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CAPTIVE NATIONS WEEK

"Captive Nations Week" is officially designated by our government as the third week of July each year. By a joint resolution overwhelmingly adopted on July 17, 1959, Congress ordered the President to issue the proclamation each year "until such time as freedom and independence shall have been achieved for all the Captive Nations of the world."

The Captive Nations resolution, Public Law 86-90, listed the 22 nations which were then enslaved by Communist aggression, including Mainland China, Tibet, North Korea, North Vietnam, and 18 nations behind the Iron Curtain. It stated that "it is vital to the national security of the United States that the desire for liberty and independence on the part of the peoples of these conquered nations should be steadfastly kept alive."

The first such proclamation was issued by President Dwight Eisenhower. He said: "I invite the people of the United States to observe such week with appropriate ceremonies and activities, and I urge them to study the plight of the Soviet-dominated nations and to recommit themselves to the support of the just aspirations of the peoples of those Captive Nations."

Eisenhower's proclamation clearly identified the problem and outlined American foreign policy in support of the victims of Communist aggression -- long before "human rights" became a political plaything of the Carter Administration. Ike's July 21, 1959 proclamation included this language: "Whereas many nations throughout the world have been made captive by the imperialistic and aggressive policies of Soviet Communism; whereas the peoples of the Soviet-dominated nations have been deprived of their national independence and their individual liberties; and whereas it is appropriate and proper to manifest to the peoples of the Captive Nations the support of the government and the people of the United States of America ..."

The original 1959 Captive Nations resolution worried the Kremlin dictators more than any action the United States has ever taken. Khrushchev was so angry at its passage that it was his principal complaint when Vice President Richard Nixon visited Moscow.

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Why should the Kremlin bosses, who clearly have only contempt for other pieces of paper such as treaties, care about mere words in a Congressional resolution or Presidential proclamation? It's because of a deep-seated yearning for their illegitimate regime to be recognized by the world as legitimate.

Everybody knows that the Soviets enjoy iron and total control over the Captive Nations of Eastern Europe, and even over the latest victim of their aggression, Afghanistan. But de facto control does not satisfy the Soviets. They long for the mantle of legality. "Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown," -- and the head is even uneasier if others don't recognize his right to wear it.

The rationale of the Captive Nations resolution is that the United States refuses to recognize Soviet rule over the Captive Nations as either legitimate or permanent. The courageous resistance to Soviet rule by the unions in Poland and by the freedom fighters in Afghanistan is a continual reminder of how easy it would be to ignite the hearts of those who would say, "Give me liberty or give me death."

The Brezhnev Doctrine was born of this same Kremlin craving to elevate the crude armed invasion of Czechoslovakia to the status of an accepted international "doctrine." It proclaimed the alleged "right" of the Soviet Union to carry out future Czechoslovak-type invasions to maintain its control over any other satellite which might try to throw off or loosen its Communist yoke.

Since 1959, the plight of the Captive Nations has gotten worse, not better. No country has freed itself from Communism. The list of Captive Nations is now much longer; it now includes Cuba, Cambodia, Laos, South Vietnam, Libya, Angola, Mozambique, Ethiopia, Afghanistan, and Nicaragua.

When President Jimmy Carter issued the Captive Nations Week proclamation, as he was required by law to do, he did not mention Communism, or the Captive Nations, or the Soviet Union. He merely made a vague reference to "our commitment to human rights."

President Ronald Reagan has an historic opportunity to issue a strong Captive Nations proclamation which truthfully recognizes the identities of both the Captive Nations and their captors. More important, he can show by his proclamation that American dedication to human rights dates at least from 1959, and that we now reaffirm our support for the human rights of the captive peoples who are living under Communist tyranny.

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