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THE SITUATION IN AFGHANISTAN AND  
ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL  
PEACE AND SECURITY

SECURITY COUNCIL  
Forty-fourth year

Letter dated 28 March 1989 from the Permanent Representative of  
the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics to the United Nations  
addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit to you herewith the text of the answer given by Mr. E. A. Shevardnadze, Member of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, to questions on the subject of Afghanistan posed by a TASS correspondent on 23 March 1989.

I should be grateful if you would have this text circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under item 32 of the preliminary list, and of the Security Council.

(Signed) A. BELONOGOV

\* A/44/50/Rev.1.

ANNEX

Answers provided by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the  
Union of Soviet Socialist Republics to questions posed by  
a TASS correspondent on 23 March 1989

**Question:** Why, in your opinion, has the situation in Afghanistan recently not only remained tense but also, perhaps, tended to become more complicated?

**Answer:** The signing on 14 April 1988 of the Geneva Agreements opened up broad prospects for progress towards a comprehensive Afghan settlement. The basic thrust and substance of the Agreements was to eliminate external factors which did not help to overcome inter-Afghan disagreements and dissension, and to lead Afghans to the irrefutable conclusion that a constructive effort must be made to seek ways of overcoming their disagreements by means of peaceful negotiations, political compromises and the defusion of tensions.

The conclusion of these Agreements at Geneva would, of course, have been unthinkable were it not for the constructive contribution to the negotiating process made by the Afghan side.

Adopting a policy of national reconciliation inside the country, the Government of Afghanistan actively affirmed and is continuing to affirm that policy through its efforts at the international level. It was, indeed, the Afghan Government which suggested the inclusion, in accordance with international law, of such provisions as non-interference from outside, pledges not to resume such interference and the withdrawal of foreign forces in the framework of a settlement of the Afghan problem.

The Government of Afghanistan came to Geneva as a full and acknowledged partner in the negotiations, and demonstrated the seriousness and sincerity of its intentions. It has fully complied with its commitments under the Geneva Agreements with respect to the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan and is rigorously adhering to the provisions on non-interference in the affairs of others.

What were the interests of the various parties and what did they stand to gain from the full implementation of the Geneva Agreements?

For the Afghan side, Geneva promised an end to the war and a political settlement based on inter-Afghan dialogue and the creation of a broad-based Government.

The Pakistani leadership, in its turn, was relieved of its concern at the presence of Soviet forces in neighbouring Afghanistan and given a real chance of ridding itself of the heavy economic and political burden imposed by the presence of Afghan refugees in its territory.

The Soviet Union was given the opportunity of bringing its boys back home while preserving a non-aligned, sovereign and friendly Afghanistan on its southern borders.

The United States stood to avoid spending more billions on arms supplies for the Afghan opposition. Yet another complex source of tension which in one way or another affects Soviet-American relations would have been defused.

Thus, the Geneva Agreements were signed because they were based on a balanced consideration of the interests both of the Afghans themselves and of the other parties involved in the conflict. And only clear, reciprocal compliance by the parties with their obligations can ensure attainment of the objectives set when the Agreements were concluded. The main reason why the Afghan situation continues to give rise to concern and anxiety lies not in any weaknesses inherent in the Geneva Agreements, but in the fact that they have not yet been fully implemented.

The Soviet and Afghan sides proceeded with the withdrawal of Soviet forces on the assumption that external interference in Afghan affairs, principally from Pakistani territory, would stop completely, in accordance with the Geneva Agreements, and that there would therefore be no further need for a future Soviet military presence to help counteract such interference.

There is now not a single Soviet soldier left in Afghanistan, and yet the fratricidal war is continuing and becoming more intense. If we are to understand why, we must turn once again to the Geneva Agreements. And we shall see that the provision on the ending of interference in internal Afghan affairs - this being a problem addressed by the most important of the four documents signed at Geneva, the Agreement on Non-Interference - is being completely ignored by Pakistan.

