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

Letter dated 16 February 1990 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 enclose the text of an article entitled "Afghanistan - the difficult road to peace", by E. A. Shevardnadze, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and member of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, which was published in "Izvestia" on 15 February 1990.

I should be grateful if you would have the text of the article circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under item 29 of the preliminary list, and of the Security Council.

(Signed) A. BELONOGOV

\* A/45/50.

ANNEX

Afghanistan - the difficult road to peace

Today, 15 February, marks the anniversary of the day when the last Soviet soldier left Afghan soil. That occasion was, it may be stated without exaggeration, one which left its mark on the hearts of all Soviet people. They awaited, discussed and lived through it with impatience.

Let's be candid, up until then many people, both here at home and abroad, had not been able fully to define their attitude to the aims of perestroika. That test in political responsibility was one we had to pass both then and later on. The courageous and honest verdict on that decision in December 1979 to send troops into Afghanistan was returned by the Second Congress of People's Deputies.

The leadership of the Republic of Afghanistan also passed that test honourably by demonstrating, in very difficult circumstances, that its platform enjoyed broad support among Afghans. It embarked on the course of seeking a political solution of the Afghanistan problem on local soil.

And yet, in talking about the withdrawal of the Soviet troops, it is probably right to recall in the first place the domestic aspect of that event, to set it in the overall context of the processes of perestroika taking place in our country. Having embarked on the course of perestroika, we could not ignore the fact that Soviet troops were fighting in Afghanistan, that the blood of Soviet soldiers was being shed there.

The road to the withdrawal of our forces was not an easy one. Getting into the Afghanistan conflict was easier than getting out of it. A complex tangle of conflicts was formed which threatened far-reaching political and social upheavals. It had to be disentangled without delay. We put the Geneva negotiating process into high gear. A difficult diplomatic campaign had to be waged. It culminated in the signing on 14 April 1988 of the Geneva Accords, and we were able to begin withdrawing our troops.

Now that all that is behind us, we cannot but give their due not only to the participants in the historic international agreements on Afghanistan, but also to all those who, in one way or another, to a greater or lesser extent, contributed to the reaching of those agreements. Among them, particular mention must be made of India, which invariably took a constructive attitude and made a substantial contribution to the common effort. Our thanks also go to the People's Republic of China, which above all, as a neighbouring country, played an important role in maintaining the necessary atmosphere around the talks.

And of course, there could hardly have been any agreement if the position of Iran had not been favourable.

Naturally, this turning point had not only a domestic, but also a clearly delineated international dimension. As M. S. Gorbachev said at the Nineteenth

All-Union Party Conference, the Geneva Accords "have become an important international milestone in the political settlement of regional conflicts which threaten peace as a whole and slow the progress of peoples". The breakthrough on Afghanistan convincingly demonstrated that the new political thinking in international affairs also involved practical action to strengthen trust among States and peoples and break deadlock in the most complex situations. The precedent of Afghanistan had a certain impact on the ending of the war between Iran and Iraq, the resolution of the Angola-Namibia situation, and the strengthening of the movement to find mutually acceptable compromise solutions in South-East Asia and Central America.

Last - and perhaps most important - there has been a qualitative change in the situation both within Afghanistan itself and around it. Within the extremely non-homogeneous society of Afghanistan and in the world as a whole, a basic consensus is emerging that there is no alternative to a political solution of the Afghanistan problem. The large mass of Afghanistan's population is sick to death of war, and has recognized the futility and pointlessness of continuing the bloodshed.

However, this truly nation-wide aspiration for peace has not yet been transformed into the concrete decisions which would be taken as a result of a dialogue among all Afghans, and indeed this dialogue has not yet begun. In these circumstances, the position of the Government of Afghanistan and of President Najibullah is extremely important, and this position is distinguished by its constructiveness and flexibility. Just a few days ago, the President, speaking in Kabul, again confirmed his readiness to look for ways of bringing about a peaceful settlement. But for the time being, progress is being held back by the unrealistic conditions the opposition is attaching to the opening of a dialogue.

Nevertheless, there are some hopeful signs. Today we can speak - although as yet only for the most part on the conceptual, philosophical level - of the emergence of points of contact in the approaches of the Soviet Union and the United States, which together with the USSR is a guarantor of the Geneva Accords. Primarily, this involves a joint conclusion regarding the need to search for political ways of resolving the issue and to establish a "transition period" during which national reconciliation would be achieved and a new structure of State power in Afghanistan would take shape. This may not look like much, but it is no small achievement, especially if we bear in mind how complex this problem is. Just recently, issues relating to Afghanistan were the subject of in-depth discussion during the talks with United States Secretary of State James Baker in Moscow. This discussion again confirmed the possibility of further stepping up the two countries' joint efforts towards a settlement in Afghanistan.

