International Politics 37: 233-246, June 2000

REVIEW ESSAY:

Afghanistan: The Soviet Invasion in Retrospect

DAVID N. GIBBS
University of Arizona, Tucson, Arizona, USA

Diego Cordovez and Selig S. Harrison, *Out of Afghanistan: The Inside Story of the Soviet Withdrawal* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 450, $35.00 Hardcover; Ralph H. Magnus and Eden Naby, *Afghanistan: Mullah, Marx, and Mujahid* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1998), pp. 320, $33.00 Hardcover; Zbigniew Brzezinski,"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).

Introduction[1]

Foreign policy practitioners and scholars immediately viewed the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979 as a decisive event in the Cold War. Whether or not one wishes to accept Jimmy Carter's claim that the invasion was a major strategic challenge to the West and "the greatest threat to peace since Second World War,"[2] there can be no doubt that the invasion was an historical turning point. The invasion and the occupation of Afghanistan constituted the largest Soviet military action since World War II, while US support for the anti-Soviet resistance was the principal paramilitary operation of the Reagan Doctrine.

The Afghan war was one of the decisive events in the final, terminal phase of the Cold War. Now that the war has moved from current events to recent history, it is time to reassess the whole affair, and to place it in historical and comparative perspective. Fortunately, several studies have emerged that begin this reassessment,studies that I will review in this essay. In addition, I will discuss some important revelations regarding US foreign policy in Afghanistan revealed in a recent interview with Zbigniew Brzezinski in the French press.

Before proceeding with the survey, it is important to note that the Afghan invasion has come to look somewhat different in retrospect than in 1979, when even the most sober observers were often swayed by the sensational quality of the events being recorded. At the time, the invasion did, indeed, look menacing to Western security interests, especially for the security of the Persian Gulf. In retrospect, however, the strategic significance of Afghanistan seems doubtful–a point belatedly acknowledged by US officials when the Soviets withdrew in 1989.[3] The image of Afghanistan's strategic significance has thus changed over time.

In addition, the image of the various protagonists in the Afghan war has also changed. The Islamic guerrillas who fought against the Soviets were widely portrayed in

the Western media in highly favorable terms, while their more unsavory qualities – their intolerance of dissent, propensity for violence, involvement in narcotics trafficking, retrogressive attitudes toward women – were generally eschewed, if not altogether disregarded. Many academic analysts wrote from a perspective that openly favored the guerrillas.[4] Now, with the end of the Cold War and the rise of the Taliban government in Afghanistan, the image of the Afghan guerrillas (from which the Taliban descended) is more negative. Western support for the guerrillas, during the 1980s, thus appears less an act of idealism and more an act of simple strategic calculation.

Differing Perspectives on Afghanistan

Out of Afghanistan, is a collaboration by Diego Cordovez and Selig S. Harrison. Cordovez is the United Nations-appointed mediator whose actions ultimately led to the Geneva Accords of 1988 and the Soviet withdrawal the following year. Harrison is a longtime journalist and researcher on South Asia associated with the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. The book adopts a somewhat unconventional format as both authors write separate chapters. A chapter of analysis, heavily footnoted and written in somewhat academic style, by Harrison, is followed by a memoir by Cordovez. The analytical chapters penned by Harrison are especially rich in empirical detail, based on extensive interviews with American, Afghan, and (former) Soviet officials, including Mikhail Gorbachev. By far the most useful portions of the book are Harrison's chapters, although the autobiographical supplements by Cordovez provide supporting detail.

A major theme of *Out of Afghanistan* is that both the Soviet Union and the United States had considerably less control over events in the Afghan war than is commonly supposed. In Harrison's words. "the Cold War world was dominated by the superpower rivalry but not by the superpowers. Moscow and Washington saw themselves as the puppeteers pulling the strings. More often than not, however, they were manipulated by clients who had their own agendas" (p. 10). This would seem to apply particularly to the Soviet relationship with the Afghan communists, the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA). This was the party that seized power in a *coup d'état* of April 1978, under the leadership of Mohammad Nur Taraki and Hafizullah Amin, who became respectively President and Foreign Minister of the new "revolutionary" government. The communist government initiated a series of hastily conceived and poorly implemented reforms, which triggered a sizable popular reaction. A collection of Islamic guerrilla groups, loosely referred to as the Mujahiddin, sought to oust the communists. The Soviets provided military support for the PDPA in the form of equipment and advisors, leading to the eventual invasion of the country in late December 1979.

