P.S. to the NEWS
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CYRUS VANCE'S RESIGNATION

Was President Carter this spring deliberately provoking a confrontation with the Soviet Union over Iran and Afghanistan? He talked ominously about "military action" by American troops to defend the Persian Gulf, and he let his special ambassador, Clark Clifford, openly talk in capitals abroad about "war."

This columnist reached the conclusion several months ago that Carter had set us on a course that would lead to war in the Middle East. It has now leaked out that Cyrus Vance came to the same conclusion, and that he resigned as Secretary of State primarily to shock Carter off that disaster course.

When Vance suddenly resigned on April 28, he said only that he disagreed with the hostage rescue mission, which he later called harebrained. Some reporters speculated that his rivalry with National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski was also a factor.

However, enterprising reporters have interviewed Vance's confidents and come up with the real reason. He thought Carter was leading us into a military disaster, and Vance wanted to force the President to change course. Vance now thinks the appointment of Senator Edmund Muskie indicates that Carter got the message.

The question remains, why was Vance so afraid of a confrontation? In the past, our country has successfully survived many confrontations with the Communists and come out ahead. These successful confrontations included the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, the Berlin airlift of 1948, sending the Marines into Lebanon in 1958, and facing down the Chinese Reds over Quemon and Matsu in the late 1950s.

But there is a fundamental difference between then and now. You can call your opponent's bluff when you hold all the aces, but you will be wiped out if you seek a showdown when you don't. In those earlier confrontations, the United States had overwhelming military superiority; but today, the Russians are Number One.

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The unhappy fact is that the United States cannot afford a military provocation of the Russians in Iran, in Afghanistan, in Cuba, or anywhere in the world. Vance knew it and, according to friends, after his private warnings to Carter fell on deaf ears, Vance took the only way left, a public resignation.

The talk persists in Washington that, while the hostage rescue helicopters were on the ground in Iran, Brezhnev telephoned Carter on the Hot Line and said, "Get them out!" This event cannot be verified, but it is certainly credible. Our retreat was so frantic that some of our crewmen were killed, top-secret equipment was abandoned, and our aides in Iran were deserted.

Carter tempted the Soviets with his saber-rattling because his most urgent priority is not stopping Communism, not curbing inflation, but winning reelection. War, or the threat of war, has been the key to several Presidential election victories.

In 1940, President Franklin D. Roosevelt set our country on a course of war for which we were very unprepared. But the fundamentals of confrontation were completely different then. After the Pearl Harbor attack, there was time for our great military-industrial complex to build the weapons to win the war. In the nuclear age, the only weapons that count are those which are ready to fire when danger strikes.

While resigning to save us from an election-year military disaster may have been Vance's finest hour, he shares the blame for getting America into the fix where we are immobilized from any military action to protect our citizens, our interests, or our allies. Vance was part of the McNamara Defense Department in the 1960s which made the fatal decisions to let the Soviets catch up and then pass us in nuclear weapons. The McNamara-Vance disarmament elite of the 1960s cancelled the second thousand Minuteman missiles and the B-70 bomber, and scrapped the Atlas and Titan I missiles, the Skybolt, and the B-58s.

Defending America in the nuclear-space age requires two factors: weapons better than the enemy's and a President with the will to use them. The former without the latter is dangerous. The latter without the former is disastrous. We must rebuild U.S. nuclear superiority while there is still time.

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