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Transcript

Afghanistan: Mikhail Gorbachev's Lessons for President Obama

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Sir Rodric Braithwaite:

I'm Rodric Braithwaite. I was Ambassador in Moscow when the Russians came out of Afghanistan, and I've done a book myself on the subject of the Russians in Afghanistan which is however history. Doesn't attempt to draw lessons. Jonathan will speak, I think he draws the same lessons that I draw.

And one of the things which I think emerges in this book, what is very striking, is that until quite recently the views of everybody in the west were well expressed by some American Special Forces soldiers flying out to Afghanistan in October 2001. One of their number was very interested in what the Russians had got up to. And when he said that, they said, 'We don't want to hear that commie rubbish from you about a whole lot of sad asses who lost their war to monkeys.'

Well the mood has changed. My experience is that if you talk to people dealing with Afghanistan now, including the soldiers who are fighting there, they're very interested in the Soviet experience. And that they regard it ruefully. Jonathan.

Jonathan Steele:

Thank you very much. As Rodric said, he's also written a book on Afghanistan. Extremely impressive book called *Afghantasy* about the Soviet war. So this, as they say in the Kremlin, is really a tandem.

Afghanistan has been part of my life for the last 30 years. And I've reported from the country in each of its turbulent modern phases. Starting with the Soviet occupation, I went there three times in the 1980s. Then came the civil war which resumed after they left in 1989 and of course accelerated in 1992, culminating in the destruction of Kabul by Islamist warlords who shelled each other's strongholds for four terrible years.

Then in September 1996 I was one of the many correspondents who rushed to Afghanistan to report on the Taliban capture of Kabul. It was a fairly amazing period in the early days, because we watched them ripping cassette tapes out of cars because they forbade any kind of music being played. And then they would hang these tapes like confetti from lamp posts to show how the drivers, they better not be listening to music.

They pulled crates of alcohol out of the cellars of the Intercontinental Hotel, laid them out on the road and then drove a tank over them. But actually the fumes from the exploding brandy and wine rather confused the driver of the tank, so the circles became rather more peculiar. Anyway, after 9/11 I was

back in Afghanistan again covering the US attack, which helped topple the Taliban in a matter of weeks. And since then I've been another six times to Afghanistan to watch NATO's very uphill struggle to pacify the country against a resurgent Taliban.

Now I'm not obviously going to go through the whole of Afghanistan's complicated and tragic recent history today. What I'm trying to do is to compare and contrast the two interventions that I've witnessed – the Soviet one and the American one – because the Russians' mistakes haunt the Americans today as they confront exactly the same challenges that face the Soviet Union, which is partly why I call this the 'haunted battleground'.

In the first weeks after the December 1979 invasion, Soviet officials were so confident of success that they gave western reporters amazing access, even allowing people to ride in rented cars and taxis alongside Soviet military convoys. But by 1980, when the war was beginning to bog down, of course the mood changed and the press was no longer welcome. It became a taboo in the Soviet media, and western journalists who applied for visas were routinely refused.

So the only way to cover the conflict was to endure days and nights of walking along precarious mountain paths with the Mujahideen from their safe havens in Pakistan. And the Mujahideen encouraged this kind of adventure journalism which was often uncritical and exaggerating and sometimes even dishonest, because it helped to bring support and funding from western governments and sympathetic aid groups.

But by 1981, the Russians were realising this no visa policy was a blunder because their case wasn't being heard. So a handful of western journalists were let in for short trips on their own or in small groups. And I was one of the few.

In November 1981, just about 30 years ago, with a precious Afghan visa in my passport, I landed in Kabul on a bright autumn morning. The city's majestic surroundings with the Hindu Kush snow-capped in the background exuded a sense of calm. But so did the city itself, and I was rather astonished. Where was the war? Where were the Russians? I'd come to cover the war, where was it?

And I spent two weeks in the city on that first occasion and I saw hardly any Soviet troops at all. The same case in Jalalabad and Mazari Sharif, two other cities that I visited. The Soviets were able to leave as many military duties as possible to Afghans. And the effort was quite successful. Security was indeed

in Afghan army and police hands. And the two subsequent trips I made in '86 and '88, it was exactly the same.

