

Zbigniew Brzezinski: Drawing the Russians into the Afghan Trap...

President Carter, Do You Swear to Tell the Truth, the Whole Truth, and Nothing But the Truth?

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*Conor Tobin's January 9, 2020 Diplomatic History[1] article titled: [The Myth of the 'Afghan Trap': Zbigniew Brzezinski and Afghanistan](#)[2] attempts to "dismantle the notion that President Jimmy Carter, at the urging of National Security Advisor **Zbigniew Brzezinski**, aided the Afghan Mujahedin intentionally to lure the Soviet Union into invading Afghanistan in 1979." As Todd Greentree acknowledges in his July 17, 2020 review of Tobin's article, the stakes are high because the "the notion" calls into question not just President Carter's legacy, but the conduct, the reputation and the "strategic behavior of the United States during the Cold War and beyond." [3]*

Central to the issue of what Tobin refers to as "the Afghan Trap thesis," is French journalist Vincent Jauvert's infamous January [1998 Nouvel Observateur interview](#) with Brzezinski in which he brags about a secret program launched by him and President Carter six months before the Soviet invasion "that had the effect of drawing the Russians into the Afghan trap..."

"According to the official version of history, CIA aid to the Mujahideen began during 1980, that is to say, after the Soviet army invaded Afghanistan, 24 Dec 1979. But the reality, secretly guarded until now, is completely otherwise."

Brzezinski is on record as saying.

"Indeed, it was July 3, 1979 that President Carter signed the first directive for secret aid to the opponents of the pro-Soviet regime in Kabul. And that very day, I wrote a note to the president in which I explained to him that in my opinion this aid was going to induce a Soviet military intervention." [4]

Despite the fact that the secret program had already been revealed by the CIA's former

chief of the directorate of Operations for the Near East and South Asia **Dr. Charles Cogan** and former CIA Director **Robert Gates** and was largely ignored, Brzezinski's admission brings attention to a glaring misconception about Soviet intentions in Afghanistan that many historians would rather leave unexplained. From the moment Brzezinski's interview appeared in 1998 there has been a fanatical effort on both the left and the right to deny its validity as an idle boast, a misinterpretation of what he meant, or a bad translation from French to English. Brzezinski's admission is so sensitive amongst the CIA's insiders, Charles Cogan felt it necessary to come out for a Cambridge Forum discussion of our book on Afghanistan ([*Invisible History: Afghanistan's Untold Story*](#))[5] in 2009 to claim that even though our view that the Soviets were reluctant to invade was authentic, Brzezinski's *Nouvel Observateur* interview had to be wrong.

Image: An Afghan mujahid carries a Lee-Enfield No. 4 in August 1985 (Photo by Erwin Franzen, licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0)



Tobin expands on this complaint by lamenting that the French interview has so corrupted the historiography as to have become the almost sole basis to prove the existence of a plot to lure Moscow into the "Afghan Trap." He then goes on to write that since Brzezinski asserts the interview was technically *not* an interview but excerpts *from* an interview and was never approved in the form it appeared *and* that since Brzezinski has subsequently repeatedly denied it on numerous occasions—"the 'trap' thesis has little basis in fact." [6]

Tobin then proceeds to cite official documents to prove "Brzezinski's actions through 1979 exhibited a meaningful effort to *dissuade* [emphasis added] Moscow from intervening... In sum, a Soviet military intervention was neither sought nor desired by the Carter administration and the covert program initiated in the summer of 1979 is insufficient to charge Carter and Brzezinski with actively attempting to ensnare Moscow in the 'Afghan trap.'"

So what does this reveal about a secret U.S. government operation taken six months prior to the Soviet invasion of December 1979 and not bragged about by Brzezinski until January of 1998?

To summarize Tobin's complaint; Brzezinski's alleged boast of luring the Soviets into an "Afghan trap" has little basis in fact. Brzezinski *did say something but what*—is not clear, but whatever he said, there is no historical record of it and anyway it wasn't enough to lure

the Soviets into Afghanistan *because* he and Carter didn't want the Soviets to invade anyway *because* it would jeopardize détente and the SALT II negotiations. So what's all the fuss about?

Tobin's assumption that the President of the United States and his CIA would never intentionally set out to exacerbate the Cold War in the middle of such a hostile environment, may reveal more about Conor Tobin's bias than his understanding of what Brzezinski's strategy of confrontation was all about. To read his article is to step through the looking glass into an alternative universe where (to paraphrase T.E. Lawrence) facts are replaced by daydreams and the dreamers act-out with their eyes wide open. From our experience with Afghanistan and the people who made it happen, Tobin's "valuable service of traditional diplomatic history" (as quoted from Todd Greentree's review) does no service to history at all.

Looking back at what Brzezinski admitted to in 1998 doesn't require a top secret clearance to verify. The Great Game-like motivations behind the Afghan trap thesis were well known at the time of the invasion to anyone with an understanding of the history of the region's strategic value.