A great deal depends on the position of Afghanistan's neighbours - Pakistan and Iran. In Pakistan, as can be seen, the process is under way, albeit slowly and with great difficulty, of reassessing values and bringing official objectives into line with the real situation in Afghanistan. On the whole, a constructive policy is being pursued in Iran, where, in particular, emphasis is placed on the role that the countries of the region might play in an Afghanistan settlement.

And even when we look at the opposition, it is apparent that there, too, an understanding is beginning to gain ground of the inevitability of intra-Afghan problems being solved through a dialogue in which the whole range of political forces in Afghanistan will participate. And we are speaking here of a fairly broad range of opposition, starting with the field commanders and ending with the moderate leaders of the "Alliance of Seven".

There is thus every ground for stating that genuine prerequisites now exist for setting the process of national reconciliation and political settlement in Afghanistan on a practical course.

The fate of Afghanistan and of the Afghan people is not a matter of indifference to us. This, I think, must be obvious. Afghanistan is our neighbour and our traditional and close partner. So it was, and so it will continue to be. Thus there is nothing strange in the fact that, having withdrawn our forces, we are in no way indifferent to the further evolution of affairs in Afghanistan - whether the will to peace and agreement will win through, or whether this courageous and wise people will be doomed to endless bloody strife. I am not giving away any big secret if I say that we have our own view of the optimum model of a peaceful settlement in Afghanistan, one which we have worked out in close consultation with the Government in Kabul while maintaining contacts with other forces in Afghan society.

The most important thing now is not to let slip the chance that now presents itself in the Afghan drama - and such a chance exists, no one is disputing that - of setting in motion a process of full-blooded intra-Afghan political dialogue. Let me share with you some of our views on this subject.

Like most other regional conflicts, the Afghanistan problem has two clearly defined aspects - an internal and an external one. Given all the nuances that characterize the question of Afghanistan, the internal aspect undoubtedly has priority. This is quite understandable: no one can or is in a position to settle the Afghans' own affairs for them. Although, of course, those who in one way or another have been involved in the events in Afghanistan have an obligation to help the Afghans reach agreement. But only to help, not to impose their own formulas, still less to hedge them about with preliminary conditions.

We consider, and this view of ours is shared by the leadership of the Republic of Afghanistan, that the basic elements of an intra-Afghan settlement could be reduced to the following.

First. The cornerstone of the settlement process must be a broad dialogue among Afghans, with the participation of all - without exception - political forces active in Afghanistan and abroad. This concerns, first of all, those forces which have the country's national interests at heart and want the fratricidal war to end as soon as possible. And if the majority of those groups reach a mutual understanding on the beginning of a dialogue among Afghans, then the first, most important and most practical step will have been taken towards a solution of the question of Afghanistan.

Since there have been considerable difficulties in establishing a dialogue among Afghans, we believe that the participation, at the current preparatory stage, of the United Nations, which has great prestige and experience in such work, would contribute significantly to overcoming those difficulties.

Second. In order for the inter-Afghan dialogue to become a reality, the appropriate conditions must be created. In this regard, an end to the bloodshed in the country is of vital importance. We realize that immediate agreement on a complete and definitive end to the war, which even at the official count has lasted 11 years - and, in fact, much longer - would, most likely, be impossible. Therefore, the objective that needs to be set for the first stage is that of achieving at least a pause, a suspension of hostilities.

Third. A plan for an intra-Afghan settlement must be the main focus of the inter-Afghan dialogue. That dialogue could take, for example, the form of an all-Afghan peace conference which could be held in Afghanistan or in any third country with the agreement of the participants.

Fourth. It is, of course, the affair of the Afghans themselves to work out a mechanism for an intra-Afghan settlement. In our opinion, a good basis for that would be the plan proposed by the President of the Republic of Afghanistan at the Ninth Conference of Heads of State or Government of Non-Aligned Countries, held at Belgrade. This plan outlines the principal stages of a settlement, leaving the specifics to be filled in later. What is particularly valuable in the current circumstances is the plan's considerable flexibility, which opens up prospects for initiatives from both sides.

Fifth. One of the principles of the concept of the "transition period", which would begin with the convening of an all-Afghan peace conference and end with the establishment of a broadly representative Government in Afghanistan as a result of the free expression of the will of the Afghan people, could be maintenance of the status quo with regard to the armed forces and units of the opposing sides engaged in the dialogue, and the territories under their control. In other words, the question of unified armed forces and a single administration for the entire country would be postponed until the establishment of a broad-based Afghan government. That, of course, does not exclude the possibility of other alternatives. Much will depend on the atmosphere at the conference and on the attitude of its participants.

Sixth. The objectives of setting up an all-Afghan dialogue and strengthening the mutual confidence of the negotiating Afghan sides would certainly be furthered by a pledge on their part that they will recognize the results of the general elections and not attempt to "correct" them by force. Afghan President Najibullah, for his part has already made a declaration to that effect, at a meeting with journalists in Kabul on 24 January 1990.

