

ZBIG'S PLOTTING OVER CHILEAN SEA BASS

Earlier this month, President Obama hosted a dinner with past foreign policy luminaries to explain his plan to combat ISIL. He served Chilean sea bass and d'Anjou pear salad as they discussed the future of America's empire.

Harman described the dinner on Monday as "focused and thoughtful." Over a dinner of d'anjou pear salad and Chilean sea bass, Obama, Vice President Biden and the outside experts engaged in a deep discussion of the options to combat the Islamic State, those who participated said.

Among the attendees was Zbigniew Brzezinski (see the full list of attendees below), Jimmy Carter's National Security Advisor.

I thought it a curious choice, given how much of the Blowback we're still fighting he birthed. As NSA, after all, Zbig crafted what he thought was a brilliant plan to draw the Soviet Union into a quagmire in Afghanistan. Even after al Qaeda had started attacking the US in Africa, Zbig thought fostering well-trained Islamic terrorists was an acceptable trade-off for having lured the Soviet Union into an embarrassing defeat.

Brzezinski: Yes. According to the official version of history, CIA aid to the Mujahadeen began during 1980, that is to say, after the Soviet army invaded Afghanistan, 24 Dec 1979. But the reality, secretly 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.

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

B: It isn't quite 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 a secret involvement of the United States in Afghanistan, people didn't believe them. However, there was a basis of truth. You don't regret anything 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. 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.

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

B: 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?

Zbig doesn't acknowledge it here, but another reason he thought this was such a great idea is

because the Iranian revolution was already in full swing, and he hoped to counter our loss of footprint there with something to keep the Russians busy next door.

In so many ways that decision has led inexorably to where we are, doing the bidding of dangerous Saudi allies who are actually a cause of the extremism we fight, not its solution.

Even before the Chilean sea bass dinner, I've been wondering whether the US would double down on its commitment to the Saudis, in spite of the way they've fostered this terrorist threat, or whether we'd use the opportunity to cement the deal with Iran, giving us more space from the Saudis.

I'm embarrassed I even wondered. I should have known from heavy-handed intercept of Russian jets and the increasing sanctions on both Russia and Iran that we intended to gain advantage both against ISIS and against those who question our unlimited hegemony.

But this account of how the Saudis came to join in bombing campaigns against Islamic extremists makes it rather clear.

The Americans knew a lot was riding on a Sept. 11 meeting with the king of Saudi Arabia at his summer palace on the Red Sea.

A year earlier, King Abdullah had fumed when President Barack Obama called off strikes against the regime of Syria's Bashar al-Assad. This time, the U.S. needed the king's commitment to support a different Syrian mission—against the extremist group Islamic State—knowing there was little hope of assembling an Arab front without it.

At the palace, Secretary of State John Kerry requested assistance up to and including air strikes, according to U.S. and Gulf officials. "We will provide any support you need," the king said.

That moment, more than any other, set in train the U.S. air campaign in Syria against Islamic State, according to U.S. and Gulf officials. Mr. Obama made clear he would only authorize strikes if regional allies agreed to join the effort.

[snip]

The process gave the Saudis leverage to extract a fresh U.S. commitment to beef up training for rebels fighting Mr. Assad, whose demise the Saudis still see as a top priority.

[snip]

After Islamic State made startling gains in Iraq, Saudi officials told Mr. Kerry in June that Iraqi leader Nouri al-Maliki, a Shiite with close ties to Iran, needed to go, according to U.S. officials. Once that happened, Riyadh would step up its role against Islamic State and work to bring other Gulf states onboard. The Obama administration had come to a similar conclusion and started to maneuver Mr. al-Maliki out of office.

[snip]

Two of the F-15 pilots were members of the Saudi royal family, including Prince Khaled bin Salman, son of the crown prince. In the third wave of the initial attack, half of the attack airplanes in the sky were from Arab countries.

There's far more at the link: the Saudi agreement to host the training (something I'll return to), Bandar's presence – and smiles – at the meeting on September 11, (Though, if I'm not mistaken, the story had more details about the meeting between Saudi Ambassador Adel al-Jubeir and Obama when it was first posted last night, including that they used first names.)

Whether the US means to faithfully execute their half of the bargain or not, and whether the Saudis are dealing with us in good faith, remains a very good question.

But if they really intend to help the Saudis and Qataris take out Assad (not because he's a brutal dictator, of course, but because he's not their brutal dictator), certain things must come with that: a means to undercut the momentum our fight against ISIL will necessarily give Iran and Russia. Otherwise, no amount of training of "moderate" rebels will make a difference – or keep the Saudis happy.

Maybe that's not what we intend. Maybe we've still got a plan in place to ditch the Saudis. But if not, expect some kind of Zbig plan that will likely backfire worse than his earlier one.

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Zbigniew Brzezinski

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