It has always been assumed that the Soviets *welcomed* the opportunity to occupy Afghanistan, and that Soviet officials viewed the occupation in a manner very much like that of Western officials, i.e., as a major strategic asset. *Out of Afghanistan*, in contrast, presents new evidence that directly contradicts this interpretation. The authors argue that Soviet officials were,in fact, reluctant to intervene. This reluctance was dramatically demonstrated in March 1979, when a rebellion in Herat, in western Afghanistan, precipitated a foreign policy crisis for Soviet leaders. In the course of

the Herat rebellion, Afghan leaders asked the Soviets to send troops to aid in suppressing the rebellion, and the Soviet Politburo met to consider possible intervention. A verbatim transcript of the politburo discussion has become available and is provided by the authors. Its content is fascinating:

> [Yuri] Andropov: Comrades, I have thought this issue over very thoroughly since yesterday and have concluded that we should consider very, very seriously whether it would make sense to send troops into Afghanistan. The economy is backward, the Islamic religion predominates, and nearly all of the rural population is illiterate. I do not think we can uphold the revolution in Afghanistan with the help of our bayonets. The idea is intolerable and we can not risk it.
>
> [Andrei] Gromyko: I fully support Comrade Andropov's view that we should exclude the dispatch of troops to Afghanistan. The Afghan army is unreliable and our army would become an aggressor. With whom will it fight? With the Afghan people! Our Army would have to shoot them! To be blunt, the Afghan [communist] leaders have made many mistakes and haven't got the support of their own people.
>
> [Andrei] Kirilenko: Tanks and armored vehicles cannot rescue them [the PDPA]. I think that we must frankly tell them that. We must say that we will support them to the hilt, we shall give them all of the aid that we have promised to give, but we cannot send troops (pp. 36-37).

Several conclusions may be drawn from the above. First,it is clear that Soviet leaders had a very low opinion of their Afghan protégés, whose lack of popularity and leadership skill was fully recognized. Second, there is no evidence from this meeting that Soviet officials regarded Afghanistan as a strategic prize that would project communist influence into the Persian Gulf or Indian Ocean regions. Finally, there can be little doubt that the Politburo members were *not* enthusiastic about the prospect of invading Afghanistan.

Soviet reluctance to intervene gradually changed, however, primarily due to internal events within Afghanistan, combined with a substantial measure of blunder and misperception. Specifically, the Soviets had long been suspicious, if not downright hostile, toward Amin, who was regarded as reckless and impulsive. Soviet leaders also suspected that Amin had connections to American intelligence. Contrary to Soviet wishes, Amin's faction of the PDPA continued to gain in power during 1979, at the expense of the less energetic Taraki. In a September 1979 coup, Amin overthrew Taraki and fully consolidated his position. This coup was a major setback for Soviet policy, which had sought to reduce Amin's sway.

Once in power, Amin began to curry favor with the Americans, in a desperate effort to broaden his international supporters. Amin appealed to American officials for support; he even hinted at a possible shift in Afghanistan's international orientation during a published interview with the *Los Angeles Times*. It is clear that the Americans were not receptive to Amin's entreaties and never seriously considered an alliance with the Afghan communists. Nevertheless, Soviet officials became increasingly fearful that Amin was going to "do a Sadat," i.e.,that he would shift Afghanistan to a pro-American and anti-Soviet stance in the manner of Anwar Sadat during the 1970s. That the United States had rebuffed Amin was unknown to the Soviets.

All of this occurred in a context where the Soviet leaders assumed that *détente* with the United States was dead in any case, and there was little to lose from an invasion. Thus, it is argued, the Soviet invasion did *not* result from a Soviet desire to move against the Persian Gulf,nor did it occur because of military successes by the Mujahiddin forces; it resulted from a Soviet desire to subjugate the Afghan communist party and to remove Amin and his key supporters. Above all, the invasion reflected a longstanding Soviet fear of having a pro-American regime on its southern frontier.

When the Soviets began their invasion, Amin was quickly assassinated. The internecine feuds that had debilitated the PDPA were brought under control by Soviet military power. For the next decade, Soviet forces bore the brunt of the fight against the Mujahiddin guerrillas, while the United States, Pakistan, and China supplied weapons to the guerrillas. In 1982, the United Nations appointed Cordovoz, an Ecuadorian diplomat, as official mediator in the dispute. The "diplomatic" phase of the Afghan war began at this point.

