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ON PAGE A21

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'Normalization' in Afghanistan

Now that the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan is an accomplished fact, the process of "normalization" can begin. The dust is about to settle behind the tank columns that rolled across the border, and soon someone in Washington will note "hopeful signs" in the fact that a few tanks are moving back into Russia. The hectic Soviet airlift into Kabul will quiet down and our intelligence will report that air traffic is back to normal.

Perhaps, if continued nagging from the West seems to demand it, Moscow might even offer a formal promise that all its troops will be withdrawn "as the situation in Afghanistan normalizes." This would be in the tradition of the Soviet promise to the president of Czechoslovakia in August 1968, which assured the world that the entry of the Soviet troops would be "temporary" and that they would be withdrawn from Czech territory "as the situation in Czechoslovakia normalizes." (Today, more than 11 years later, the Soviet divisions are still there.)

The Soviet Union will see to it that the "normalization" of Afghanistan continues apace. News about armed resistance that may persist in the rugged mountains will be skillfully suppressed or drowned out by fabricated misinformation. No outside observer will be granted access to any area where Moslem freedom-fighters might still resist. If refugees manage to cross the border into Pakistan, their reports will be balanced off by news stories from other "refugees," reporting that CIA agents are fomenting assassinations and economic sabotage among hapless Afghan tribesmen.

To cheer us up, we will be reading about the genuine increase in the standard of living in Afghan cities and of the freedom of religion enjoyed by Moslems. Now and then our newspapers may carry a photograph of a cherubic Soviet agronomist teaching backward Afghan peasants how to increase their crop yields.

Back in 1979, some American commentators predicted that by invading Afghanistan, the Soviets could only sink deeper into the quagmire of their own "Vietnam." These "quagmire" forecasts will be displaced by admonitions that we should come to terms with the new "reality," should cease encouraging any Moslem resistance in Afghanistan and, instead, should, through a program of economic aid, offer an alternative to exclusive reliance on Moscow for the Karmal government—if Babrek Karmal is then still the name of the Afghan Gauleiter.

Those who will continue to object to the "normalization" of Afghanistan will be asked what alternative policy they propose. Should the United States invade Afghanistan? Or do they propose that we launch a nuclear war? Some will reason

that the whole Afghan "episode" was nothing new, but simply reflected the old Russian quest to get closer to the Indian Ocean.

However, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, as Zbigniew Brzezinski stressed, is a qualitatively new step. Indeed, if the total Soviet control of Afghanistan resulting from this step becomes an accepted "normal" situation, the invasion will turn into a historic watershed. It will have extended the writ of the Brezhnev Doctrine beyond Eastern Europe.

That is to say, the "normalization" of Afghanistan will signify worldwide acceptance of the rule that the Soviet Union can use its massive military power, outside Eastern Europe as it has done inside, to maintain Marxist regimes against popular opposition or to replace the leaders of these regimes should they be insufficiently compliant with the Kremlin's wishes. In particular, the Third World, by accepting the "normalization" of Afghanistan, will have accepted that Moscow—the Rome of the "socialist" empire—is the sole and final arbiter of the internal affairs of any "socialist" country. The sundry Marxist, "socialist" and Soviet-supported regimes in the Third World will thus give their consent to the "common laws governing socialist construction" that Brezhnev laid down when he announced his doctrine in August 1968:

"It is known, comrades, that there also are common laws governing socialist construction, a deviation from which might lead to a deviation from socialism as such. And when the internal and external forces hostile to socialism seek to revert the development of any socialist country toward the restoration of the capitalist order, when a threat to the cause of socialism in that country, a threat to the security of the socialist community as a whole, emerges, this is no longer only a problem of the people of that country but also a common problem, concern for all socialist states."

By "normalizing" the invasion of Afghanistan, the West—and the Third World—will make other invasions of "socialist" Third World countries a normal event, opposition to which would not be expected. Brezhnev's "common law" will thus have been extended to cover a Soviet invasion of Yugoslavia, South Yemen, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Angola, Cuba (if the Soviets can marshal sufficient military power) and, of course, Iran, once "socialist construction" has begun there.

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In 1948, after the first Soviet takeover of Czechoslovakia, the leaders of Western Europe put their ancient quarrels aside and joined with the United States in creating the North Atlantic Alliance. That alliance preserved the western limits to Soviet invasions up to this day. Now the threat has turned to the south. It is hence in the common interests of the United States and the Islamic world to prevent Brezhnev's "socialist construction" from becoming the vanguard of an attack by Soviet tanks and gunships. We in the United States must marshal the strength to back up the self-defense of all independent nations in the Middle East. And the leaders of these nations must rise above the destructive fanaticism of a Khomeini. In the life of nations, a mortal threat can call forth the greatest acts of statesmanship—provided the threat is recognized.