M.S. Agwani of the Jawaharlal Nehru School of International Studies stated as much in the October-December 1980 issue of the Schools Quarterly Journal citing a number of complicating factors that support the Afghan trap thesis: "Our own conclusion from the foregoing is twofold. First, the Soviet Union had in all probability walked into a trap laid by its adversaries. For its military action did not give it any advantage in terms of Soviet security which it did not enjoy under the previous regimes. On the contrary, it can and does affect its dealings with the Third World in general and the Muslim countries in particular. Secondly, the strong American reaction to Soviet intervention cannot be taken as proof of Washington's genuine concern about the fate of Afghanistan. It is indeed possible to argue that its vital interests in the Gulf would be better served by an extended Soviet embroilment with Afghanistan inasmuch as the latter could be taken advantage to ostracize the Soviets from that region. The happenings in Afghanistan also seem to have come in handy for the United States to increase its military presence in and around the Gulf substantially without evoking any serious protest from the littoral states." [7]

Whenever questioned over the nearly two decades after the *Nouvel Observateur* article appeared until his death in 2017, Brzezinski's responses to the accuracy of the translation often varied from acceptance to rejection to somewhere in between which should raise questions about relying too heavily on the veracity of his reflections. Yet Conor Tobin chose to cite only a 2010 interview with Paul Jay of the [Real News Network](#) [8] in which Brzezinski denied it, to make his case. [In this 2006 interview](#) with filmmaker Samira Goetschel [9] he states that it's a "very free translation," but fundamentally admits the secret program "probably convinced the Soviets even more to do what they were planning to do." Brzezinski defaults to his long held ideological justification (shared with neoconservatives) that *since* the Soviets were in the process of expanding into Afghanistan anyway as part of a master plan for achieving hegemony in Southwest Asia and the Gulf oil-producing states, [10] (a position rejected by Secretary of State Cyrus Vance) the fact that he might have been provoking an invasion was of little significance.

Having dispensed with the implications of Brzezinski's exact words, Tobin then blames the growth and acceptance of the Afghan trap thesis largely on an over-reliance on Brzezinski's "reputation" which he then proceeds to dismiss by citing Brzezinski's "post-invasion memos

[which] reveal concern, not opportunity, which belies the claim that inducing an invasion was his objective.”[11] But to dismiss Brzezinski’s well known ideological motivation to undermine U.S./Soviet relations at every turn is to miss the *raison d’être* of Brzezinski’s career prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union. Accepting his denials at face value ignores his role in bringing the post-Vietnam neoconservative agenda ([known as Team B](#)) into the White House not to mention the opportunity to permanently shift American foreign policy into his anti-Russian ideological world view by provoking the Soviets at every step.

Anne Hessing Cahn, currently Scholar in Residence at [American University](#) who served as Chief of the Social Impact Staff at the [Arms Control and Disarmament Agency](#) from 1977–81 and Special Assistant to the [Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense](#) 1980–81, had this to say about Brzezinski’s reputation in her 1998 book, *Killing Détente*: “When President Carter named Zbigniew Brzezinski as his national security advisor, it was foreordained that détente with the Soviet Union was in for rough times. First came the March 1977 ill-fated arms control proposal, which departed from the Vladivostok Agreement[12] and was leaked to the press before it was presented to the Soviets. By April Carter was pressing NATO allies to rearm, demanding a firm commitment from all NATO members to start increasing their defense budgets by 3 percent per year. In the summer of 1977 Carter’s Presidential Review Memorandum-10[13]called for an ‘ability to prevail’ if war should come, wording that smacked of the Team B view.” [14]

Within a year of taking office Carter had already signaled the Soviets multiple times that he was turning the administration away from cooperation to confrontation and the Soviets were listening. In an address drafted by Brzezinski and delivered at Wake Forest University on March 17, 1978,

“Carter reaffirmed American support for SALT and arms control, [but] the tone was markedly different from a year earlier. Now he included all the qualifiers beloved by Senator Jackson and the JCS... As for détente—a word never actually mentioned in the address—cooperation with the Soviet Union was possible to meet common goals. ‘But if they fail to demonstrate restraint in missile programs and other force levels or in the projection of Soviet or proxy forces into other lands and continents then popular support in the United States for such cooperation with the Soviets will certainly erode.’”

The Soviets got the message from Carter’s address and immediately responded in a TAAS News Agency editorial that: “‘Soviet goals abroad’ had been distorted as an excuse to escalate the arms race.” [15]

At a Nobel conference on the Cold War in the fall of 1995, Harvard/MIT Senior Security Studies Advisor, Dr. Carol Saivetz addressed the tendency to neglect the importance of Brzezinski’s ideology in the Cold War decision-making process and why that led to such a fundamental misunderstanding of each side’s intentions.