Here again, *Out of Afghanistan* substantially revises our understanding of the conflict. The authors explore in considerable detail the policy-making processes in both the Soviet Union and the United States (as well as in Pakistan, among other key players), and how these processes interacted with UN mediation. According to Cordovez and Harrison, Soviet leadership began to question the wisdom of the invasion as early as 1982, with the accession to power of Yuri Andropov. Originally, Andropov had been one of the key Soviet figures who had acquiesced to the invasion in 1979, but he and other associates began to shift position after the death of Brezhnev. Andropov's receptiveness to diplomacy is emphasized by both Harrison's and Cordovez's separate accounts. Harrison bases his analysis on interviews with former Soviet officials, while Cordovez's judgements are based on his own direct interactions with Andropov.

According to Cordovez and Harrison, "many of his [Andropov's] close associates cite persuasive evidence that Andropov was prepared to withdraw Soviet forces under the aegis of the United Nations despite opposition from the armed forces and from more orthodox Communist leaders" (p. 91). The Soviet divisions were paralleled within the Pakistani regime of Zia al-Huq, a key player, and also in the Reagan Administration. The divisions in the Reagan Administration are discussed in considerable depth. Certain Administration officials sought to cooperate with UN mediation efforts, and these officials argued that military support for the Mujahiddin must be coupled with diplomatic efforts. This group, "the dealers" as Harrison terms them,initially appear to have been in the minority, although their clout grew toward the end of the Reagan years. Yet, a second

group, the "bleeders," welcomed the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan and sought to "bleed" Soviet forces. This latter group, which was influential in the CIA and other "operational" departments, disdained UN diplomacy; they sought a military defeat for the Soviet Union. Cordovez and Harrison emphasize that the bleeders were uncooperative with UN mediation efforts and sought to sabotage them:

> [T]here can be no doubt about the fact that the United States strongly disliked the U.N. approach to a settlement during 1983 and that the American attitude tipped the scales in the debate within the Pakistani leadership between April and June. Ironically, during the very period when Andropov was groping for a way to disengage from Afghanistan, supporters of stepped-up American involvement were on the ascendant in the Reagan Administration (p. 102).

Part of American skepticism resulted from a conviction — unjustified as it turned out — that the Soviet Union would never leave Afghanistan via a diplomatic settlement. However, Cordovez and Harrison offer an additional reason: CIA director William Casey and other key Reagan Administration officials sought to prolong the war as much as possible and to delay a withdrawal. General Edward C. Meyer, who was US Army Chief of Staff, stated: "Casey would *say* that he wanted them out, but he actually wanted them to send more and more Russians down there and take casualties" (quoted in Corodovez and Harrison, p. 103).

It has long been assumed that the United States and Pakistan wanted the Soviets to *leave* Afghanistan and that US military pressure had the long-term objective of *end - ing* the Soviet occupation. Cordovez and Harrison argue that this interpretation is inaccurate and, on the contrary, key American and Pakistani officials sought to keep Soviet troops in Afghanistan as long as possible to maximize their losses. These officials also sought to block any diplomatic efforts that might enable a face-saving Soviet withdrawal.

The authors of *Out of Afghanistan* also challenge conventional wisdom regarding military aspects of Soviet occupation. According to the conventional view, Soviet withdrawal constituted a vindication of the Reagan Doctrine and, in particular, the US decision to supply Mujahiddin guerrillas with increasingly sophisticated weapons. The US decision in 1986 to supply the Mujahiddin forces with Stinger antiaircraft missiles has often been cited as a decisive factor in blunting the Soviet counterinsurgency efforts. The supply of these missiles, it has been argued,increased Soviet willingness to withdraw its forces. This interpretation is challenged by Cordovez and Harrison. Top-level Soviet officials (including Aleksandr Yakovlev, Eduard Shevardnadze, and General Valentin Varennikov, commander of Soviet forces in Afghanistan) are cited as dismissing the Stingers as a significant factor in leading to a negotiated settlement. Indeed, Yakovlev claims that the Stingers *delayed* Soviet withdrawal, by increasing the influence of hawks within the Soviet military and in the overall decision-making process. In addition, Cordovez and Harrison emphasize that top-level Soviet leaders were receptive to a diplomatic solution several years before the Stingers were introduced.

