

EDITORIAL

Brzezinski, the ‘Great Game,’ and Afghanistan

by Harley Schlanger

July 16—Most press reports incorrectly identify the origin of the U.S. quagmire in Afghanistan as a response to the deadly terrorist attacks against the United States on September 11, 2001. America invaded Afghanistan on October 7, 2001, ostensibly based on intelligence attributing the attack to forces run by Osama bin Laden, based in Afghanistan, and given safe haven there by the Taliban government. That government fell shortly after that, but America and its NATO allies remained for another 20 years.

But the actual U.S. military involvement in Afghanistan began more than two decades earlier, when President Carter’s National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski unleashed a plan to lure the Soviet Union into that nation. In an interview with *Le Nouvel Observateur* published January 15-21, 1998, Brzezinski revealed that he convinced Carter to issue a directive providing secret support to the opposition to the pro-Soviet regime in Kabul. The directive was issued on July 3, 1979; the Soviet invasion occurred on December 24 of that year.

Brzezinski said, “I explained to the President that this support would ... lead to a military intervention by the Soviets.” By providing this aid to the Mujahideen forces, the United States “didn’t push the Russians to intervene, but we knowingly increased the probability that they would do it.” Asked if he had any regrets, he exclaimed, “Regret what? This secret operation was an excellent idea. It lured the Russians into the Afghanistan trap.” Brzezinski acted on an “opportunity to provide the USSR

with their Viet Nam War.”

America continued to arm and train the Mujahideen throughout the 1980s, making them the dominant power in the country when the Soviets withdrew.

Brzezinski’s plan grew out of his study of the mid-19th Century inter-imperial rivalry between the British and Russian empires, known as the “Great Game.” The British feared that the Russians intended to expand their empire southward, to the Indian Ocean, so they deployed forces to Afghanistan, to use it as a buffer, to contain what they believed was Russian interests in expanding their empire. Similarly, the British, with the French and the Ottomans, launched the Crimean War against Russia, from 1853-56, to keep Russia out of the Mediterranean.

The Great Game was later expanded into a global doctrine by Royal geographer Halford Mackinder, whose lecture in 1904, “The Geographical Pivot of History,” provided the basis for the geopolitical doctrine which defines strategic policy for the British and their American allies to this day.

This doctrine, adopted as a defense of the British Empire and its “democratic values”—which, in reality, means its global financial/colonial interests—justified British intervention against any potential alliance which challenged its supremacy. Its application was directly responsible for World Wars I and II, and the creation of the modern arena of Southwest Asia with its built-in instabilities.

In *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives*, published in 1997, Brzez-

inski acknowledged Mackinder as his inspiration. For him, as for Mackinder, he wrote “the prize is Eurasia.” He developed the concept of the “Arc of Crisis” as a “zone of instability,” in which Islamic forces could be deployed against the USSR.

Implications for Today

The foreign policy team of President Biden, including Tony Blinken and Jake Sullivan, is heavily influenced by Brzezinski’s lunatic application of British geopolitics, in large part through one of those he mentored, former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright. The assertion of the U.S. right to unilateral action today, from Pompeo to Blinken, echoes Brzezinski’s claim that for America, as the “first truly global superpower,” it is “imperative that no Eurasian challenger emerges, capable of dominating Eurasia and thus also challenging America.”

For those hoping that “realists” in the military can protect us from wars resulting from these imperial am-

bitions, the comments of the chief of the Afghan war mission under Bush and Obama, Lt. Gen. Douglas Lute, are instructive. Lute said in 2014, “We were devoid of a fundamental understanding of Afghanistan—we didn’t know what we were doing.... What are we trying to do here?”

With U.S. troops leaving Afghanistan, it is now up to the American people to demand and ensure that the United States rejects geopolitics and collaborates with other major nations, so that quagmire is not replaced by an even more brutal, and potentially *unsurvivable war*.

The pathway for change, based on collaboration for mutual benefit, rather than confrontation, was presented in a strategic [memo](#) by Helga Zepp-LaRouche, “Afghanistan at a Crossroads: Graveyard for Empires or Start of a New Era?” After forty years of destruction unleashed on the Afghan people, and two decades of war in Southwest Asia, the era of imperial geopolitics must be ended.