“What I learned over the last couple of days was that ideology—a factor which we in the West who were writing about Soviet foreign policy tended to dismiss as pure rationalization... To some extent, an ideological perspective—an ideological world view, let us call it—played an important role... Whether or not Zbig was from Poland or from someplace else, he had a world view, and he tended to interpret events as they unfolded in the light of it. To some extent, his fears became self-fulfilling prophecies. He was looking for certain kinds of behaviors, and he saw them—rightly or wrongly.”[16]

To understand how Brzezinski's "fears" became self-fulfilling prophecies is to understand how his hard line against the Soviets in Afghanistan provoked the results he wanted and became adopted as American foreign policy in line with Team B's neoconservative objectives; "to destroy détente and to steer U.S. foreign policy back to a more militant stance viz-à-viz the Soviet Union." [17]



Afghan guerrillas that were chosen to receive medical treatment in the United States, Norton Air Force Base, California, 1986 (Photo by T.Sgt. Bob Simons, licensed under the Public Domain)

Although not generally considered a neoconservative and opposed to linking Israel's objectives in Palestine with American objectives, Brzezinski's method for creating self-fulfilling prophecies and the neoconservative movement's geopolitical aims of moving the U.S. into a hardline stance against the Soviet Union found a common objective in Afghanistan.

Their shared method as Cold warriors came together to attack détente and SALT II wherever possible while destroying the foundations of any working relationship with the Soviets. In a 1993 interview we conducted with SALT II negotiator Paul Warnke, he affirmed his belief that the Soviets would never have invaded Afghanistan in the first place had President Carter not fallen victim to Brzezinski and Team B's hostile attitude toward détente and their undermining of Soviet confidence that SALT II would be ratified. [18]

Brzezinski saw the Soviet invasion as a great vindication of his claim that the U.S. had encouraged Soviet aggression through a foreign policy of weakness which therefore justified his hardline position inside the Carter administration. But how could he claim vindication for Soviet actions when he had played such a crucial role in provoking the circumstances to which they reacted? [19]

President Dwight D. Eisenhower's science advisor **George B. Kistiakowsky** and former deputy director of the CIA, **Herbert Scoville** answered that question in a Boston Globe Op-ed barely two months after the event.

"In reality, it was actions by the President designed to appease his hardline political

opponents at home that destroyed the fragile balance in the Soviet bureaucracy... The arguments that stilled the voices of the Kremlin moderates grew out of the approaching demise of the SALT II treaty and the sharply anti-Soviet drift of Carter's policies. His increasing propensity for accepting the views of National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski led to the anticipation of dominance in the United States by the hawks for many years to come..."[20]

In an April 1981 article in the British journal *The Round Table*, author Dev Murarka reveals that the Soviets had refused to intervene militarily on thirteen separate occasions after being asked by the Afghan government of Nur Mohammed Taraki and Hafizullah Amin—knowing a military intervention would provide their enemies with exactly what they had been seeking. Only on the fourteenth request did the Soviets comply “when information was received in Moscow that Amin had made a deal with one of the dissident groups.” Murarka observes that “A close scrutiny of the circumstances of the Soviet decision to intervene underlines two things. One, that the decision was not taken in haste without proper consideration. Two, that an intervention was not a predetermined inevitable consequence of growing Soviet involvement in Afghanistan. In different circumstances it could have been avoided.”[21]

But instead of being avoided, the circumstances for a Soviet invasion were fostered by covert action taken by Carter, Brzezinski and the CIA directly and through proxies in Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and Egypt ensuring that Soviet intervention was not avoided but encouraged.

Additionally absent from the Tobin analysis is the fact that anybody who tried to work with Brzezinski at the Carter White House—as testified to by SALT II negotiator Paul Warnke and Carter CIA Director Stansfield Turner—knew him as a Polish nationalist and a driven ideologue.[22] And even if the *Nouvel Observateur* interview did not exist it wouldn't alter the weight of evidence that without Brzezinski and Carter's covert and overt provocations, the Soviets would never have felt the need to cross the border and invade Afghanistan.

In a January 8, 1972 article in the *New Yorker Magazine*, titled [Reflections: In Thrall To Fear](#),[23] **Senator J. William Fulbright** described the neoconservative system for creating endless war that was keeping the U.S. bogged down in Vietnam.

“The truly remarkable thing about this Cold War psychology is the totally illogical transfer of the burden of proof from those who make charges to those who question them... The Cold Warriors, instead of having to say how they knew that Vietnam was part of a plan for the Communization of the world, so manipulated the terms of the public discussion as to be able to demand that the skeptics prove that it was not. If the skeptics could not then the war must go on—to end it would be recklessly risking the national security.”

Fulbright realized that Washington's neoconservative Cold Warriors had turned the logic for making war inside out by concluding,

“We come to the ultimate illogic: war is the course of prudence and sobriety until the case for peace is proved under impossible rules of evidence—or until the enemy surrenders. Rational men cannot deal with each other on this basis.”

But these “men” and their system were ideological; not rational and their drive to further

their mandate to defeat Soviet Communism only intensified with the official loss of the Vietnam War in 1975. Because of Brzezinski, U.S. policy formation surrounding the Carter administration on Afghanistan, SALT, détente and the Soviet Union lived outside the realm of what had passed for traditional diplomatic policy-making in the Nixon and Ford administrations while succumbing to the toxic neoconservative influence of Team B that was gaining control at the time.