The factors that overcame resistance to a negotiated settlement and made possible the US-Soviet-Pakistani agreement, formalized in the 1988 Geneva Accords, remain murky. Accounts by Cordovez and Harrison are quite lucid in laying out the assorted obstacles that long frustrated a negotiated settlement of the Afghan war. However, the text falls short in explaining how these obstacles eventually were overcome. The book implies that the Geneva Accords were accomplished because of tenacious mediation efforts by Cordovez, repeated Soviet concessions,and a more conciliatory international environment associated with *perestroika*. Also, the center of power within the Reagan Administration gradually shifted away from the hard-line "bleeders" and more toward the position advocated by the "dealers." Various officials who had previously stayed on the sidelines during these disputes became increasingly sympathetic to the dealer position and to Cordovez's mediation efforts. A pivotal figure in this regard was Secretary of State George Schultz. After an extended period of equivocation, Schultz became an advocate of a diplomatic solution. Schultz later acknowledged (p. 268), "the heat I was taking from some on the hard right who, I suspected, did not really want the Soviets to leave Afghanistan; they preferred to 'bleed' them to death through indefinite continuation of the war."

There are points where the Harrison/Cordovez account may be challenged. Cordovez's account, at times, sounds self-promoting or exculpatory. While Gorbachev was determined to achieve a diplomatic solution to the war, the contention that this policy had begun with Andropov will not persuade all readers. However, this book provides compelling evidence that the Soviets were far more receptive to diplomacy, while the Americans were significantly less receptive than previously recognized. The Reagan policy of intensifying and prolonging the war in order to bleed the Soviets — and incidentally the Afghans, too — is an important and previously unrecognized feature of this conflict. The vast range of documentation and its endorsement by high level officials from both the Reagan and Carter administrations lend a considerable air of authority to this account. Future studies will add further to our understanding of these events, as more information trickles out of the archives in the United States, Russia, Pakistan,and other countries. At the moment,however, *Out of Afghanistan* is the most important and thoroughly documented book on the Afghan war, and it sets a standard against which all future studies on this subject will be judged.

The second book, *Afghanistan: Mullah, Marx, and Mujahid*, by Ralph Magnus and Eden Naby, offers a useful counterpoint. This study holds to the traditional view that the invasion of Afghanistan represented a Soviet effort to project its power into the Persian Gulf and thus constituted a major strategic challenge to the Western powers. This book is authored by two academics: Magnus, a faculty member at the Naval Postgraduate School and former foreign service officer in Kabul, and Naby, a Middle East specialist at Harvard who gained some fame in 1980 when she escorted Dan Rather inside Mujahiddin controlled territory. Both wrote extensively on the Afghan war during the 1980s, and their new collaborative effort purports to be a general introduction to the Afghan conflict, placing both Soviet occupation and the recent conflicts within an historical and sociological perspective. Consistent with the title, fairly extensive, discursive discussion of the Afghanistan's social characteristics, the background and outlook of Mujahiddin groups, and PDPA internal politics are provided.

Maghus and Naby emphasize the Soviet occupation of the country. Again, one sees a marked contrast with the approach of Cordovez and Harrison. Whereas the latter book consistently views the Soviet Union as reluctant to invade, Magnus and Naby view the invasion as the culmination of longstanding Soviet ambitions. The Magnus and Naby book has a distinctively Cold War tone, both in style and content, although it was published nearly a decade after the fall of the Berlin Wall. The authors adopt a strongly anti-Soviet perspective, while generally friendly toward the Mujahiddin guerrillas.

The authors argue that the Soviets had long sought influence in Afghanistan, and that this objective was an extension of the traditional Russian expansionism in the Near East/South Asia region. The invasion is thus regarded as an outgrowth of the nineteenth century Great Game between Russia and Great Britain (with the United States replacing Great Britain after 1945). The authors emphasize an upsurge in Soviet interest in Afghanistan during the 1950s, when the USSR became the principal supplier of foreign aid to the country. Indeed, during the period 1954-1978, Afghanistan entered a category of a "third world Finland," in that its foreign policy underwent a pro-Soviet tilt; Afghanistan's domestic politics, however, remained relatively free of Soviet influence. Magnus and Naby argue that this aid was part of a Soviet plan aimed at subverting and, ultimately, occupying the country.

