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# AN ORDEAL OF REAGAN'S OWN MAKING

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RONALD Reagan, in his second term, is not being served well by his presidential staff and is not serving himself well.

Amid the din of virtuous — and mostly merited — castigation of Reagan about the Iranian blunder I miss any positive note (from either critics or administration) about how to learn from it.

Before a blunder is productive we must recognize its core, and move on from there, instead of getting mired endlessly in the swamp of administration-bashing and defensive damage-control.

The National Security Council has presented historians with a prime case history of muddled decision-making.

You could try to hack out, secretly, a new diplomatic opening to Iranian "pragmatists," hoping that in some post-Khomeini day one of them would be at the power center. Or you could try to do the almost equally undoable: persuade the Iranians to get the Beirut hostages freed.

But you couldn't link one with another, and "sweeten" both with arms deliveries. That way lies disaster.

Note that a sequence of foreign policy disasters started with Bitburg and has stalked Reagan ever since his overwhelming second-term victory. In part it is because, an optimist to his core, he has more trouble with success than with adversity.

But there was also the

changing of the palace guard, and his adoption of a more flamboyant confrontational policy.

The real key may be the absence of a foreign policy elite and of a political culture in which it can flourish.

The great foreign policy elite operated in the post-World War II years as a close-knit group of "wise men." They included Dean Acheson, Averell Harriman, Robert Lovett and John McCloy.

Add Paul Nitze (still in government service) and Eisenhower's John Foster Dulles. Add also Nixon's Henry Kissinger and Carter's Zbigniew Brzezinski.

But since the Nixon-Kissinger opening to China the political climate has made foreign-policy-making a

hard path. The relations with America's far-flung world allies have grown more febrile. The post-Watergate investigative zeal and the leakages have quickened even while the need for secrecy has intensified.

The intelligence community has been tied up by congressional oversight groups, with no trust of either in the other.

Worst of all, the talent isn't flowing, as it did earlier, into policy-making posts. There is too much money — and quicker fame — in consulting and commentary posts.

The hard road of coming up through the foreign service, the intelligence community and the ranks of public scholarship, making your blunders and learning from them — that today is a road

less traveled.

The decisions, especially the secret ones, still have to be made out of deep knowledge of history and long experience with men. The President unwarily went along with a decision that cut away his senior advisers, which left him naked to his enemies and to history.

He is paying for it by his ordeal.

We need the National Security Council, now duly chastened by its scarring blunder. But even more we need a Council of Wise Men — with experience, knowledge, perspective, but without dogma.

They will be hard to find and recruit because they have to be a council not only of the wise but of the adventuresome, spunky and wily.