Tobin ignores this glaring historical conjunction of likeminded ideologists. He insists on relying on the official record to come to his conclusions but then ignores how that record was framed by Brzezinski and influenced by Washington's cult of neoconservatives to deliver on their ideological self-fulfilling prophecy. He then cherry-picks facts that support his anti-Afghan trap thesis while ignoring the wealth of evidence from those who opposed Brzezinski's efforts to control the narrative and exclude opposing points of view.



National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski accompanying President Jimmy Carter during a visit to Strategic Air Command's Headquarters in Offutt Air Force Base, Nebraska. (Photo by United States Air Force Archive, licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0)

According to numerous studies Brzezinski transformed the role of national security advisor far beyond its intended function.

In a planning session with President Carter on St. Simon Island before even entering the White House he took control of policy creation by narrowing access to the president down to two committees (the Policy Review Committee PRC, and the Special Coordinating Committee SCC). He then had Carter transfer power over the CIA to the SCC which he chaired. At the first cabinet meeting after taking office Carter announced that he was elevating the national security advisor to cabinet level and Brzezinski's lock on covert action was complete. According to political scientist and author David J. Rothkopf, "[It was a](#)

[bureaucratic first strike of the first order](#). The system essentially gave responsibility for the most important and sensitive issues to Brzezinski.” [24]

According to one academic study,[25] over the course of four years Brzezinski often took actions without the knowledge or approval of the president; intercepted communications sent to the White House from around the world and carefully selected only those communications for the president to see that conformed to his ideology. His Special Coordinating Committee, the SCC was a stovepipe operation which acted solely in his interest and denied information and access to those who might oppose him, including Secretary of State Cyrus Vance and CIA Director Stansfield Turner. As a cabinet member he occupied a White House office diagonally across the lobby from the Oval Office and met so often with the President, the in-house record-keepers stopped keeping track of the meetings.[26] By agreement with President Carter, he would then type up three page memos of these and any meetings and deliver them to the president in person.[27]He used this unique authority to single himself out as the primary spokesman for the administration and a barrier between the White House and the president’s other advisors and went so far as to create a press secretary to convey his policy decisions directly to the Mainstream Media.

He was also on the record as singlehandedly establishing a rapprochement with China in May of 1978 on an anti-Soviet basis which ran counter to U.S. policy at the time while renowned for misleading the president on critical issues to falsely justify his positions.[28]

So how did this work in Afghanistan?

Tobin rejects the very idea that Brzezinski would ever advise Carter to actively endorse a policy that would risk SALT and détente, jeopardize his election campaign and threaten Iran, Pakistan and the Persian Gulf to future Soviet infiltration—because to Tobin “it is largely inconceivable.”[29]

As proof of his support for Brzezinski’s belief in the Soviet’s long term ambitions to invade the Middle East through Afghanistan, Tobin cites how Brzezinski “reminded Carter of ‘Russia’s traditional push to the south, and briefed him specifically on Molotov’s proposal to Hitler in late 1940 that the Nazis recognize the Soviet claims of pre-eminence in the region south of Batum and Baku.’” But Tobin fails to mention that what Brzezinski presented to the president as proof of Soviet aims in Afghanistan [was a well-known misinterpretation](#)[30] of what Hitler and Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop *had proposed* to Molotov—and which Molotov rejected. In other words, the very opposite of what Brzezinski presented to Carter—yet Tobin ignores this fact.

From the moment Afghanistan declared its independence from Britain in 1919 until the “Marxist coup” of 1978 the main goal of Soviet foreign policy had been to maintain friendly but cautious relations with Afghanistan, while preserving Soviet interests.[31]

U.S. involvement was always minimal with the U.S. represented by allies Pakistan and Iran in the region. By the 1970s the U.S. considered the country to already be within the Soviet sphere of influence having defacto signed on to that arrangement at the start of the Cold War. [32] As two long term American experts on Afghanistan explained quite simply in 1981, “The Soviet influence was predominant but not intimidating until 1978.”[33]

Contrary to Brzezinski’s claim of a Soviet grand design, Secretary of State Cyrus Vance saw

no evidence of Moscow's hand in the 78'overthrow of the previous government but much evidence to prove the coup had caught them by surprise.[34] In fact it appears the coup leader Hafizullah Amin feared the Soviets would have stopped him had they discovered the plot. **Selig Harrison** writes,

"The overall impression left by the available evidence is one of an improvised ad hoc Soviet response to an unexpected situation... Later, the KGB 'learned that the Amin's instructions about the uprising included a severe ban on letting the Russians know about the planned actions.'"[35]

Moscow considered **Hafizullah Amin** to be aligned with the CIA and labelled him

"'a commonplace petty bourgeois and extreme Pashtu nationalist... with boundless political ambitions and a craving for power,' which he would 'stoop to anything and commit any crimes to fulfill.'"[36]

