

Prime Minister

Mr. C. Powell
Private Secretary to the
Prime-Minister
10 Downing Street
London SW1A

This is a characteristically
skillful piece of work by
Gorbachev. It says nothing
new, but sets out the
Soviet position authoritatively
and attractively. It is designed
to put pressure on
Khinan & the Resistance to
agree quickly on a condition
governer.

8 February 1988

Dear Mr. Powell,

I enclose for the Prime-Minister and yourself copies
of a statement by the General Secretary M. Gorbachev on
Afghanistan, made on 8 February 1988.

CSB
8/2-

Yours sincerely,

L. Zamyatin

L. Zamyatin
USSR Ambassador

THE USSR EMBASSY



PRESS RELEASE

13 KENSINGTON PALACE GARDENS LONDON W8 4QX

February 8, 1988

PR01988

Gorbachev - Statement on Afghanistan

Moscow February 8 TASS - Follows a statement by Mikhail Gorbachev, General Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee, on Afghanistan:

The military conflict in Afghanistan has been going on for a long time now. It is one of the most bitter and painful regional conflicts. Judging by everything, certain prerequisites have now emerged for its political settlement. In this context the Soviet leadership considers it necessary to set forth its views and to make its position totally clear.

In the near future, a new round of talks conducted by Afghanistan and Pakistan through the personal representative of the United Nations Secretary-General will be held in Geneva. There are considerable chances that this round will become a final one.

By now documents covering all aspects of a settlement have been almost fully worked out at the Geneva negotiations. They include agreements between Afghanistan and Pakistan on non-interference in each other's internal affairs and on the return of Afghan refugees from Pakistan; international guarantees of non-interference in Afghanistan's internal affairs; a document on the interrelationship of all elements of political settlement. There is also agreement on establishing a verification mechanism.

So what remains to be done? It is to establish a timeframe for the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan that would be acceptable to all. Precisely that - a timeframe, since the fundamental political decision to withdraw Soviet troops from Afghanistan was adopted by us, in agreement with the Afghan leadership, some time ago, and announced at that same time.

more...../

The question of timeframe has both a technical and a political aspect. As for the technical aspect, it is clear that the actual withdrawal of troops will take a certain amount of time. There is hardly any need to go into the details of that here.

As for the political aspect of the matter, it is that the withdrawal of Soviet troops is, quite naturally, linked with precluding interference in Afghanistan's internal affairs. Prerequisites for that have now been created to a mutual satisfaction.

Seeking to facilitate a speedy and successful conclusion of the Geneva talks between Afghanistan and Pakistan, the governments of the USSR and the Republic of Afghanistan have agreed to set a specific date for beginning the withdrawal of Soviet troops - May 15, 1988 - and to complete their withdrawal within 10 months. The date is set based on the assumption that agreements on the settlement would be signed no later than March 15, 1988 and that, accordingly, they would all enter into force simultaneously two months after that. If the agreements are signed before March 15, the withdrawal of troops will, accordingly, begin earlier.

Recently, another question has been raised, whether the phasing of Soviet troops withdrawal could be arranged in such a way as to withdraw, during the first phase already, a relatively greater portion of the Soviet contingent. Well, that too could be done. The Afghan leadership and we agree to it.

All of this creates the necessary conditions for signing the settlement agreement in the very near future.

That, of course, does not mean that no one could now obstruct the settlement, or push the talks backwards. But we would not like to think that some states or political figures might want to be held accountable by the Afghan nation and other nations for scuttling a settlement. We believe that common sense will prevail.

The question of the withdrawal of our troops from Afghanistan was raised at the 27th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

That was a reflection of our current political thinking, of our new, modern view of the world. We wanted thereby to reaffirm our commitment to the tradition of good-neighbourliness, goodwill and mutual respect which trace back to Vladimir Lenin and the first Soviet-Afghan treaty signed in 1921. Progressive forces of Afghan society have understood and accepted our sincere desire for peace and tranquility

between our two neighbouring countries, which for several decades have shown an example of peaceful coexistence and mutually-beneficial equitable cooperation.

Any armed conflict, including an internal one, can poison the atmosphere in an entire region and create a situation of anxiety and alarm for a country's neighbours, to say nothing of the suffering and losses among its own people. That is why we are against any armed conflicts. We know that the Afghan leadership, too, takes the same attitude.

It is well known that all of that has caused the Afghan leadership, headed by President Najibullah, to undertake a profound rethinking of political course, which has crystallised in the patriotic and realistic policy of national reconciliation. It was an act of great courage and bravery; not merely an appeal to cease armed clashes but a proposal to set up a coalition government and share power with the opposition, including those who wage armed struggle against the government and even those who, while being abroad, direct the rebels' operations and supply them with weapons and combat equipment obtained from foreign countries. And that proposal was made by a government vested with constitutional authority and wielding real power in the country.

The policy of national reconciliation is a reflection of new political thinking on the Afghan side. It is not a sign of weakness, but rather of the force of spirit, wisdom and dignity of the free, honest and responsible political leaders concerned about their country's present and future.

Success of the policy of national reconciliation has already made it possible to begin withdrawing Soviet troops from parts of Afghan territory. At present there are no Soviet troops in 13 Afghan provinces - because armed clashes have ceased there. It can well be said that the more rapidly peace gains ground in Afghanistan, the easier it will be for Soviet troops to leave.

