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## ‘Magical Thinking’ has Always Guided the US Role in Afghanistan



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“Why, sometimes I’ve believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast.”

– The Queen of Hearts from Lewis Carroll’s Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland

The best way for us to understand Afghanistan is to look at the record of American involvement going back four decades and to look at the record requires a reexamination of President Jimmy Carter’s national security advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski. From the start, U.S. policy formation surrounding Afghanistan has lived in a realm of magical

thinking that has produced nothing but a catastrophe of nightmarish proportions. Brzezinski impacted the future of American foreign policy by monopolizing the Carter administration in ways that few outside the White House understand. In his role as national security advisor he put himself in a position to control information into and out of the White House and when it came to Afghanistan – to use it for whatever purposes he saw fit.

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."

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 even 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. 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.

So how did this work in Afghanistan?

Central to that issue is the claim that Brzezinski intentionally lured the Soviet Union into invading in order to trap them in their own Vietnam. And central to that claim is the now infamous January 1998 Nouvel Observateur interview with Brzezinski in which he admits to luring the Soviets into an Afghan trap with a secret program.

From the moment Brzezinski's interview appeared in 1998 there has been a fanatical effort by observers 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 English to French and back to English. Brzezinski's admission is so sensitive, the CIA's former chief of the directorate of Operations for the Near East and South Asia from 1979 to 1984, Charles Cogan felt it necessary to come out for a Cambridge Forum discussion of our book on Afghanistan (*Invisible History*) in 2009 to claim that even though our view of the Soviet invasion was authentic, the *Nouvel Observateur* interview could not be right.

But of all the articles that have been published by "experts" and academics refuting Brzezinski's claims, none comes close to a recent article by University College Dublin scholar Conor Tobin, titled "The Myth of the Afghan Trap."

In his article Tobin argues that based "almost solely" on the *Nouvel Observateur* interview the Brzezinski "trap" thesis doesn't hold up and complains that it has filtered uncritically into the works of several reputable historians. He even cites our work as an example of this uncritical acceptance while failing to note that our use of the interview is but one piece of a wealth of evidence of Brzezinski's involvement in the Afghan issue.

Tobin discounts Brzezinski's life-long "reputation," for ideological bias against all things Russian then moves on to base his debunking mandate solely on the veracity of the interview, declaring: "That if this one unreliable interview is discounted there is very little legitimate evidence to back up the trap thesis..." and then concludes that "This article will demonstrate that the 'trap' thesis has little basis in fact."

Based solely on his wish fulfillment rather than the facts, 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."

As proof of 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 [supposed] 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 what Tobin fails to mention is that what Brzezinski presented to the president was a well-known misinterpretation of what the Nazis had proposed—not Molotov—and which Molotov rejected. In other words, the very opposite of what Brzezinski had presented.

To others who had a personal experience in the events surrounding the Soviet invasion, there is little doubt that Brzezinski wanted to draw the Soviets into an Afghan trap and had been doing it since April of 1978 through a program of destabilization. The record indicates that U.S. Afghan ambassador Adolph Dubs and Brzezinski came to blows over Brzezinski’s destabilization program at least a year before the Soviet invasion if not sooner. Afghan expert Selig Harrison, who’d gone to Kabul and interviewed Dubs in the summer of 1978 writes in his book with Diego Cordovez *Out of Afghanistan*, “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. 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 an eyewitness report that at least two thousand Afghans were being trained at former Pakistani Army bases guarded by Pakistani patrols.”

David Newsom, Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs who’d met the new Afghan government in the summer of 1978 told Harrison, “They struck me as very ideological but they were still Afghan nationalists... From the beginning, Zbig had a much more confrontational view of the situation than Vance. 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. Zbig wasn’t worried about provoking the Russians, as some of us were.”

To some members of the Carter White House who interacted with Brzezinski during his four years at the wheel from 1977 to 1980 his intention to provoke the Russians into doing something was clear. By early 1979 events had grown so unstable in Afghanistan,

the ambassador had to confront his own CIA station chief and demand answers about CIA interference. According to John Helmer an NSC 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."

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 deaf ears.

In 2015 we began work on a documentary to finally clear the air on such sophistic arguments as Conor Tobin's and reconnected with Dr. Charles Cogan for an interview. Soon after the camera rolled, Cogan interrupted the interview to tell us he had talked to Brzezinski in the spring of 2009 about the 1998 *Nouvel Observateur* interview and been shocked to learn that the "Afghan trap thesis" as stated by Brzezinski in the *Nouvel Observateur* interview was legitimate. Brzezinski had done it with intent and wanted Cogan to know it. As one of the highest level CIA officials to participate in the largest American intelligence operations since WWII it was a devastating blow to learn that the CIA hadn't won the Cold War against the Soviet Union fair and square. Brzezinski had tricked them and they had fallen for the bait.

Yet Cogan's willingness to recount his conversation with Brzezinski on camera has given us a vital piece of evidence that will change history and we are all fortunate that he chose to leave his testimony with us that you can now view for the first time.

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, he 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. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was Brzezinski's 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 we live with them today. US policy since that time has operated in a delusion of racist triumphalism that both provokes international incidents and then capitalizes on the chaos.

From its origins in 1977 as Brzezinski's covert program to destabilize the Soviet Union through ethnic violence and radical Islam, a straight line can be drawn to the current American quagmire in Afghanistan today. The time has come to see it for the lie it always was. And end it.

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