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REAPING THE WHIRLWIND

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Russia weighs its words. When a new edition of Russia's most widely used dictionary was published during Khrushchev's era, it contained a single significant change from the previous edition. "Khrushch," a kind of beetle, was no longer described as "deleterious to agriculture."

Last week, while Russians were harvesting Afghanistan, some Republicans who fancy themselves Presidential were telling Iowa that they would never, ever be deleterious to agriculture. They usually are thrillingly fierce about Russia, but now say: Let's be tough-as-nails with the Russian bear but, golly, let's not stop feeding it. All those fellows want to seem Churchillian, but can't get the hang of it. Churchill raised two fingers in a defiant "V" for victory. The Republican trademark is a single wetted finger raised to test which way the wind is blowing.

By last week, neither the Iranian nor the Afghan crisis was, strictly speaking, a crisis. The Soviet conquest was proceeding routinely and was distracting attention from the fact that, regarding Iran, the U.S. Government has exhausted its repertoire of inaction. That exhaustion didn't matter much because the American public wasn't so interested anymore. For all the talk about transformed man meeting grave crises with bold departures, the Administration could not even rise above waffling about an Olympics boycott. Or about whether aid to Pakistan would include a commitment to guarantee Pakistan's territorial integrity.

OPTIMISM: The whirlwind we are now reaping was sown in 1975. Congress had long since made impossible a response to the North Vietnamese attacks that presaged the destruction of a U.S. ally. Congress would not tolerate a serious response to the arrival of Soviet proxies in Angola. The U.S. signed the Helsinki agreements on human rights, knowing that the Soviet Union had no intention of complying and that there was no hope of compelling compliance. The United States thereby became an accomplice of the Soviet Union in legitimizing Soviet pretenses and deceiving the American public.

In 1977, U.S. paralysis was elevated to the status of policy, even philosophy, when Carter unfurled "a new American foreign policy" in his commencement address at Notre Dame. He proclaimed "a policy based on constant decency in its values and on optimism in our historical vision." Optimism was in order because we were now free from "inordinate fear of Communism" and because "we are confident that democracy's example will be compelling." Carter did not say what he considered an ordinate fear of Communism or who would be compelled to do what by "democracy's example." But his theme was clear: Kissingerian power politics were unseemly. We would rely on optimism and the power of exemplary living.

Less than three years later, we are (or so it is said) getting yet another new foreign policy. This one is based on the sunburst of understanding that occurred when the Soviet Union did to Afghanistan what it had done to Latvia, Estonia, Poland, East Germany, Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary and Czechoslovakia (and had helped others do to South Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos). The Administration seems almost proud of its metaphysical flexibility, but there are

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skeptics who doubt the duration of this month's enlistment in the cold war. They note that Carter's speech in response to the Soviet military aggression contained not a syllable about U.S. military countermoves.

Carter may be the most dangerous President since James Buchanan (1857-61), who gave the South the impression that the North would not use force to save the Union. Buchanan thought secession was wrong, but that coercion would be, too. His attitude was an invitation.

The Economist says: "Who invited 40,000 Russian soldiers complete with their quisling into Afghanistan? Answer: President Carter, the American Congress and American opinion—and those American allies who have dared not believe, and have done little to remedy or reverse, the crumbling of America's willingness to exercise its power." Before that issue of The Economist arrived by air from London, 60,000 more troops had arrived in Afghanistan. The Economist called the invasion an "act of contempt" dramatizing "the failing deterrence of America" and the need to halt "appeasement." But the invasion also was an act of ominous confidence.

The Russians are, officially, materialists, but they know the role of the immaterial. They know power is not a mass of military matériel; it is such matériel at the service of a particular kind of will, of confidence. Russia's Ethiopian and other recent operations have given them confidence in their ability to conduct clockwork intervention, as they have done in Afghanistan. Russia beat Napoleon and Hitler with vast spaces and huge numbers. Now Russia is shedding inhibitions in part because it has confidence in its ability to use speed and precision, as well as overwhelming power. The United States, for its part, could have bases and ships all over the Middle East and be no better off if it remained paralyzingly reluctant to use military assets in any way. And the U.S. cannot prevail, in any case, unless it substantially increases its assets, fast.

INTELLECTUAL DEBRIS: It is said we are governed by changed men. But it might be at least a bit easier to believe in change if Carter himself would forgo that non sequitur about how we will prevail because we are right. And if he would change some of the men around him. After the Bay of Pigs, President Kennedy reportedly said to Allen Dulles, the CIA director, "Under a parliamentary system of government it is I who would be leaving office. But under our system it is you who must go." Today, after three worse-than-wasted years, the Administration admits that its original policy assumptions are intellectual debris, and the kindest assessment is that Carter has been consistently misinformed and ill-advised. Is there *no* penalty for failure in this Administration? Among those who should go are Stansfield Turner, the CIA director, and Marshall Shulman, the State Department's "Soviet expert."

But how many experts are needed to decipher Soviet policy? In June 1968, two months before the West was (or said it was) shocked by the invasion of Czechoslovakia, Andrei Gromyko proclaimed that "the Soviet People do not plead with anybody to be allowed to have their way in the solution of any question involving . . . our country's extensive interests." In 1975, when U.S. behavior helped set in train events that led to Russia's geopolitical onslaught, Gromyko proclaimed that Russia's overriding aim is "developing and deepening the world revolutionary process."

Where next? Marshal Tito is 87. When he dies and Yugoslavia is riven by factions, the Russians will have a faction, and the West may have another occasion for saying how shocked it is by Russian behavior. In Russia, there must be amazement, if not inextinguishable laughter, about the West's unwillingness to weigh Russia's words.