The car bombs, the suicide attacks which would become a permanent threat in today's Kabul were unknown during the Soviet period. Afghans went about their daily business without any fear of sudden mass slaughter. Today, in Kabul as you know, no American or British diplomats or foreign contractors have their partners or their children with them. In the 1980s, Soviet diplomats came with their families. The embassy had a flourishing kindergarten, primary and secondary school.

At the city's two university campuses, most young women were unveiled as were most of the female staff, working in banks, shops, schools, factories and government offices. Only a few wore a loose head scarf over their hair, and it was only really in the bazaar where the poorer people shopped that you saw, sometimes, the all-embracing burka.

The Mujahideen claimed Kabul was under siege, but from the evidence of my own eyes on these three trips, this was completely false. There were dozens of little kebab stalls in the street and they obviously had as much lamb as they needed from the countryside. Pomegranates and watermelon and grapes were spilling out of the bazaar.

So in terms of security, [in] the capital, the Russians had much more success than the Americans or the British do today. The countryside, yes, was a different matter. At the UN guest house in Kabul, which was a favourite place of foreigners to meet at the weekend, aid workers told me of their frustration at the restrictions they faced. There were dozens of consultants involved in the rural development, but they weren't allowed out of Kabul to supervise the projects they were supposed to be running. And Afghan government officials admitted that because of Mujahideen activity, land reform was only operating in a quarter of the country's districts. Half the schools were closed.

So the Russian experience in the 1980s mirrors exactly the American experience today. Foreign invaders can garrison Afghan cities with some help, more or less, from local security forces. They can even keep the roads open that connect the cities. But penetrating the country's villages and finding support is much, much harder. And of course it's particularly hard in the south and east of Afghanistan which borders on Pakistan. Every day, just as now, dozens of resistance fighters were infiltrating Afghanistan from Pakistan while the Soviets were there. So that's one obvious similarity.

The origins of the two interventions were also remarkably similar. In December 1979, when the Russians sent their troops across the border into

Afghanistan, they wanted regime change in Kabul. Just as Bush did when he sent troops in and Air Force to topple the Taliban in September 2001.

In 1979, Afghanistan was in the middle of a civil war. I won't go into it in enormous detail, but the Moscow-backed government – which was led by the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan, which was a typical third world authoritarian secular modernising Socialist government, which accepted no real opposition – had taken power in April 1978. And it was locked in battle now with tribal and religious forces who rejected its effort to modernise the country and bring in land reform. The Kabul government made several pleas to the Russians, to the Kremlin, to come in and help. Bring your forces in and help us to fight these insurgents. But the Russians repeatedly said, 'Sending foreign troops will only make things worse.'

But then of course, in the autumn of '79, 18 months later, the Soviet mood had changed. A new PDPA [People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan] leader, Hafizullah Amin, had murdered the president and seized power. And he was a radical who had studied in the United States in the early 1960s, one of the few Afghans who had been able to go abroad to study – not to Moscow but to the United States. And there were suspicions in the Kremlin that he was a CIA agent who wanted to push the Russians out and hand the country over to the Americans. It might seem a little bit far-fetched nowadays, but don't forget this was just a few months after the Shah had been toppled in Iran and the Americans had lost their incredibly important strategic position in Iran and were looking around for alternatives. Maybe Afghanistan was the place they were going to go to.

Anyway, Brezhnev the Soviet leader was furious. He wanted Amin out. But anger and revenge are not the best guides to political decision-making. They were, in fact, boiling over in the Kremlin in December '79. And the first thing Russian forces did when they invaded Kabul was to assassinate Amin. Similarly, in September 2001 after 9/11, the Bush Administration also wanted revenge and they were consumed by anger. After all, the Taliban had given safe haven to Osama Bin Laden, the Al-Qaeda leader.

Bush wanted the Taliban removed. In fact, we know from Bob Woodward's books that when he talked to his advisers soon after 9/11, Bush went back to the language of the days when America's Indians were being exterminated and he told his advisers, I need to, quote, 'get some scalps.'

The Americans expected their intervention to be short, just as the Russians did in '79. Regime change would be quickly achieved and foreign forces would then be able to leave. Indeed, the initial US plan was to keep US

combat troops to a very minimum in the actual attack. The idea was to rely on cruise missile strikes and heavy bombing by B52s, plus a few contingents of US Special Forces.