Reference is made in article II of this Agreement to mutual respect for sovereignty, political independence, territorial integrity, national unity and security and to the right of each party freely to determine its own political, economic and social system. Each party is obliged to refrain from the use of force in any form whatsoever to disrupt the political, social or economic order of the other party or to overthrow or change its political system. The principle is confirmed whereby neither party's territory may be used to disrupt the political, economic and social stability of the other party. There are clearly stated obligations on each party to refrain from armed intervention, subversion or any act of military, political or economic interference and to prevent within its territory the training, equipping, financing and recruitment of mercenaries for the purpose of hostile activities against the other party or the sending of such mercenaries into its territory. Specific clauses prohibit hostile propaganda, the acceptance by either party within its territory of terrorist groups, saboteurs or subversive agents against the other party, the presence and harbouring of such groups in bases and the training, equipping and financing of such groups.

In this article the parties also mutually undertake to refrain from the promotion, encouragement or support, direct or indirect, of rebellious or secessionist activities, under any pretext whatsoever, or from any other action which seeks to disrupt the unity or to undermine or subvert the political order.

Now let us look at what is actually happening. In practice, there is not one of the 13 clauses of this article which Islamabad has not violated. The groups making up the so-called "alliance of seven", which is conducting widespread subversion, terrorism and other activities designed to overthrow by force the legitimate Government of the Republic of Afghanistan, are permitted to maintain an open and quite undisguised presence in Pakistani territory. Not only have the camps and bases where these groups' fighters receive their training and preparation not been closed down, but they are becoming ever more active. With not just the connivance but the open support of the Pakistani authorities, the mercenaries they have armed cross into Afghan territory to engage in acts of banditry, murder and violence. There is an unending and ever increasing flow of arms, including heavy weapons, and ammunition to the insurgents through the territory of Pakistan. Lavish financial subsidies are also provided. The reports that have appeared, some of them in Western countries, of direct participation by Pakistani officers in fighting against the Afghans are well-founded. A few days ago, Pakistani servicemen were captured deep inside Afghan territory. Of particular concern is the part played in this fighting by Pakistani tribal units ("malishes"); in our opinion, this requires special investigation by the United Nations and its machinery for verifying compliance with the Geneva Agreements.

Pakistan has also grossly violated its obligations through the establishment in its territory of the so-called interim Government - the "alliance of seven". And it is clearly no accident that the formation of that Government - if that is the right word for something which is completely in Pakistan's pocket - should have coincided with the resurrection of Zia-ul-Haq's idea of a Pakistani-Afghan confederation. And the current President, Ghulam Ishaq Khan, is not ruling out the possibility of going back to that idea. This is a logical consequence of the continuing interference aimed at undermining the sovereignty, political independence and territorial integrity of Afghanistan.

Question: There is a tendency in the West to believe that one of the things which fanned the flames of the war in Afghanistan after the withdrawal of Soviet forces was the continued supply of Soviet arms.

Answer: We have stated unequivocally at the highest level that the Soviet Union is willing to halt its arms supplies if such supplies to all the warring Afghan parties are also halted. This offer of ours still stands. But we shall not act unilaterally, particularly since our military assistance does not in any respect go against a single letter of the Geneva Agreements. It is provided on the basis of bilateral agreements between the Soviet Union and the Republic of Afghanistan.

The supplies of arms to the Afghan opposition through or by Pakistan are another matter. Such deliveries are illegal, wherever the weapons come from. The bilateral agreement between Afghanistan and Pakistan which is the major element of the Geneva package directly prohibits such supplies. Let me clarify this once again: if it were a question of arms supplies other than through Pakistan, then, in strict legal terms, there would be no violation of the Geneva Agreements. But the point is precisely that almost all the arms do come from Pakistan.

Supplying the Afghan opposition with weapons from Pakistani territory amounts, in essence, to materially abetting aggression against the Afghan State. So there is here a glaring infringement of the spirit and letter of Geneva. But I should like once again to emphasize our willingness to halt, on a mutual basis, all military supplies to Afghanistan, for whomever they may be intended.

**Question:** Could it be said that the Soviet Union is rethinking its position on the development of political contacts in connection with an Afghan settlement?