As early as May 1978 the Soviets were engineering a plan to remove and replace him and by the summer of 1979 contacting former non-communist members of the King and Mohammed Daoud's government to build a "non-communist, or coalition, government to succeed the Taraki-Amin regime," all the while keeping U.S. embassy charge d'affaires Bruce Amstutz fully informed.[37]

To others who had a personal experience in the events surrounding the Soviet invasion, there is little doubt that Brzezinski wanted to raise the stakes for the Soviets in Afghanistan and had been doing it at least since April of 1978 with the help of the Chinese. During Brzezinski's historic mission to China only weeks after the Marxist takeover in Afghanistan, he raised the issue of Chinese support for countering the recent Marxist coup. [38]

In support of his theory that Brzezinski was not provoking a Soviet invasion, Tobin cites a memo from NSC director for South Asian Affairs, Thomas Thornton on May 3, 1978 reporting that "the CIA was unwilling to consider covert action"[39] at the time and warned on July 14, that "no official encouragement" be given to "coup plotters." [40] The actual incident to which Thornton refers regards a contact by the second highest Afghan military official who probed the U.S. embassy chargé d'Affaires Bruce Amstutz on whether the U.S. would support overthrowing the newly installed "Marxist regime" of Nur Mohammed Taraki and Hafizullah Amin.

Tobin then cites Thornton's warning to Brzezinski that the result of "giving a helping hand... would likely be an invitation for massive Soviet involvement," and adds that Brzezinski wrote "yes" in the margins.

Tobin assumes the warning from Thornton is further evidence that Brzezinski was discouraging provocative action by signaling a "yes" to his warning. But what Brzezinski meant by writing in the margin is anybody's guess, especially given his bitter policy conflict over the issue of destabilizing the regime with the incoming U.S. ambassador **Adolph Dubs** who arrived that July as well.

"I can only tell you that Brzezinski really had a struggle for American policy toward Afghanistan in 1978 and 79 between Brzezinski and Dubs" journalist and scholar [Selig Harrison](#) told us in an interview we conducted in 1993.

"Dubs was a Soviet specialist... with a very sophisticated conception of what he was

going to do politically; which was to try to make Amin into a Tito - or the closest thing to a Tito - detach him. And Brzezinski of course thought that was all nonsense... Dubs represented a policy of not wanting the U.S. to get involved with aiding antagonistic groups because he was trying to deal with the Afghan Communist leadership and give it off-setting and economic help and other things that would enable it to be less dependent on the Soviet Union... Now Brzezinski represented a different approach, which is to say was all part of a self-anointed prophecy. It was all very useful to the people who, like Brzezinski had a certain conception of the overall relationship with the Soviet Union.”[41]

In his book with Diego Cordovez *Out of Afghanistan*, Harrison recalls his visit with Dubs in August of 1978 and how over the next six months his conflict with Brzezinski made life extremely difficult and dangerous for him to implement the State Department’s policy. “Brzezinski and Dubs were working at cross purposes during late 1978 and early 1979.” Harrison writes.

“This control over covert operations enabled Brzezinski to take the first steps toward a more aggressive anti-Soviet Afghan policy without the State Department’s knowing much about it.”[42]

According to the State Department’s 1978 “Post Profile” for the ambassador’s job, Afghanistan was considered a difficult assignment subject “to unpredictable - possibly violent - political developments affecting the stability of the region... As Chief of mission, with eight different agencies, almost 150 official Americans, in a remote and unhealthy environment,” the ambassador’s job was dangerous enough. But with Ambassador Dubs directly opposed to Brzezinski’s secret internal policy of destabilization it was becoming deadly. Dubs was clearly aware from the outset that the ongoing program of destabilization might cause the Soviets to invade and explained his strategy to Selig Harrison. “The trick for the United States, he [Dubs] explained would be to sustain cautious increases in aid and other links without provoking Soviet counter pressures on Amin and possibly military intervention.”[43]

According to former CIA analyst Henry Bradsher, Dubs attempted to warn the State Department that destabilization would result in a Soviet invasion. Before leaving for Kabul he recommended that the Carter administration do contingency planning for a Soviet military response and within a few months of arriving repeated the recommendation. But the State Department was so out of Brzezinski’s loop, Dubs’ request was never taken seriously.[44]

By early 1979 the fear and confusion over whether Hafizullah Amin was secretly working for the CIA, had so destabilized the U.S. embassy, Ambassador Dubs confronted his own station chief and demanded answers, only to be told Amin had never worked for the CIA.[45] But rumors that Amin had contacts with Pakistan’s Intelligence Directorate the ISI and the Afghan Islamists backed by them, especially Gulbuddin Hekmatyar are most likely true.[46] Despite the obstacles Dubs persisted in advancing his plans with Hafizullah Amin against the obvious pressure coming from Brzezinski and his NSC. Harrison writes.