It should be noted that other observers of these events have reached very different conclusions from those of Magnus and Naby. There is evidence — neglected by Magnus and Naby — that Soviet interest in Afghanistan during the 1950s was a *reaction* to Western activities in the region, rather than a prelude to expansion. According to a 1954 National Intelligence Estimate (presented verbatim in *The Foreign Relations of the United States*), "this increased Soviet attention to Afghanistan is part of a general effort to *counter* recent Western (particularly US) gains in the Middle East-South Asia area."[5] A weakness of the Magnus/Naby study is that it tends to avoid information and interpretations at odds with its conclusions.

During the 1970s, in light of US weakness after the debacle of Vietnam, Soviet interest in Afghanistan increased further, according to Magnus and Naby.

> The weakness of Pakistan, the tempting resources of the oil states of the Middle East,and the United States distancing itself from foreign commitments,all raised the possibility of major, or even decisive geopolitical gains on the Soviet southern flank through the utilization of Afghanistan's central position...The stage was set for the last foreign adventure of the Brezhnev era (p. 59).

The authors acknowledge that the PDPA was faction-ridden, and that these divisions resulted in debilitating internal feuds. However, there is a strong suggestion that all party factions were manipulated and ultimately controlled by their Soviet handlers. The 1978 communist takeover, if not actually orchestrated by the USSR, was certainly Soviet supported. The overwhelming character of Soviet influence in the PDPA is a consistent theme. The authors state emphatically that the communist takeover in 1978 was part of a comprehensive strategy: "the Soviets through the

PDPA and the covert networks established over decades, had *ensured* that they would be positioned to shape the future" (p. 115, emphasis added). Overall, the Soviets were interested in Afghanistan because it offered "a secure base...for further advances into more promising areas of the Middle East and South Asia" (p. 122).

It should be noted that although there is not much novel in this interpretation, Magnus and Naby do describe a 1971 visit by the Afghan monarch Zahir Shah to Moscow that, to this reviewer's knowledge, has not appeared elsewhere:

> The king emerged from the meeting clearly shaken. In his explanation later to delegation members and to his family, he [Zahir Shah] said that Brezhnev had asked the Afghans to join with the Soviets and India in finishing the job of carving up Pakistan....Brezhnev persisted by stating that all the Afghans would have to do was to stand aside and let the Soviets transit through their country to accomplish their goal. Zahir Shah again refused (p. 117).

The purported revelation of a Soviet plan to carve up Pakistan with Afghan connivance would certainly constitute new and important historical information. Unfortunately, when checking the endnote (p. 258), one finds that the only basis for Zahir Shah's Moscow discussion is a third hand source, who is left unnamed. The research for this volume, it must be said, is not always solid.

Magnus and Naby also provide discursive discussion of Afghan politics since the Soviet withdrawal. The Geneva Accords that led to the withdrawal receive only perfunctory mention, and Cordovez's name does not even appear in the index. The authors express regret and frustration that the Mujahiddin have been unable to provide a united government and have been fighting among themselves since 1989. They are equally frustrated that Western powers largely have lost interest in Afghanistan since the Soviet withdrawal. However, important questions follow from these points: If Western powers have shown so little interest in Afghanistan in recent years, could it be that Afghanistan never held much intrinsic strategic value for the West and that assertions to the contrary were mistaken?[6] Perhaps the country's alleged importance for protecting Middle Eastern oil fields had been exaggerated during the 1980s? And, if the remnants of the Mujahiddin forces have been implicated in perpetrating human rights abuses, dealing narcotics, and exporting terrorism, perhaps the heroic image they enjoyed in the Western press during the 1980s was overblown? Could it be that the Mujahiddin had always been less heroic than Western analysts were willing to accept during the war against the Soviet occupation? Magnus and Naby tend to avoid these questions.

Overall, the arguments of Magnus and Naby are neither original nor well documented. Apart from the dubious story of the Zahir Shah's meeting in Moscow, little new material is presented. The principal assertions – that the Soviets had long sought a way to occupy Afghanistan and that this occupation was part of an offensive strategy – are based largely on speculation and conjecture. The substantial amount of archival information on this topic that has emerged from both the United States[7] and the former Soviet Union[8] is passed over and not cited. Considerable primary materi-

als have been published verbatim and are available at many university libraries; even this material is neglected. Nowhere does one find the level of empirical depth and documentation evident in *Out of Afghanistan*. The latter study is mentioned in the footnotes, but Magnus and Naby make no effort to grapple with the implications of its factual content, which is very much at odds with their own conclusions. Overall, the Magnus/Naby study is useful, if only to remind the reader that Cold War interpretations of the Afghan war are still adhered to by a significant subset of scholars working on this subject.