The policy of national reconciliation has provided a political platform for all those who want peace in Afghanistan. What kind of peace? The kind that the Afghan people will choose. The proud, freedom-loving and courageous Afghan people, which has gone through many centuries of struggle for freedom and independence, has been, and will continue to be, the master of its own country, which, as President Najibullah has said, is built on a tradition of multi-party politics and of a multiple-structure economy.

The Afghans themselves will decide the final status of their country among other nations. Most often it is being said that the future peaceful Afghanistan will be an independent, non-aligned, and neutral state. Well, we would only be happy to have such a neighbour on our southern borders.

In connection with the question of beginning the withdrawal of Soviet troops, there is a need to make clear our position on yet another aspect - whether the withdrawal is linked with the completion of efforts to set up a new, coalition government in Afghanistan, i.e. with bringing the policy of national reconciliation to fruition. We are convinced that it is not.

The withdrawal of Soviet troops, combined with other aspects of the settlement, including guarantees of non-interference, is one thing. Various states are involved in it. Speaking of this, we believe that Iran, a neighbouring country, should not stand aside from political settlement.

National reconciliation and the establishment of a coalition government is another thing. This is a purely internal Afghan issue. It can only be resolved by the Afghans themselves, though they belong to different and even opposing camps. When, however, it is hinted to us that the Soviet Union should take part in talks on that issue, and even talk to third countries, our answer is firm and clear: don't expect us to do it; it is none of our business. Or yours, for that matter.

But could hostilities flare up even more after Soviet troops leave? It would hardly be appropriate to prophesy, but I think that such a course of events could be prevented if those now fighting against their brothers take a responsible attitude and try indeed to get involved in peace-building. If however, they are guided, not by the arguments of reason, but by emotions, multiplied by fanaticism, then they would be confronted with the greatly increased will of the Afghan people to see their country pacified and with the obligations of states no longer to interfere in its internal affairs. The Geneva obligations will close the channels for outside assistance to those who hope to impose their will on the whole nation by armed force.

And, if necessary, consideration could be given at that stage to using the possibilities available to the United Nations and its Security Council.

And now about our boys, our soldiers in Afghanistan. They have been doing their duty honestly, performing acts of self-denial and heroism.

Our people profoundly respect those who were called to serve in Afghanistan. The state provides for them, as a matter of priority, good educational opportunities and a chance to get interesting, worthy work.

The memory of those who have died a hero's death in Afghanistan is sacred to us. It is the duty of Party and Soviet authorities to make sure that their families and relatives are taken care of with concern, attention and kindness.

And, finally, when the Afghan knot is untied, it will have the most profound impact on other regional conflicts too.

Whereas the arms race, which we are working so hard - and with some success - to stop, is mankind's mad race to the abyss, regional conflicts are bleeding wounds which can result in gangrenous growth on the body of mankind.

The Earth is literally spotted with such wounds. Each of them means pain not only for the nations directly involved but for all - whether in Afghanistan, in the Middle East, in connection with the Iran-Iraq war, in Southern Africa, in Kampuchea, or in Central America.

Who gains from those conflicts? No-one except the arms merchants and various reactionary expansionist circles who are used to exploiting and turning a profit on people's misfortunes and tragedies.

Implementing political settlement in Afghanistan will be an important rupture in the chain of regional conflicts.

Just as the agreement to eliminate intermediate- and shorter-range missiles is to be followed by a series of further major steps towards disarmament, with negotiations on them already underway or being planned, likewise behind the political settlement in Afghanistan already looms a question: which conflict will be settled next? And it is certain that more is to follow.

States and nations have sufficient reserves of responsibility, political will and determination to put an end to all regional conflicts within a few years. This is worth working for. The Soviet Union will spare no effort in this most important cause.

ends



MR POWELL ✓

COO 8/2

c Sir Robin Butler

c Sir Percy Cradock

Afghanistan: "New" Soviet Initiative

Gorbachev announced on 8 February that the Soviet troop withdrawal from Afghanistan could begin on 15 May and be completed within 10 months, providing that the agreements on a settlement are signed by 15 March.

2. This move is already being presented as an important new Soviet initiative. The Indians were apparently forewarned of it by a visiting Soviet official (and welcomed it), and our Ambassador in Moscow was told early on 8 February by another senior official to watch out for "interesting news" on Afghanistan. In substance, however, it adds little that is new. The Russians have been saying for some time that they are ready to withdraw within 12 months (or less if things go smoothly). This merely clarifies that the 12-month clock will start running from the signature date, rather than from the formal beginning of implementation some 60 days later.

3. But the Russians are likely to use their "new" initiative to step up pressure on Pakistan. The UN negotiator, Cordovez, is still shuttling between Kabul and Islamabad, and does not now expect to reconvene the Geneva proximity talks before 2 March. The timetable is formally the only major issue outstanding. The Pakistanis want the Russians to leave faster (11 months from signature) than they intend, even after this latest clarification. But there are also a number of important details still to be settled. Only then can the agreement even be initialled, and the date and circumstances of the formal signature are still unclear. On present form, Pakistan will want to reach some agreement on



the thorny and all-important question of the transitional administration before signature takes place. And Cordovez has made little progress on this issue so far. 15 March as Gorbachev has suggested is certainly completely unrealistic. But Gorbachev emphasised in his statement that the establishment of a coalition government was a question for the Afghans alone, and none of the Soviet Union's, or anybody else's, business. He warned against anyone trying to obstruct a settlement. The Russians may now point to their latest "move" as further proof of their willingness to leave, and try to heap the blame for any delay on to Pakistan.

human

P E HALL

8 February 1988