“Dubs meanwhile was arguing vigorously for keeping American options open, pleading that destabilization of the regime could provoke direct Soviet intervention.”[47]

Harrison goes on to say;

“Brzezinski emphasized in an interview after he left the White House that he had remained strictly within the confines of the President’s policy at that stage not to provide direct aid to the Afghan insurgency [which has since been revealed as not true]. [Since there was no taboo on indirect support](#), however, the CIA had encouraged the newly entrenched Zia Ul-Haq to launch its own program of military support for the insurgents. The CIA and the Pakistani Interservices Intelligence Directorate (ISI) he said, worked together closely on planning training programs for the insurgents and on coordinating the Chinese, Saudi Arabian, Egyptian and Kuwaiti aid that was beginning to trickle in. By early February 1979, this collaboration became an open secret when the Washington Post published [February 2] an eyewitness report that at least two thousand Afghans were being trained at former Pakistani Army bases guarded by Pakistani patrols.”[48]

David Newsom, Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs who’d met the new Afghan government in the summer of 1978 told Harrison,

“From the beginning, Zbig had a much more confrontational view of the situation than Vance and most of us at State. He thought we should be doing something covertly to frustrate Soviet ambitions in that part of the world. On some occasions I was not alone in raising questions about the wisdom and feasibility of what he wanted to do.” ‘CIA Director Stansfield Turner, for example,’ “was more cautious than Zbig, often arguing that something wouldn’t work. Zbig wasn’t worried about provoking the Russians, as some of us were...”[49]

Although noting Ambassador Dubs’ subsequent murder on February 14 at the hands of the Afghan police as a major turning point for Brzezinski to shift Afghan policy further against the Soviets, Tobin entirely avoids the drama that led up to the Dubs’ assassination, his conflict with Brzezinski and his overtly expressed fear that provoking the Soviets through destabilization would result in an invasion.[50]

By the early spring of 1979 the “Russia’s Vietnam” meme was circulating widely in the international press as evidence of Chinese support for the Afghan insurgency began to filter out. An April article in the Canadian MacLean’s Magazine reported the presence of Chinese army officers and instructors in Pakistan training and equipping “right-wing Afghan Moslem guerillas for their ‘holy war’ against the Moscow-back Kabul regime of Noor Mohammed Taraki.”[51] A May 5 article in the Washington Post titled “Afghanistan: Moscow’s Vietnam?” went right to the point saying, “the Soviets’ option to pull out entirely is no longer available. They are stuck.”[52]

But despite his claim of responsibility in the *Nouvelle Observateur* article, the decision to keep the Russians stuck in Afghanistan may already have become a fait accompli that Brzezinski simply took advantage of. In his 1996 *From the Shadows*, former CIA director Robert Gates and Brzezinski aid at the NSC confirms that the CIA was on the case long before the Soviets felt any need to invade.

“The Carter administration began looking at the possibility of covert assistance to the insurgents opposing the pro-Soviet, Marxist government of President Taraki at the beginning of 1979. On March 9, 1979, CIA sent several covert action options relating to Afghanistan to the SCC... The DO informed DDCI Carlucci late in March that the government of Pakistan might be more forthcoming in terms of helping the insurgents than previously believed, citing an approach by a senior Pakistani official to an Agency

officer.”[53]

Aside from the purely geopolitical objectives associated with Brzezinski’s ideology, Gates’ statement reveals an additional motive behind the Afghan trap thesis: The long term objectives of drug kingpins in the opium trade and the personal ambitions of the Pakistani General credited with making the Afghan trap a reality.

In 1989 Pakistan’s Lieutenant General Fazle Haq identified himself as the senior Pakistani official who’d influenced Brzezinski into backing the ISI’s clients and to get the operation to fund the insurgents underway. “I told Brzezinski you screwed up in Vietnam and Korea; you’d better get it right this time” he told British journalist Christina Lamb in an interview for her book, *Waiting for Allah*. [54]

Far from absolving Brzezinski of any responsibility for luring the Soviets into an Afghan trap, Haq’s 1989 admission combined with the Gates 1996 revelation confirm a premeditated willingness to use destabilization to provoke the Soviets into a military response and then use that response to trigger the massive military upgrade that was referred to in the Soviet reaction to Carter’s Wake Forest address in March of 1978. It also links Fazle Haq’s motives to President Carter and Brzezinski and in so doing, makes both witting accessories to the spread of illicit drugs at the expense of Carter’s own “Federal strategy for prevention of drug abuse and drug trafficking.”

In late 1977 Dr. David Musto, a Yale psychiatrist had accepted Carter’s appointment to the White House Strategy Council on Drug Abuse. “Over the next two years, Musto found that the CIA and other intelligence agencies denied the council—whose members included the secretary of state and the attorney general—access to all classified information on drugs, even when it was necessary for framing new policy.”

When Musto informed the White House about the CIA’s lying about their involvement he got no response. But when Carter began openly funding the mujahideen guerrillas following the Soviet invasion Musto told the council.