The Revelations of Zbigniew Brzezinski

Revelations provided by Zbigniew Brzezinski, national security advisor to President Jimmy Carter at the time of the invasion deserve careful scrutiny. These revelations appeared in a 1998 interview with the French political and cultural weekly *Le Nouvel Observateur*.[9] Since the interview reveals new and important information, and since it has escaped notice in the English-speaking world, the entire transcript follows in translation:

> Question: The former director of the CIA, Robert Gates, stated in his memoirs[10] that the American intelligence services began to aid the Mujahiddin in Afghanistan six months before the Soviet intervention.[11] In this period you were the national security adviser 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].
>
> Q: Despite this risk, you were an advocate of this covert action. But perhaps you yourself desired this Soviet entry into 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* [emphasis added].
>
> Q: When the Soviets justified their intervention by asserting that they intended to fight against secret US 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"* [emphasis added]. Indeed, for almost 10 years, Moscow had to carry on a war that was unsustainable for the regime, a conflict that brought 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 there in common among fundamentalist Saudi Arabia, moderate Morocco, militarist Pakistan, pro-Western Egypt, or secularist Central Asia? Nothing more than what unites the Christian countries...

The Brzezinski interview must be approached with a measure of caution. At some points, Brzezinski comes close to suggesting that he personally was responsible for policies that led to the collapse of communism, not a terribly modest position to adopt. One must consider an element of self-aggrandizement in evaluating Brzezinski's remarks. Some aspects of this account are confirmed in other sources (specifically Gates' memoirs), but for other parts we have only Brzezinski's word. One hopes that other persons who were involved in the Carter foreign policy, notably President Carter, will offer their views regarding the veracity of the above statements.

With those qualifications out of the way, it is clear that Brzezinski offers some extremely interesting information. The key revelation is that Brzezinski had urged Carter to send aid to the Mujahiddin, *knowing that this would probably cause a Soviet invasion.*[12] Brzezinski denies that he actually went so far as to provoke the Soviets into invading, but comes rather close to saying the same thing. He also reveals that, when the invasion actually occurred several months later, he welcomed the opportunity to give "the USSR its Vietnam war." All of this runs contrary to previous accounts of US policy toward Afghanistan. It had always been assumed that US poli-

cy-makers were aghast when the Soviet Union invaded; according to Brzezinski, at least some key officials *wanted* the Soviets to invade and had taken concrete actions to make it more likely. The Brzezinski statements, if true, would suggest that the Reagan policy of "bleeding" the Soviets and "fighting to the last Afghan" (Cordovez and Harrison, p. 10) actually began during the Carter period. Carter's foreign policy may have contained a greater element of *realpolitik* than is commonly supposed.

In addition,it is interesting to reflect on Brzezinski's flippant remark regarding the Afghan Mujahiddin and Islamic fundamentalism. This interview was conducted only a few months before the confrontation between the United States and the Taliban government over the status of alleged terrorist Osama bin Ladin. One can only wonder whether Brzezinski still would regard the decision to aid the Mujahiddin as an unqualified success if the interview were to be conducted today.[13]

Conclusion

One consequence of the end of the Cold War has been the availability of new materials for studying the international conduct of the major powers.A considerable quantity of new information has emerged from the archives of the former Soviet Union, as well as several of the USSR's communist allies in Eastern Europe. These new materials have greatly influenced debates among social scientists and historians, even if they have not always settled basic questions. Two basic schools of thought have emerged. On the one hand, John Lewis Gaddis has argued that the new documentation demonstrates the central importance of ideology in guiding Soviet policy, not only in its domestic affairs but in foreign policy as well. The US role, according to this view, was to constrain the innate Soviet tendency to export communism and expand its sphere of influence. The essentially aggressive and expansionist nature of Soviet policy is the central conclusion that Gaddis and his followers derive from the new documentary materials. One the other hand, more recently, Gaddis's conclusions have been challenged by other scholars, notably Melvyn Leffler, who argue that the new documents often show caution on the part of Soviet foreign policymakers,as well as reluctance to assume new global commitments.