The ground troops would be Afghan. They would be the anti-Taliban militias of the former Mujahideen, who'd formed what was then called the Northern Alliance. And General Tommy Franks, who was the head of US Central Command, who planned the whole operation, was conscious of the Soviet experience, as Rodric pointed out in his introduction. Franks, in his memoirs, recalled telling his colleagues, 'We don't want to repeat the Soviets' mistakes. There's nothing to be gained by blundering around these mountains and gorges with armoured battalions chasing a lightly armed enemy.'

This advice was obviously sound. But things didn't quite work out as he had suggested, because after the Taliban were toppled, the strategy of regime change gradually suffered mission creep and turned into one of nation-building, just as had happened with the Russians. Because when I talked to Soviet officials in Kabul in the 1980s, I heard exactly the same language that I was to hear from US and British officials a quarter of a century later.

They talked about Afghanistan's poverty, its lack of development. They promised to modernise the country, introduce good governance, all these things we hear today. They saw the fighting as a struggle between a progressive Afghan government and a fanatical Muslim insurgency.

Forgetting the warnings which their leaders had given back in 1979 that intervention would only make things worse, they now told me that they were reluctant – rather, from what they told me I could see that they were reluctant – to concede that the presence of Soviet forces had indeed provoked a huge increase in resistance on patriotic lines.

And then the Americans of course fell into exactly the same trap, because when the Taliban re-emerged and started serious armed resistance in late 2003-2004, Tommy Franks by then had retired. And his successors thought they could deal with the problem by sending in more and more of their own ground troops. They didn't seem to realise that adding more foreign troops would only provoke more resistance.

And even today, ten years after this terrible war began, American and British officials are still reluctant to admit this basic point. They talk about so-called 'ten dollar a day Taliban', who they say they're just fighting for money. Or because of local grievances or because there are so many young unemployed men in the villages.

They overlook all the surveys that have been done into Taliban fighters' attitudes, which show that most of them are primarily motivated by patriotism and the desire to defend their country from foreign occupiers. Just as the Mujahideen were in the struggle against the Russians.

The American and British media, I'm afraid, have largely gone along with this self-deception. Just look at the difference in language in the way it's written up in the media. We happily use the word 'occupation' when we're talking about the Soviet presence, but we're frowned on if we actually talk today about a US or British occupation. We routinely describe the anti-Soviet Mujahideen as the Afghan resistance, but of course we reject that terminology when it comes today to the Taliban. They're insurgents, or bad guys, or terrorists. They're never referred to as resistance fighters.

Now let me come to the differences now between the two wars, because in many ways they're far more important, especially when it comes to the question of how this intervention is to end.

In March '85, the Soviet Union got a new leader, Mikhail Gorbachev. Like Barack Obama, he inherited a war in Afghanistan that his predecessor had started and which was not going well. But Obama famously described the war in Afghanistan as one not of choice, but of necessity. Iraq, he said, was a bad war. It was a war of choice, unnecessary. Afghanistan, by contrast, was necessary. Now Gorbachev was never rash enough to trap himself into that dangerous language, because of course if a war is necessary, how do you ever end it?

Gorbachev's instinct was that the war had become a stalemate. The Soviet army couldn't be defeated. On the other hand, the Mujahideen couldn't be defeated. Both sides were trapped in a war of attrition with no end in sight. Of course, since the Soviet Union collapsed, most of the Soviet archives have been opened. So we now have the remarkable view of the discussions that went on. We have the transcripts and other accounts of the discussions in the Politburo.

And they reveal that shortly after becoming Soviet leader, Gorbachev asked General Mikhail Zaitsev, who was the Soviet military commander at the time in Afghanistan, to evaluate the Russian army's options. And Zaitsev reported that the only way to achieve military success would be to seal the country's borders with Pakistan. This, he said, would require at least a quarter of a million troops, which was more than double the number they already had in the country. He said sending this amount of troops would be unrealistic.

I think it probably sounds quite familiar. How many times do we hear US commanders and diplomats urging Pakistan to stop allowing the infiltration of Taliban and Al Qaeda fighters across the mutual border?

Now Gorbachev took his military advisers' points on board, because their views confirmed his instinct, that the war was unwinnable. Obama, by contrast unfortunately, has not yet conceded that to seek military victory in Afghanistan is futile. So that's the first major difference between the two wars.