**Answer:** No, that conclusion is wrong. We intend to continue actively supporting the idea of an Afghan settlement in all our international meetings and contacts - with the Secretary-General of the United Nations and with statesmen of other countries, including the United States leadership. Because the principles to which we adhere as a basis for the achievement of peace in Afghanistan - unconditional compliance with the Geneva Agreements, iritiation of inter-Afghan dialogue and creation of a broad-based representative government, broad-based meaning that all the opposing forces and groups should have a voice - are universally recognized.

The discussion on Afghan questions has been going different ways with different partners. It has not been going well in Pakistan, for instance. We had rather foreseen that, but decided, as you know, to go to Islamabad anyway so as not to pass up a single opportunity, however slender it appeared. In Islamabad, they assured us that Pakistan would strictly observe the Geneva Agreements. Indeed, the official joint Soviet-Pakistani statement said as much. We don't doubt there are politicians there who fully understand the responsibility their country took on in Geneva and are concerned to carry out the Geneva Agreements. But there are also influential circles that cannot swear off expansionist and chauvinistic policies. We had productive talks, we think, in Tehran recently. We are in favour of continuing talks with the Afghan opposition, but not on specific formulas for an intra-Afghan settlement. That prerogative belongs to the Afghans alone. It cannot be any other way.

Why will the militant opposition and some other sectors not try negotiating with the Afghan Government? Simple - they were counting on a quick military success, a military resolution of the Afghan problem. But things have not worked out at all as some people were predicting. Of course, war is war, and fortunes vary. But the fighting at Jalalabad has shown that the Afghan people, the People's Democratic Party and the national leadership under President Najibullah, drawing strength from the policy of national reconciliation, can close ranks when the country is subjected to interference from Pakistani territory.

I should like to believe that Prime Minister Bhutto meant what she said a few days ago about Pakistan not wanting to be involved in the intra-Afghan conflict, and being interested in seeing peace in Afghanistan.

**Question:** It is increasingly being asked, both in the West and at home, whether it was not a mistake to send Soviet troops into Afghanistan.

**Answer:** Every situation is different, and the only way to answer that kind of question is after carefully going through all the specific factors making up the situation. We and the Afghan leadership have together come to the conclusion that there is no military solution to the problem of Afghanistan. That should answer your question. But the other side also has to arrive at that conclusion, which is the only correct one. The logic of the new political thinking is not an abstraction. It allowed us to go ahead with the Geneva Agreements, the withdrawal of the troops, and approval of the basic principles for an Afghan settlement at the United Nations.

Withdrawing the troops was not an easy decision. We knew the complications that both we and our Afghan friends would come up against. But our military presence in Afghanistan up to February 1989 is far from all that Soviet-Afghan co-operation and interaction has to offer. We will go on helping the Afghans to attain their long-awaited peace and tranquillity. That is the aim of our economic, social and cultural assistance to the Afghan people, which we have been providing on a very large scale, both while Soviet troops were in Afghanistan and since their withdrawal. Assistance of this kind is being provided by virtually all the Union Republics, many regions, major industrial centres, and individual ministries and enterprises.

If the Afghan people are still left with a protracted war on their hands, we will help them in their fight for freedom and independence against foreign interference. But, I repeat, we are backing the first option 100 per cent.

**Question:** In the context of Pakistani interference in intra-Afghan affairs you mentioned the "malishes", the tribal irregulars. They and other things should, of course, be regarded as direct complicity by Pakistan in the war against the Republic of Afghanistan?

**Answer:** Foreign soldiers in Afghan national dress are taking part in military actions on Afghan territory - this has been confirmed by many independent sources. As I said just now, there is proof of this. It is hard to believe that these "malishes" - Pakistani citizens - would act without the approval of the Pakistani authorities, getting involved in military operations on their own account. But even if you take them to be "volunteers", why should volunteers not appear on the government forces' side? That, though, would escalate the war again, and it is better to avoid anything that might make the intra-Afghan conflict even more complicated and difficult to settle.

Today the main factor acting to prolong the bloodshed in Afghanistan is the obstructionist policy of the Pakistani military circles that want to undermine the Geneva Agreements.

