P.S. to the NEWS
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CARTER'S CREDIBILITY

The American people have traditionally been very supportive of our Presidents' conduct of foreign affairs. The President's constitutional powers in this area have been broadly interpreted by the courts and acquiesced in by Congress, opinion leaders, and the general public.

With hindsight, many Presidential mistakes have been painfully evident and severely criticized, as witness the agreements of Teheran, Yalta, Potsdam, Geneva, and SALT I. But at the time, the public attitude has usually been "politics should stop at the water's edge" and "when in doubt, trust our President."

Public confidence in a President's sincerity is an essential ingredient in giving him a largely free hand in foreign affairs. That credibility is precisely what has evaporated from the Carter Administration.

It was bad enough to learn that President Carter had unilaterally renounced a mutual defense treaty with Taiwan that had been solemnly ratified by the U.S. Senate and relied on by a faithful ally. It was bad enough that Carter gave in to every demand that the Red Chinese made without getting anything in return, such as a pledge not to invade Taiwan.

But it was unforgivable that he misled the American people in his news conference. When a reporter asked the direct question if he "at any point asked the Chinese to provide a written pledge that they would not seize Taiwan by force," he answered yes. White House officials now concede the answer should have been no.

In Iran the problem was official ignorance rather than insincerity. The Carter Administration was caught out on the end of a limb, uninformed about reality at every change in the fortunes of Iran. We paid a bitter price for the emasculation of the Central Intelligence Agency.

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Inopportune talk about "human rights" contributed significantly to the Shah's slide downhill and helped to inflame revolutionaries to believe they had world opinion on their side. Then Carter gave full backing to the Shah after he was a lost cause and it was impossible to save him.

Next, Carter put U.S. prestige on the line behind Prime Minister Bakhtiar, although it should have been obvious that he didn't have nearly as much chance to maintain a viable government as the Shah himself. The Shah had important factions who were personally loyal to him, whereas Bakhtiar had no constituency at all.

Now Carter is forced to come hat in hand as a humble supplicant to the revolutionary government of Ayatollah Khomeini, which owes us absolutely nothing. It came to power with Soviet weapons and despite the opposition of the United States. The President of the United States must beg the new Iranian masters to sell us oil so our great nation can avoid gasoline rationing.

Secretary of Defense Harold Brown has been traveling in the Middle East trying to reassure friendly nations, who are rapidly diminishing in number, that we will stand behind them. Brown even implied to the Saudis that we would fight to prevent unfriendly nations from getting their hands on Saudi oil.

Actions always speak louder than words. If you were the Saudis, how much faith would you put in Brown's assurances? Just about as much faith as Americans now put in President Carter's solemn promise in his State of the Union Message that "I will sign no (SALT II) agreement which does not enhance our national security."

As it becomes more and more evident that the terms of the forthcoming SALT II treaty are highly disadvantageous to the United States, the White House strategy has been to gloss over the specifics and try to sell it based on public confidence in our President. It's beginning to look as though it's not the country, but President Carter's credibility, that needs some "new foundations."

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