



“Revelations of Carter’s Former Advisor : ‘Yes, the CIA entered Afghanistan before the Russians...’” (1998)

## Description

### The Brzezinski Interview with *Le Nouvel Observateur* (1998)

**Question:** The former director of the CIA, Robert Gates, stated in his memoirs that the American intelligence services began to aid the Mujahiddin in Afghanistan six months before the Soviet intervention. In this period, you were the national security advisor to President Carter. You therefore played a key role in this affair. Is this correct?

**Brzezinski:** Yes. According to the official version of history, CIA aid to the Mujahiddin began during 1980, that is to say, after the Soviet army invaded Afghanistan on December 24, 1979. But the reality, closely guarded until now, is completely otherwise: 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* [emphasis added throughout].

**Q:** Despite this risk, you were an advocate of this covert action. But perhaps you yourself desired this Soviet entry into the war and looked for a way to provoke it?

**B:** It wasn’t quite like that. *We didn’t push the Russians to intervene, but we knowingly increased the probability that they would.*

**Q:** When the Soviets justified their intervention by asserting that they intended to fight against secret U.S. involvement in Afghanistan, nobody believed them. However, there was an element of truth in this. You don’t regret any of this today?

**B:** Regret what? That secret operation was an excellent idea. It had the effect of *drawing the Russians into the Afghan trap* and you want me to regret it? The day that the Soviets officially crossed the border, *I wrote to President Carter, essentially: “We now have the opportunity of giving to the USSR its Vietnam war.*

” Indeed, for almost 10 years, Moscow had to carry on a war that was unsustainable for the regime, a conflict that bought about the demoralization and finally the breakup of the Soviet empire.

**Q: And neither do you regret having supported Islamic fundamentalism, which has given arms and advice to future terrorists?**

**B:** What is more important in world history? The Taliban or the collapse of the Soviet empire? Some agitated Moslems or the liberation of Central Europe and the end of the cold war?

**Q: “Some agitated Moslems”? But it has been said and repeated: Islamic fundamentalism represents a world menace today...**

**B:** Nonsense! It is said that the West has a global policy in regard to Islam. That is stupid: There isn’t a global Islam. Look at Islam in a rational manner, without demagoguery or emotionalism. It is the leading religion of the world with 1.5 billion followers. But what is t h e r e in c o m m o n among fundamentalist Saudi Arabia, moderate Morocco, militarist Pakistan, pro-Western Egypt, or secularist Central Asia? Nothing more than what unites the Christian countries...

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Translated from the French by William Blum and David N. Gibbs. This translation was published in Gibbs, “Afghanistan: The Soviet Invasion in Retrospect,” *International Politics* 37, no. 2, 2000, pp. 241-242. For article full text, [click here](#).

Original French version appeared in “Les Révélations d’un Ancien Conseiller de Carter: ‘Oui, la CIA est Entrée en Afghanistan avant les Russes...’” *Le Nouvel Observateur* [Paris], January 15-21, 1998, p. 76. [Click here](#) for original French text.

Note that all ellipses appeared in the original transcript, as published in *Le Nouvel Observateur*.

## **Additional Sources:**

The memoirs referred to in the interview are Robert M. Gates, *From the Shadows: The Ultimate Insider’s Story of Five Presidents and How They Won the Cold War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), pp. 143-49. Written by a former CIA director, this book first revealed the covert support for the Mujahiddin, prior to the invasion.

*Washington Post* correspondent Steve Coll downplays the significance of the CIA operation. He presents declassified documents from Brzezinski that express deep concern about the Soviet invasion. According to Coll, the documents “show no hint of satisfaction” from Brzezinski, regarding the invasion. Note, however, that Brzezinski’s 1983 memoirs clearly *do* imply some satisfaction regarding the Soviet invasion (Coll neglects to mention this).

See Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and Bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001* (New York: Penguin, 2004), pp. 50-51, 581, footnote 17; and Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Power and Principle: Memoirs of the National Security Advisor, 1977–1981* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1983), p. 429.

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