

Zbigniew Brzezinski, architect of the catastrophe in Afghanistan, dead at 89

By Bill Van Auken
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Zbigniew Brzezinski, security adviser to Democratic President Jimmy Carter and a longtime proponent of an aggressive strategy for asserting US global hegemony, died Friday at the age of 89.

During his four-year tenure in the Carter White House, Brzezinski was involved in a large number of criminal operations carried out by US imperialism around the globe, from support for the Shah's attempts to drown the Iranian Revolution in blood to the initiation of a US policy in Central America that led to bloody counterinsurgency campaigns that claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands.

Unquestionably, however, the greatest of these crimes, and one for which he proudly took credit, was the orchestration and support for a dirty war waged by Islamist mujahedeen against the Soviet-backed government of Afghanistan at the end of the 1970s.

Born into an aristocratic Polish family that was forced to take refuge in Canada, where his father was a diplomat at the outbreak of World War II, Brzezinski's outlook and policies were grounded in a ferocious hatred of revolution, socialism and the Soviet Union.

He was recruited into anti-Soviet operations while lecturing at Harvard University in the 1950s. He was among a delegation sent by the CIA through its front group, the "Independent Service for Information," to intervene at a Soviet-backed world youth festival held in Vienna in 1959. He was described by contemporaries as the most anticommunist and provocative of those sent by the US intelligence agency.

In the early 1970s, Brzezinski was tapped by David Rockefeller to head the Trilateral Commission, a body created to coordinate imperialist strategy between Washington, Western Europe and Japan. The commission, made up of influential business and political figures, in turn, threw its support behind the 1976 presidential campaign of Democrat Jimmy Carter, then governor of Georgia and seen as a Washington "outsider" who could provide a fresh face after the debacle of the administration of Richard Nixon and that of his successor, Gerald Ford. Members of the commission occupied key posts in the Carter administration, with Brzezinski as national security adviser exercising overwhelming influence over US foreign policy.

It was in this position that Brzezinski authored one of the greatest crimes carried out by US imperialism in the 20th century, the instigation of a war in Afghanistan that has continued to ravage the country to this day.

In its obituary of Brzezinski, the *New York Times* acknowledges that "his rigid hatred of the Soviet Union" had placed him "to the right of many Republicans, including Mr. Kissinger and President Richard M. Nixon." It adds that under Carter he directed US policy with the aim of "thwarting Soviet expansionism at any cost...for better or worse." As an example, it states, "He supported billions in military aid for Islamic militants fighting invading Soviet troops in Afghanistan."

This is a deliberate distortion of the real role played by Washington, its military and the CIA in Afghanistan, under Brzezinski's direction.

Brzezinski acknowledged in an interview with the French news magazine *Le Nouvel Observateur* in January 1998 that he initiated a policy in which the CIA covertly began arming the mujahedeen in July 1978—six months before Soviet troops intervened in Afghanistan—with the explicit aim of dragging the Soviet Union into a debilitating war.

Asked, given the catastrophe unleashed upon Afghanistan and the subsequent growth of Islamist terrorist groups like Al Qaeda, whether he regretted the policy he championed in Afghanistan, Brzezinski replied:

"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: 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 unsupportable by the government, a conflict that brought about the demoralization and finally the breakup of the Soviet empire."

Asked specifically whether he regretted the CIA's collaboration with and arming Islamist extremists, including Al Qaeda, in fomenting the war in Afghanistan, Brzezinski responded contemptuously: "What is most important to the history of the world? The Taliban or the collapse of the Soviet empire? Some stirred-up Moslems or the liberation of Central Europe and the end of the cold war?"

In the four decades of nearly uninterrupted fighting that flowed from Brzezinski's "excellent idea"—with nearly 9,000 US troops still on the ground and plans being set in motion to carry out another escalation—over 2 million Afghans have lost their lives and millions more have been turned into refugees.

In the aftermath of the Moscow Stalinist bureaucracy's formal dissolution of the Soviet Union in December 1991, Brzezinski refocused his long-standing maniacal hostility to the USSR toward a strategy to assert undisputed US hegemony over Eurasia.

He was among the more influential imperialist strategists in shaping a policy of attempting to offset the long-term decline in the world position of American capitalism by resort to Washington's unchallenged supremacy in terms of military might. This turn would lead to unending wars in the Middle East and Central Asia designed to assert undisputed American dominance in the regions containing the lion's share of the world's oil and natural gas reserves.

In an article published in the September-October 1997 issue of *Foreign Affairs*, Brzezinski argued:

"Eurasia is the world's axial supercontinent. A power that dominated Eurasia would exercise decisive influence over two of the world's three most economically productive regions, Western Europe and East Asia. A glance at the map also suggests that a country dominant in Eurasia would almost automatically control the Middle East and Africa. With Eurasia now serving as the decisive geopolitical chessboard, it no longer suffices to fashion one policy for Europe and another for Asia. What happens with the distribution of power on the Eurasian landmass will be of decisive importance to America's global primacy and historical legacy... In a volatile Eurasia, the immediate task is to ensure that no state or combination of states gains the ability to expel the United States or even diminish its decisive role."

Expanding on this thesis in his book *The Grand Chessboard*, Brzezinski voiced his concern about the major obstacle to Washington pursuing such an aggressive drive for hegemony: the hostility of the vast majority of the American people to war.

He wrote: "... America is too democratic at home to be autocratic abroad. This limits the use of America's power, especially its capacity for military intimidation. Never before has a populist democracy attained international supremacy. But the pursuit of power is not a goal that commands popular passion, except in conditions of a sudden threat or challenge to the public's sense of domestic well-being. The economic self-denial (that is, defense spending) and the human sacrifices (casualties even among professional soldiers) required in the effort are uncongenial to democratic instincts. Democracy is inimical to imperial mobilization." [*The Grand Chessboard*, Basic Books, pp. 35-36, emphasis added].

Four years later, on September 11, 2001, the "sudden threat or challenge to the public's sense of domestic well-being" that the former national security adviser saw as a necessary

precondition for launching a global campaign of American militarism was served up by the very forces that he and the CIA had promoted in Afghanistan. Al Qaeda, with its historic ties to US intelligence, claimed credit for the attacks on New York City and Washington, which were carried out by individuals who were able to move remarkably unhindered in and out of the US.

Brzezinski was a virulent opponent of revolution, socialism and any challenge to the existing capitalist order from the left. In 1968, during the mass protests against the Vietnam War, he wrote in the *New Republic* that students should be prevented from protesting by locking them up, adding that if the protests' "leadership cannot be physically liquidated, it can at least be expelled from the country."

In more recent years, particularly in the wake of the meltdown of the global capitalist financial system in 2008, Brzezinski has repeatedly warned of the "growing risk of class hatred" and the danger of radicalization among young people under conditions of unsustainable levels of social inequality.

In his 2012 book *Strategic Vision: America and the Crisis of Global Power*, he wrote: "Populations of young adults...are especially explosive when combined with the revolution in communication technology... "Often educated but unemployed, their resulting frustration and alienation" leaves them "susceptible to ideological agitation and revolutionary mobilization."

In a television interview that year, he warned that a growing "sense of social injustice can be terribly demoralizing and, politically in the long run, very dangerous."

While able to perceive this danger and issue his warnings, Brzezinski was no more able than any other representative of America's capitalist ruling establishment to offer a rational, much less progressive, answer to the rising social and class conflicts that pose the threat of revolution.

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