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The Freezing Point

If those countries that are planning a missile attack on us have been following the press in the last 11 days, they may be drastically revising their defense budgets.

We don't know who these countries are—North Korea, Iraq and Iran are suspects—but we're sure they are even now polishing up a big one with Washington's name on it, and we must revive "Star Wars" to thwart them.

Mind you, Congress and President Clinton are haggling over Meals on Wheels and school lunches, but the billions needed to build a missile defense system don't count.

If evil countries are tracking events here, they are rediscovering a truth that nobody here or there can grasp. You don't need missiles to bring Washington to its knees. Snow does it better for less.

If the agents of these scoundrels studied accounts from the stricken capital closely, they would see that nothing moved in the center of the Western world for 10 days: Government, schools, bingo, the Kemp tax commission, the Falls Church Madrigal Society all ground to a halt. The city was under siege.

Marion Barry, the mayor of Washington, finds it unreasonable of people to expect streets to be plowed and sidewalks shoveled. Don't they understand that time will take care of it all? He has an exceptionally high tolerance for snow or at least hates to take hostile action against it and wishes people wouldn't obsess about it. But as we entered into the second week, and the clamor increased, he sought federal help and promised that all roads would be passable. Well, FEMA never made it to Macomb Street, and the only evidence of any government interest we saw was the parking ticket affixed to one of two stuck trucks sprawled across our road. It was a reminder of what we always knew: The parking enforcement division is the one agency that never sleeps.

Where was the Federal Emergency Management Agency? Well, maybe it was taking its sweet time about obliging a mayor as unamiable as Barry. On the 11th day after the first storm, he, whose home was promptly plowed, had not troubled to send a crew over to shovel snow off the sidewalk in front of the White House. Washington suffers

democratically.

It must have dawned on our enemies that they can spare themselves a great deal of grief and expense in bringing about our ruination. They possibly have noticed that we brought ourselves to

bankruptcy by defense spending in the Cold War, and they may be anxious to avoid a similar fate. You don't need to bug their conference rooms to hear them saying, "Look, plutonium is expensive, and you get all those international inspection teams hassling you. Why don't we scrap all that and concentrate on artificial snow? We could pack the missiles we have with it and sit back until the soothsayers tell us it is time to launch."

There is still time for us to avert such an attack, against which there is no defense. What we need is for the CIA to do something useful. It should discover in the archives of Moscow a secret memo calling for a tripling of the Russian snowplow capability. Maybe it would even turn up in the wandering Whitewater papers. There will surely be such a document. The Russians did all sorts of stupid things, which we, of course, instantly emulated. Remember when we sent schoolchildren under their desks and put shelters in every building when we heard they were making a big drive on civil defense? And more recently, we find they were out rounding up psychics to divine things they couldn't photograph or chart. We spent \$20 million on catch up. Who's counting when it's for national security?

Aha, you will say, the secret document has lost its voodoo even with defense freaks. The Cold War is over. It may be, in fact, but in the heated psyches of certain susceptible lawmakers, it rages on. Actually, it's love. The Republicans cannot bear to end their long and passionate attachment to the military-industrial complex. They know they should break it off, but they are like Mitterrand and his mistress, who came to his grave site with their daughter, at his request. Star Wars is on shaky ground, but it means that the elephant does not have to say goodbye to its darling.

But why could they not finally face the inevitability of conversion? They sponsor madness like the Seawolf submarine, the B-2, just so they can keep the mistress afloat and rationalize that she is essential.

But if they set her to turning out snowplows, she will be happily and gainfully employed and citizens of the District of Columbia could look forward to going about their business as usual, the way they do in New Hampshire, even on days when two feet of snow is falling or the four feet already on the ground.

It could be that some hawks among those who are plotting against us will want to escalate to sterner measures to knock us out: yes, sleet, yes, freezing rain.