“‘[T]hat we were going into Afghanistan to support opium growers in their rebellion against the Soviets. Shouldn’t we try to avoid what we had done in Laos? Shouldn’t we try to pay the growers if they eradicate their opium production? There was silence.’ As heroin from Afghanistan and Pakistan poured into America throughout 1979, Musto noted that the number of drug-related deaths in New York City rose by 77 percent.”[55]

Golden Triangle heroin had provided a secret source of funding for the CIA’s anti-communist operations during the Vietnam War.

“By 1971, 34 percent of all US soldiers in South Vietnam were heroin addicts – all supplied from laboratories operated by CIA assets.”[56] Thanks to Dr. David Musto, Haq’s use of the Tribal heroin trade to secretly fund Gulbuddin Hekmatyar’s rebel forces was already exposed, but because of Fazle Haq, Zbigniew Brzezinski and a man named Agha Hassan Abedi and his [Bank of Commerce and Credit International](#), the rules of the game would be turned inside out. [57]

By 1981, Haq had made the Afghan/Pakistan border the world’s top heroin supplier with 60 percent of U.S. heroin coming through his program[58]and by 1982 Interpol was listing Brzezinski’s strategic ally Fazle Haq as an international narcotics trafficker.[59]

In the aftermath of Vietnam, Haq was positioned to take advantage of an historic shift in the illicit drug trade from Southeast Asia and the Golden Triangle to South Central Asia and the Golden Crescent, where it came to be protected by Pakistani intelligence and the CIA and where it thrives today.[60]

Haq and Abedi together [revolutionized the drug trade](#) under the cover of President Carter's anti-Soviet Afghan war making it safe for all the world's intelligence agencies to privatize what had up to then been secret government-run programs. And it is Abedi who then brought in a retired [President Carter as his front man](#) to legitimize the face of his bank's illicit activities as it continued to finance Islamic terrorism's spread around the world.

There are many who prefer to believe that President Carter's involvement with Agha Hassan Abedi was the result of ignorance or naiveté and that in his heart President Carter was just trying to be a good man. But even a cursory examination of BCCI reveals deep connections to Carter's Democratic Party circle that cannot be explained away by ignorance.[61] It can however be explained by a calculated pattern of deception and to a president that [to this day refuses to answer any questions](#) about it.

To some members of the Carter White House who interacted with Brzezinski during his four years at the wheel from 1977 to 1981 his intention to provoke the Russians into doing something in Afghanistan was always clear. [According to John Helmer](#) a White House staffer who was tasked with investigating two of Brzezinski's policy recommendations to Carter, Brzezinski would risk anything to undermine the Soviets and his operations in Afghanistan were well known.

"Brzezinski was an obsessive Russia-hater to the end. That led to the monumental failures of Carter's term in office; the hatreds Brzezinski released had an impact which continues to be catastrophic for the rest of the world." Helmer wrote in 2017,

"To Brzezinski goes the credit for starting most of the ills - the organization, financing, and armament of the mujahideen the Islamic fundamentalists who have metastasized - with US money and arms still - into Islamic terrorist armies operating far from Afghanistan and Pakistan, where Brzezinski started them off." [62]

Helmer insists that Brzezinski exercised an almost hypnotic power over Carter that bent him towards Brzezinski's ideological agenda while blinding him to the consequences from the outset of his presidency.

"From the start... in the first six months of 1977, Carter was also warned explicitly by his own staff, inside the White House... not to allow Brzezinski to dominate his policy-making to the exclusion of all other advice, and the erasure of the evidence on which the advice was based."

Yet the warning fell on Carter's deaf ears while the responsibility for Brzezinski's actions falls on his shoulders. According to Carter's CIA Director Stansfield Turner; "The ultimate responsibility is totally Jimmy Carter's. [It's got to be the President](#) who sifts out these different strains of advice." [63] But to this day [Carter refuses to address his role](#) in creating the disaster that Afghanistan has become.

In 2015 we began work on a documentary to finally clear the air on some of the unresolved questions surrounding America's role in Afghanistan and reconnected with Dr. Charles

Cogan for an interview. Soon after the camera rolled, [Cogan interrupted to tell us](#) he had talked to Brzezinski in the spring of 2009 about the 1998 *Nouvel Observateur* interview and been disturbed to learn that the “Afghan trap thesis” as stated by Brzezinski was indeed legitimate.[64]

“I had an exchange with him. This was a ceremony for Samuel Huntington. Brzezinski was there. I’d never met him before and I went up to him and introduced myself and I said I agree with everything you’re doing and saying except for one thing. You gave an interview with the *Nouvel Observateur* some years back saying that we sucked the Soviets into Afghanistan. I said I’ve never heard or accepted that idea and he said to me, ‘You may have had your perspective from the Agency but we had our different perspective from the White House,’ and he insisted that this was correct. And I still... that was obviously the way he felt about it. But I didn’t get any whiff of that when I was Chief Near East South Asia at the time of the Afghan war against the Soviets.

