration between our countries have appeared both at the bilateral level and within the framework of the Security Council. We value this. This is important in itself and from the point of view of future prospects in the UN Security Council. It is important that such cooperation continue and not dwindle.

We are ready to work with you in the next stage. But centrifugal tendencies have now appeared in the Security Council, and you are now the chairman of the Security Council. Hence [your] efforts are needed. We have not wasted our term as chairman of the Council. So don't waste yours.

G. SHULTZ. We want to achieve a success.

M. S. GORBACHEV. We will help you in this.

G. SHULTZ. Yesterday we discussed a somewhat new approach to this problem. First, a mandatory embargo of arms deliveries to a country which does not observe the previous resolution. Plus two more ideas for this. Determine an exact date at which the arms embargo would go into effect. However, there would be an interval between this date and the vote in the Security Council, let's say, 30 days. In addition, it would be proposed that the Secretary General create a special negotiations group or appoint a special representative who would deal with this issue exclusively.

In reality, as Eh. A. Shevardnadze told me yesterday, the UN Secretary General has many other responsibilities. Therefore it would be desirable to fill in the overall picture with this new element in order to step up the talks. Such a representative would work within a set timeframe. In doing so he could turn to the Security Council at any time and announce that in his view the effective date of the resolution could be postponed since progress has been noted in his efforts. Thus the representative would have a certain instrument of influence in his hands.

That's the new idea which appeared in the course of our discussion.

M. S. GORBACHEV. We will discuss your suggestions. In this context such an idea is new to us. We are ready to make a constructive contribution to the solution of this problem. I want to ask you to pass the following to the President. In our view it is exceptionally important not to permit this conflict to spread or grow or let a dramatic situation arise which could end up involving many countries.

Such a prospect worries us very much, and therefore it is necessary to carefully check all the steps. Of course, it's necessary to act firmly and consistently. But at the same time to be concerned that the result not end up being directly opposite of what we're trying for.

G. SHULTZ. Yes, we understand this.

M. S. GORBACHEV. Tell me, have you been thinking about the possibility of reducing your military presence in the Persian Gulf? Or do you think that such a step would be taken as a sign of weakness? You can solve the missions which you put before yourselves there with fewer ships.

G. SHULTZ. The mission which we are performing there is a continuing one. We are performing it successfully. Not long ago we reduced our military presence in the Persian Gulf and withdrew two large ships. As a result the configuration and size of our presence changed. The mission remains as before. However, we calculated that we can perform it with fewer resources.

We have no desire to maintain large numbers of ships there. When the size of the problem lessens our presence will too.

[US National Security Advisor] C. POWELL. When Eh. A. Shevardnadze raised this issue yesterday I pointed out that the buildup of our presence in the Persian Gulf during the last 6-6 [sic] months led to the appearance of only two additional combat ships. The buildup occurred mainly through minesweepers, helicopter carriers, and other ships which do not present a threat and are needed only for trawling operations.

We adjust the size of our presence as we understand the situation better. Therefore it became possible to withdraw two large ships. As the threat decreases and as we understand the situation better, we will be able to make further adjustments.

M. S. GORBACHEV. Good. As I understand, we can conclude the discussion of the Iran-Iraq conflict with this.

Eh. A. SHEVARDNADZE. We have agreed that we will continue consultations on this issue.

M. S. GORBACHEV. The Iranian element is also present in the Afghan situation. And we need to consider this.

G. SHULTZ. We understand this. This element is also present in the Middle East equation. I talked about this yesterday.

M. S. GORBACHEV. Absolutely right.

As regards Afghanistan, Iran is trying to have a fundamentalist government formed there.

Eh. A. Shevardnadze. And not only there.

G. SHULTZ. In my opinion, the Iranians would not object to fundamentalist governments in the Kremlin and Washington (laughter).

M. S. GORBACHEV. All the same, they can scarcely hope for this. Possibly it is true they pray for it.

Now about the Middle East. We familiarized ourselves with your proposals sent via Ambassador [Jack F.] Matlock. In addition, all the Arabs to whom you turned with these proposals have actually turned to us.

I welcome the process of collaboration which is beginning, although it is still quite weak, in searches for a solution to this chronic problem. We waited for you to be convinced that it would be hard to solve this problem without the participation of the Soviet Union. I think there could be common ground there between us.

We favor a just, comprehensive settlement considering the interests of the Arabs, including the Palestinians, and Israel on the basis of the return of the occupied territories and the solution of other problems. No other approach has a chance of success here. It is impossible to ignore anyone's interests. We are considering your proposals from this point of view. Of course, there are also certain differences between us. But both of us understand that it is impossible to impose some solution and it is impermissible to ignore the interests of any of the parties or groups.

In this light a critical understanding of your proposals regarding the Middle East is occurring. Many think that in spite of elements of flexibility in your proposals they are nevertheless based on an old approach and that that same policy of separate deals with a limited number of participants is being pursued under the cover of talks about a conference on the Middle East. The fact that your proposal reflects a negative position with regard to a Palestinian settlement and, in particular, the UN serves as an example of this.

They reason this way: on the one hand, your proposals are sort of directed at trying to provide an armistice and to removing the bitterness in Gaza and the West Bank of the Jordan River. If this were done in connection with an overall settlement this would be understandable. If not, this is a completely different matter.

As you know, we have proposed to begin the work of the preparatory committee with the participation of the permanent representatives of the Security Council which would comprehensively discuss both the multilateral and the bilateral aspects of a settlement. We think that this is a clear, natural approach.

[1] On 8 February 1988, in a statement that was read by a broadcaster over national television interrupting regular broadcasting, Gorbachev announced that Soviet troops would begin pulling out of Afghanistan on 15 May if a settlement could be reached two months before that date, and that a withdrawal would be complete no more than ten months after it started. See Philip Taubman, "Soviet Sets May 15 as Goal to Start Afghanistan Exit," *New York Times*, 9 February 1988, pg. A1. For the full text of Gorbachev's statement, see *ibid.*, pg. A14.