Another important point regarding the elections which should put an end to the military confrontation: existing experience in opening up possibilities for solving regional conflicts, in particular in Namibia and Nicaragua, show that, in the organization of such elections, effective international monitoring to ensure that they are genuinely free and democratic is of great significance. In the case

of Afghanistan, the observers could include in our opinion, along with the United Nations, other organizations, for example, the Organization of the Islamic Conference. It seems appropriate that the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, of which Afghanistan is an active member, should play a role in this area.

Such, in brief, are the "internal" aspects of a settlement. Of course, in a situation like the one in Afghanistan, it is very difficult to separate "internal" aspects from "external" ones as, for example, in the question of elections under international supervision. However, since we have already agreed - I repeat - on that somewhat artificial distinction, I shall now set forth our point of view with regard to the second group of issues.

The course of events in and around Afghanistan, and the very emergence of the question of Afghanistan are linked with a varying degree of involvement of a number of countries, especially the United States, Pakistan, Iran and the USSR. The conclusion of the Geneva Accords established the legal responsibility of the USSR and the United States as guarantors of non-interference in the internal affairs of Afghanistan and Pakistan. The main point is that measures should finally be taken in Pakistan to end such interference from Pakistan territory so as to ensure that the Pakistan side complies with its obligations. There is an increasing need for agreement among the USSR, the United States, Pakistan and Iran on the basic features of a political solution of the Afghanistan problem.

Following those preliminary remarks, I shall again set forth our proposals and, in order to give a complete picture, I continue the original enumeration.

Seventh. In the light of the importance of reaching a consensus among the USSR, the United States, Pakistan and Iran, we propose the convening of a conference of these four countries, with the participation of the United Nations Secretary-General or his representatives. The venue for the conference could be Geneva, Rome or Vienna. In so far as we are aware of the problems Iran may encounter because of difficulties in its relations with the United States, the Soviet side could offer its services of mediation.

Eighth. It is clear, however, that such a conference would lack plenipotentiary powers unless the representatives of the warring Afghan forces - of both the Republic of Afghanistan and the various groupings that form the opposition - were to be invited to it.

In that connection, in order to prepare for the conference it would be useful to set up a working group at the expert level which would determine the participation and agenda and deal with organizational matters.

Ninth. One of the crucial issues on which it would be desirable to achieve international consensus is that of a complete cessation of all arms deliveries to the warring parties in Afghanistan, whencesoever they might come, coupled with the declaration of a temporary halt or suspension in military actions. We have broached this issue several times with the American side, since we continue to believe that such a comprehensive approach alone can truly bring closer an end to bloodshed in Afghanistan.

Another point. In order to strengthen measures for the complete cessation of arms deliveries, it would be a good idea to work out a means of removing from Afghanistan all stocks of weapons and ensuring that they are not reintroduced into the country in future.

Tenth. The cessation of deliveries would be a precursor for the demilitarization of Afghanistan. The status of Afghanistan as a neutral and demilitarized State could be bolstered by an international conference. The USSR would be prepared to play a part, including a material part, in the creation of an international mechanism to supervise all stages of the demilitarization of Afghanistan.

We feel it goes without saying that the Soviet Union does not regard these ideas as the only possible framework for a solution of the Afghanistan question. But we are convinced that bringing them to fruition would enable a genuine start to be made in the process of national reconciliation in Afghanistan. We are hoping for a constructive reaction from those on whom movement towards a settlement of the Afghanistan question depends. We also count on the support of the United Nations Secretary-General. This would be fully in line with the mandate given him by the General Assembly. It is our deep conviction that the United Nations is still far from exhausting the valuable potential it possesses for creating a system most conducive to a settlement in Afghanistan.

For our part, we are ready for a constructive exchange of views with the United States, Pakistan and Iran on all aspects of a settlement in Afghanistan, including practical steps to bring it closer. The Soviet side, moreover, does not refuse to engage in dialogue with the field commanders and with the leaders of the group based in Peshawar and other groups, on the understanding that such contacts will not be misinterpreted as our acceptance of a "transitional government". We are also open to the idea of talks with Zakhir Shah and his circle, and with all those who would like to assist in solving the Afghanistan problem.

And now turning to what we regard as a crucial humanitarian issue: the freeing of our servicemen taken prisoner by the Afghan opposition. The Soviet Government and the entire Soviet people cannot but be concerned about the fate of those people of ours who one year after completion of the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan continue to languish in captivity. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs will not consider its mission accomplished until such time as all our prisoners are freed and are reunited with their families. We see this as our sacred duty and our direct official obligation.

Life and memory are inseparable. On such occasions as the present anniversary, we inevitably turn our thoughts towards what we have accomplished so far and what practical actions we can take for the future. And we are determined to maintain such a course. The Soviet Union is imbued with the desire and determination to do all in its power to ensure that neighbouring Afghanistan becomes once again a peaceful, independent, non-aligned State friendly to all peoples. So as to close for ever the bitter chapter of internecine strife in its history.