In the end it seems that Brzezinski had lured the Soviets into their own Vietnam with intent and wanted his colleague—as one of the highest level CIA officials to participate in the largest American intelligence operations since WWII—to know it. Brzezinski had worked the system to serve his ideological objectives and managed to keep it secret and out of the official record. He had lured the Soviets into the Afghan trap and they had fallen for the bait.

For Brzezinski, getting the Soviets to invade Afghanistan was an opportunity to shift the Washington consensus toward an unrelenting hard line against the Soviet Union. Without any oversight for his use of covert action as chair of the SCC, he’d created the conditions needed to provoke a Soviet defensive response which he’d then used as evidence of unrelenting Soviet expansion and used the media, which he controlled, to affirm it, thereby creating a self-fulfilling prophecy. However, once his Russophobic system of exaggerations and lies about his covert operation became accepted, they found a home in America’s institutions and continue to haunt those institutions to this day. US policy since that time has operated in a Russophobic haze of triumphalism that both provokes international incidents and then capitalizes on the chaos. And to Brzezinski’s dismay he discovered he couldn’t turn the process off.

In 2016, the year before his death Brzezinski delivered a profound revelation in an article titled **“Toward a Global Realignment”** warning that “the United States is still the world’s politically, economically, and militarily most powerful entity, but given complex geopolitical shifts in regional balances, it is no longer *the globally imperial power.*” But after years of witnessing American missteps regarding its use of imperial power, he realized his dream of an American-led transformation to a new world order would never be. Though unapologetic at using his imperial hubris to lure the Soviets into Afghanistan, he did not expect his beloved American Empire to fall into the same trap and ultimately lived long enough to understand that he had won only a Pyrrhic victory.

Why would Conor Tobin eradicate critical evidence regarding the US role in the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan NOW?

In light of what’s been done to the historical record through Conor Tobin’s effort to debunk “the Afghan Trap thesis” and clear Zbigniew Brzezinski and President Carter’s reputations the facts of the matter remain clear. Discrediting Brzezinski’s *Nouvel Observateur* interview is insufficient to his task in view of our 2015 interview with former CIA chief Charles Cogan and the overwhelming body of evidence that totally disproves his anti “Afghan Trap” thesis.

Were Tobin a “lone scholar” with an obsession to clean up Brzezinski’s reputation for posterity on a school project his effort would be one thing. But to position his narrow thesis in a mainstream authoritative journal of international studies as a definitive rethinking of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan beggars the imagination. But then, the circumstances surrounding the Soviet invasion, President Carter’s premeditated actions beforehand, his overtly duplicitous response to it and his post-presidency participation with the CIA’s covert funder Agha Hassan Abedi, leave little to the imagination.

Of all the evidence disproving Tobin’s anti-Afghan Trap thesis, the most accessible and problematic for the managers of the ‘official narrative’ regarding the U.S. role in the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan remains journalist Vincent Jauvert’s 1998 *Nouvel Observateur* interview. Whether this effort to wipe the record clean is the motive behind Conor Tobin’s essay remains to be determined. It is likely that the distance between now and Brzezinski’s death signaled that the time was right for redefining his public statements for the official record.

It was fortunate that we were able to discover Conor Tobin’s effort and correct it as best we could. But Afghanistan is only one instance of where Americans have been misled. We all must become far more aware of how our narrative-creation process has been coopted by the powers-that-be from the start. It is critical that we learn how to take it back.

Bertolt Brecht, The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui

“If we could learn to look instead of gawking,
We’d see the horror in the heart of farce,
If only we could act instead of talking,
We wouldn’t always end up on our arse.
This was the thing that nearly had us mastered;
Don’t yet rejoice in his defeat, you men!
Although the world stood up and stopped the bastard,
The bitch that bore him is in heat again.”

*

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Notes

[1] *Diplomatic History* is the official journal of Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations (SHAFR). The journal appeals to readers from a wide variety of disciplines, including American studies, international economics, American history, national security studies, and Latin-American, Asian, African, European, and Middle Eastern studies.

[2] *Diplomatic History*, Volume 44, Issue 2, April 2020, Pages 237-264,

<https://doi.org/10.1093/dh/dhz065>

Published: 09 January 2020

[3] [H-Diplo Article Review 966 on Tobin.: Zbigniew Brzezinski and Afghanistan, 1978-1979.](#) Review by Todd Greentree, Oxford University Changing Character of War Centre

[4] Vincent Jauvert, Interview with Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Le Nouvel Observateur* (France), Jan 15-21, 1998, p.76 *(There are at least two editions of this magazine; with the perhaps sole exception of the Library of Congress, the version sent to the United States is shorter than the French version, and the Brzezinski interview was not included in the shorter version).

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[17] Cahn, *Killing Détente: The Right Attacks the CIA*, p. 15.

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[29] Tobin "The Myth of the 'Afghan Trap': Zbigniew Brzezinski and Afghanistan," p. 253

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[63] Samira Goetschel - Our own Private bin Laden, 2006. At 8:59

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Featured image: "On watch". A Soviet soldier-internationalist guards the Afghan roads. (Photo by RIA Novosti, licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0)

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