The second crucial difference is that the Soviet military and the civilian leadership were in agreement. The top brass made no attempt to oppose Gorbachev's decision to withdraw. There were some minor differences over the pace of the withdrawal and how soon it should start, but the basic principle of withdrawal was not contested.

Now I've already quoted General Zaitsev's views, but over the next few months the military scepticism intensified. In November 1986, Marshal Sergei Akhromeyev, who was the Chief of the General Staff, told the Politburo, 'After seven years in Afghanistan, there is not one square kilometre left untouched by the boot of a Soviet soldier. But as soon as they leave a place, the enemy returns and restores it all back the way it used to be. We have lost the peasantry.'

And when the Politburo met again two months later, it was the Defence Minister, Marshal Sergei Sokolov, who sounded the note of despair. He said, 'The amount of shelling of our garrisons has doubled. They mainly shoot from villages, calculating that we will not fire at settlements in response. This war cannot be won militarily.' That's the Defence Minister.

What was Gorbachev's response? Well, he invited the Afghan leader, Babrak Karmal, to come to Moscow and told him the exit strategy was going to be political. He urged Karmal to negotiate with the Mujahideen, with the insurgents. Gorbachev called his Politburo into session after Karmal had left and gone back to Kabul. Gorbachev told his colleagues, 'I have been very blunt. If you want to survive,' this is what he said to Karmal, 'You have to broaden the regime's social base. Forget about Socialism. Share real power with the people who have real authority, including the leaders of the bands and the organisations that are now hostile towards you.' Bands and organisations obviously means the Mujahideen.

Contrast this with the politics of Obama and David Cameron, who still cling to the hope of a military solution. Gorbachev was lucky, he didn't have a Soviet David Petraeus telling him that surges of more troops would make a difference or that Mujahideen commanders should be targeted by drone

strikes. He didn't have a man like Lieutenant General James Bucknall, the British Deputy Commander of the NATO led coalition who recently retired but told *The Guardian* last week that the Taliban had been pushed back everywhere.

Now Gorbachev could have adopted a strategy of building up the Afghan army. This, after all, is NATO's current strategy. NATO plans to keep heavily defended garrisons all over the country, but to put Afghan troops into them instead of having British and American and other foreign troops. So the garrison strategy will only go on.

The only thing that will change is the nationality of the people manning the garrisons. But it won't help because one reason is the ethnic imbalances in the current Afghan national army. The largest ethnic group, as you I'm sure know, are the Pashtun who make up about 42 percent of Afghanistan's population. Tajiks come next with 27 percent and then you have the Uzbeks with about 9 percent each. Now the Taliban mainly of course are Pashtun. And they live in the southern and eastern part of the country where the insurgency is most active.

Yet the vast buck of the Afghan army are Tajiks and Uzbeks, so that in the Pashtun areas, where the army is supposed to come in to replace the British and the Americans, the villages will consider them and do already consider them just as foreign as the NATO troops. They don't speak the language, Tajik and Uzbek are quite different languages from Pashtun. They don't know the area. In fact, the proportion of southern Pashtun at the moment today in the Afghan National Army is below four percent. 96 percent are not Pashtun.

Nor is this Afghan army that we're building up at great expense going to be strong and efficient any time soon. There was a Pentagon report last month which said that out of 173 Afghan battalions, only one is able to operate independently of the US led coalition. So this garrison strategy is absolutely doomed. They call it transition and it's described as a political strategy. It's not. It's a military strategy; it merely perpetuates an unwinnable war at a huge cost in lives and money.

Now faced with the same reality as NATO is faced today, Gorbachev rejected the garrison strategy. He decided that negotiations offered a much better way out. He was lucky in a sense because there was already an international framework for talks, because the UN soon after the invasion had appointed a mediator whose mission it was to try to persuade the Kremlin to withdraw in return for Pakistan and the US abandoning their armed aid to the Mujahideen.

While Brezhnev was in power these talks stagnated, got nowhere. He still thought there could be a military victory. Gorbachev changed that. He took the talks seriously and they went ahead and culminated in April 1988 in Geneva with an agreement on a full Soviet withdrawal.

Gorbachev hoped this deal would be matched by one between the various Afghan parties so that they would end their civil war, which is the underlying factor below the foreign intervention, and create a government of national unity. But he was careful not to condition the two things on each other, because he didn't want to link the implementation of a Soviet withdrawal to getting an Afghan agreement on a government of national unity because that could obviously have risked indefinite delay.