The duty of the international community is to call them to task and insist that they honour all the undertakings Pakistan gave in Geneva. We do not think this is beyond the power of all those who are working towards new, civilized international relations.

**Question:** What role does the United States play as a guarantor of the Geneva Agreements?

**Answer:** Under the Declaration on International Guarantees, the United States and the USSR together undertook to refrain absolutely from interfering in the internal affairs of Afghanistan, and appealed to other countries to do likewise. For a specific answer to your question, look at the events now taking place in and around Afghanistan.

**Question:** As you know, the armed opposition, feeling unsure of their strength in open battle, would like to set up an economic blockade around Kabul, undeterred by the fact that they are condemning the population of the Afghan capital to hunger and hardship.

**Answer:** Yes, they are trying. But supplies are being got into the city from the Soviet Union. An "air bridge" has been set up to provide the peaceful inhabitants of Kabul with everything they need. The road from Kabul to the Soviet border is open.

I particularly want to stress that our aid is not just for the capital: it goes to all Afghans in need, whether they are living in zones under Government or opposition control. We support genuine humanitarian assistance for everyone in need. When it comes to saving the lives of children, women and old people you cannot draw distinctions. We cannot but approve of the actions of those "field commanders" in Afghanistan who work on the same principles. At the same time, some countries, reasoning that the assistance being given to Afghanistan through United Nations channels needs to be depoliticized, make this an excuse for causing still more hardship in this bloody war and exacerbating the already tense situation out of purely political considerations.

In an attempt to offset their military setbacks at Jalalabad and several other strategically important positions, the opposition groups and their backers have stooped to truly barbarous tactics. They are shelling Kabul international airport, endangering passengers, peaceful cargoes and the safety of civilian flights arriving there. During one bombardment, as you know, an Aeroflot plane was damaged. And let me tell you something else. Our people are transporting humanitarian aid for the Afghan people through Kabul airport. We have a large embassy in Kabul, and quite a few civilian experts left there. Any attempt to compromise their safety will meet with a very decisive reaction from us.

**Question:** What political moves, in your view, might promote détente in Afghan affairs?

**Answer:** Mr. Gorbachev, in his speech to the United Nations General Assembly in December last year, spelled out a realistic programme for attaining a comprehensive Afghan settlement. All our suggestions, including the idea of an international conference on Afghanistan, are still on the table. We also believe that Afghanistan's neighbours, who are in a better position than anyone to sympathize with the Afghan situation, have a serious part to play. There needs to be a meeting of the Security Council to discuss how the Geneva Agreements are being

implemented - or, rather, broken by Pakistan. If the United Nations monitoring machinery is to be able to do its job, permanent positions will have to be set up on the Afghan-Pakistani border, especially in Tor Khama, where the road to Jalalabad begins.

**Question:** How might the breakdown of the Geneva Agreements affect the settlement of other regional conflicts?

**Answer:** That is a very fair question. The signing of the Geneva Agreements set off a great wave of positive international feeling, in that people had at last seen a real way to heal bleeding wounds therapeutically, so to speak - by means of negotiations, political wisdom and appeals to the ideals of the new political thinking.

The pacifying influence of the example set at Geneva was seen in southern Africa, in the ending of the Iran-Iraq war, and a quickening of interest in the Middle Eastern and Kampuchean settlement processes. What is happening in Afghanistan now, however, encourages those who favour violent solutions at all trouble spots.

Let me say further: the breakdown in compliance with the Geneva Agreements casts a cloud over the future course of the Afghan settlement, with all the far-reaching international consequences that that implies, just as the political scales in Afghanistan's neighbours like China and Iran, a whole series of other countries in the Non-aligned Movement and many Islamic countries were tipping in favour of a political solution to the Afghan problem. I would point out the positive role played by India, which speaks with special authority on international affairs.

In conclusion, let me stress that we still count on the forces in Pakistan which favour peaceful and good-neighbourly relations with Afghanistan and the Soviet Union winning through, and on good sense ultimately prevailing over recklessness and ambition.

To sum up our position, we firmly support the Afghan leadership under President Najibullah which wants an end to the bloodshed and the creation of a broad-based government in Afghanistan.

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