On balance, the new materials on Afghanistan tend to conform to Leffler's interpretation, rather than Gaddis's. Thus far, evidence that has emerged strongly suggests that the Soviets invaded Afghanistan with great reluctance; their primary motivation was to prevent Afghanistan from becoming a hostile state on their southern frontier. The Soviet materials presented in Cordovez and Harrison leave little doubt that access to the Persian Gulf was not a major factor influencing the decision to invade. The Magnus and Naby study avoids these new materials, and it thus presents a far less persuasive argument. From a normative standpoint, the Soviet invasion appears every bit as brutal and outrageous as it did at the time; none of the new evidence changes our perception that the Soviets had indeed *invaded* Afghanistan, and that this invasion violated international law. While the invasion was clearly a threat to the inhabitants of Afghanistan, there is little evidence that it was a major threat to the Western powers.

In addition, source materials presented by Cordovez and Harrison suggest that US policy was considerably more aggressive and less defensive than it had previously

appeared. American policy went beyond simply supplying the resistance groups with weapons; for an extended period,US policy aimed at increasing the intensity of combat, while undercutting efforts to seek a diplomatic solution to the Afghan war. If the statements of Brzezinski are to be believed, these efforts to bleed the Soviet Union began during the Carter Administration, several months before the Soviet invasion.

To be sure a considerable amount of material remains unavailable. Much of the US archival record, particularly from the intelligence agencies, is still classified. The information pertaining to China's role in the conflict remains largely unexplored. As noted, we require corroboration for Brzezinski's very interesting revelations presented above. However, the record that is now available on Afghanistan has transformed our understanding of this crucial chapter of Cold War history.

NOTES

1. I thank John Sonnett for suggestions on a draft of this article. This article was written with support from the Morris K. Udall Center for Studies in Public Policy, University of Arizona.
2. Quoted in Edward Walsh, "Carter Sees No Early End to Crises," *The Washington Post*, (January 9, 1980), Section 1, p. 20.
3. See Elaine Sciolino,"To U.S., Afghanistan Seems to Move Further Away," *New York Times* (February 12, 1989), Section 4, p. 3.
4. The writers of one article on the Afghan war took the unusual step of acknowledging their predispositions: "While we have tried to be as objective as possible in our analysis, readers should be warned that our sympathy lies with the Afghan resistance." Pierre Allan and Albert A. Stahel, "Tribal Guerilla Warfare Against a Colonial Power: Analyzing the War in Afghanistan," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 27, No. 4 (1983), p. 590.
5. From *Foreign Relations of the United States,1952-1954*, Vol.XI (Washington, DC:US Government Printing Office, 1983), p. 1491, emphasis added.
6. For specific evidence on this point, see Sciolino, *op. cit.*, Section 4, p. 3.
7. Important materials pertaining to the US perception of Soviet policy in Afghanistan during the 1950s are available in the State Department's *Foreign Relations of the United States* series. Some of these materials were explored in an early article by the author: David Gibbs, "Does the USSR have a 'Grand Strategy'? Reinterpreting the Invasion of Afghanistan," *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (1987), pp. 365-79.
8. A substantial number of ex-Soviet documents have been published in English translation. See "New Evidence on the Soviet Intervention in Afghanistan," *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, Nos. 8/9 (Winter 1996/97), pp. 128-184.
9. I thank William Blum for bringing this source to my attention and also for furnishing a translation. I have checked Blum's translation against the original source and made some small changes. Note that the ellipses in the text appeared in the original.
10. See Robert Michael 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. 146-147.
11. It may be argued that this statement is inaccurate. The Soviets already were *intervening* at this point, since they were supplying weapons and advisors to the PDPA government; their *invasion* of Afghanistan occurred six months after the 1979 CIA decision to supply the Mujahiddin.

12. Note that these points are not mentioned in Brzezinski's latest book or, to my knowledge, in any other English language source. See Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and its Geostrategic Imperatives* (New York: Basic Books, 1997).
13. This debate is summarized in Melvyn P. Leffler, "Inside Enemy Archives," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 75, No. 4 (1996), pp. 120-136.

A*ddress for correspondence*:
David N. Gibbs, Ph.D., Department of Political Science, 315 Social Sciences Building, University of Arizona, Tucson, Arizona 85721-0027, USA.
Email: dgibbs@arizona.edu