So nine years after they entered, the Soviet troops pulled out with great dignity in February 1989, not having been defeated. This is the third big difference between the Russians and the Americans. Gorbachev put real pressure on his clients in Kabul to reach out to the armed opposition and forge a coalition government. Now it didn't work, I'm afraid, and I'll come to that in a minute. But Obama by contrast only pay lip service to the idea of negotiations and has put no real political muscle behind it.

In fact, it's rather astonishing when you look back on the Soviet failure in Afghanistan to think that the Americans didn't remember this when they started to escalate their troop presence in 2003 and 2004, because when the Russians went in in 1979, you could argue that they had no recent experience to go on. It was 60 years since there had last been a foreign intervention in Afghanistan, of course by the British, and that was perhaps forgotten.

But when the Americans started their surges of troops after 2003, it was only 14 years since the Russians had withdrawn. And more than that, of course, they had played a huge role in arming the Mujahideen, and in forcing the Russians to accept that the war couldn't be won.

How on Earth did they really forget what Tommy Franks had warned in 2001? To think that they could do better against a nationalist Islamic insurgency than the Russians had? Because obviously the Americans are non-Muslim, and infidel, just as much as the Russians are.

Well, one reason as I've already explained is this anger and revenge which clouded decision-making. And then there was also hubris. I think Rodric mentioned that in the beginning, how they thought they could do better than the Russians. The Russians are hopeless, we're better. And then of course there's massive ignorance of Afghan history.

There are many myths in the west about Afghanistan and I deal with 13 of them in this book. I try and debunk these myths and show how false they are. One of the notorious myths is that after the Russians withdrew, the west walked away. You hear it constantly from western politicians, all the time, again at the Bonn conference last week. They say they failed to stay involved in Afghanistan and left it without aid or support. As a result, the civil war revived. That's the argument.

Well, it was repeated quite recently when Hillary Clinton – I'll just give one quote – addressed the Foreign Affairs Committee of the House of Representatives. She said, 'America paid a heavy price for disengaging after the Soviets left in 1989. We cannot afford to make that mistake again. We have to be smart and strategic.'

Pity she had her facts wrong, because of course the US did not walk away in 1989. It did not disengage. The CIA continued to fund and arm the Mujahideen for three more years. And worse than that, they used their leverage to urge the Mujahideen not to negotiate with Kabul, not to accept these offers coming from the Kremlin and from Kabul. In other words, the Americans supported the revival of civil war after the Russians left.

Had they used their influence with the Mujahideen to tell them to respond positively to the PDPA overtures then the recent history of Afghanistan might have been much less bloody. Because after all, the PDPA felt they had a reasonable case to make as they offered talks both with the Mujahideen and with the representatives of the exiled king who was in Italy.

The country was completely free. There were no Russian troops left of any kind. And the PDPA did indeed represent the interests of a substantial number of Afghans in Kabul, particularly the secular, better-educated, professional people.

Critics could no longer just argue that PDPA is some kind of Moscow puppet. Unfortunately, their appeals fell on deaf ears, in large part because the west sabotaged them. We all know what happened next, because in the dying days of the Soviet Union, in the autumn of 1991, Moscow decided to cut off fuel supplies, money and arms to the Kabul government, which created panic, demoralisation within the PDPA regime. People rushed to make their own private deals with the Mujahideen and Kabul then fell without a shot being fired and the Mujahideen came in.

Then, as I say, they started the war among themselves. And the mayhem of that period, four years of shelling by the different Mujahideen leaders,

shocked a younger generation of more puritanical jihadists, who created the Taliban.

So in other words, the west's failure to support and negotiate an end to the Afghan civil war in 1989 and the creation of a government of national unity led to another decade of fighting and bloodshed. So although the Soviet Union bears the greatest responsibility for the misery and war that Afghans suffered in the 1980s, I think it's no exaggeration to say that the west, the US and its allies, share most of the blame for the misery and war that Afghans suffered in the 1990s. And I'm not even now talking about the last decade since the turn of the century.

Another decade has now passed and the Afghan civil war continues. 1800 American troops have died, almost. Close to 400 British ones. Tens of thousands of Afghans have lost their lives.

How can the whole thing be brought to an end? It can only be done by the method that Gorbachev tried: negotiations. There has to be a dramatic change of course by the Obama and Cameron administrations. The President needs to give a clear signal that he's making negotiations his top priority. He must tell the military that defeating or degrading the Taliban and the other insurgents is no longer the US objective. Instead, he should signal, announce that the new American goal for Afghanistan is the creation of a government of national unity that includes representatives of all the fighting groups as well obviously to the non-violent political parties, which would therefore end the danger of a new round of civil war as foreign troops depart.

Obama should also say that the US's three other goals are the establishment of a sovereign, non-aligned state that will not host troops or bases of any foreign nation. And obviously including the US. He can say, and I think it's not unreasonable and it's quite feasible, there have to be pledges by the new Afghan government that it will not accept activity by Al-Qaeda or other international terrorist groups in Afghanistan. And there will need to be guarantees from Afghanistan's neighbours and the other regional powers that they do recognise its independence and will not try to interfere again in its internal affairs.

Well, what are the obstacles? As with all peace negotiations, the atmosphere is clouded by fear and suspicion along with hatred and anger over the loss of loved ones. Some leaders of the Tajik and Uzbek minorities are clearly worried that the Taliban would seize full control of the country again. And for their part, the Taliban are justifiably worried that the US will never leave.

Some people claim that the Taliban are uninterested in talks because they just can wait and then they'll win anyway. But this is actually just speculation. Until serious contacts are made with the Taliban leadership, no one can really be certain what their actual position is. But there has been evidence of flexibility building up for some time.

So the sensible policy is to open the dialogue with the Taliban, discover their views. September this year, Mullah Omar, the Taliban leader, marked the end of Ramadan with a remarkable statement of aims, not much reported in the western media. Most analysts of Afghanistan have long argued that the Taliban have a different perspective from the Arabs, who have used their country as a safe haven. And the end of Ramadan statement by Mullah Omar went a long way towards confirming that. He portrayed his organisation as one with Afghan interests in mind, not some kind of global jihad. He talked of Afghanistan's abysmal poverty, the need to develop its wealth, mineral wealth particularly, including through foreign investment.

He tried to reach out to the Tajiks and Uzbeks by promising that, as he put it, all ethnicities will have participation in the regime. Portfolios will be dispensed on the basis of merit. And he said that contrary to the propaganda launched by our enemies, our policy is not aimed at monopolising power.

There's a key obstacle to serious negotiations on the western side. The ambiguity and indecision is paralysing policy-making within the Obama Administration. July this year, the President made an important speech reversing the troops' surge, announcing a gradual pull-out of 30,000 troops and talked of 2014 as the date for the departure of US combat troops.

But he said almost nothing in that crucial speech about negotiations. And he maintained this existing garrison strategy, which I say is doomed, and kept open even the option of US troops remaining indefinitely in Afghanistan. The US Ambassador even now as we're talking, Ryan Crocker, is trying to work out what is called a strategic partnership agreement with Karzai, which would be a bilateral US-Afghan agreement to authorise the long-term basing of as many as 50,000 US troops in the country after 2014.

They would be described as trainers or advisers or something else, but they would still be armed, uniformed US troops. And it's an agreement which is a disaster waiting to happen. Because obviously if it's signed between Karzai and the Americans, it would completely sabotage any chance of talks with the Taliban who insist on the complete departure of all foreign troops.

They've been fighting as nationalists for an end to the occupation and they're not going to stop fighting just because the number of US troops has been

reduced to 50,000. So maintaining a US troop presence will also undermine the objective of non-aligned Afghanistan which is what most of Afghanistan's neighbours want.

Well, I'm summing up now. Afghanistan has already suffered 38 years of civil war. Two foreign interventions have only exacerbated the Afghan tragedy. Russian troops could have remained in Afghanistan indefinitely. They could still be there today. But in 1985, Mikhail Gorbachev had the sense to change course and negotiate a full Russian troop withdrawal. This summer, I went to Moscow to see Gorbachev. He's now 80. He's still very alert, very active, very politically engaged. And he told me he had no doubt that negotiations were the best path for the Americans.

I said, 'Should the Americans talk to the Taliban?' His answer was, 'They should talk to everyone. We talked to everyone. Including the people fighting against us. I say withdraw the troops.' Well, I happen to agree with Gorbachev. It's time Obama followed his line. Thank you.