

who on the basis of the recent election appear to represent a majority of the voters and who believe they can work out their problems with the communists if America will leave Vietnam to the Vietnamese, etc.). They have not been tried because they require risk, willingness to admit mistakes, love, daring, new vision, mercy instead of vindication, reason instead of retaliation, more concern for saving lives than saving face, serious belief, that is, that the principles taught by the Savior have meaning and might work. But those solutions lie on the other side of repentance and not within the narrowly reasoned madness of the experts who rationalize the ambiguities and the refusal of most of us to take responsibility. That repentance is our only hope and the only good that can be salvaged from the tragedy of Vietnam.

## VIETNAM: JUST A WAR, OR A JUST WAR?

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Insurgent warfare in Vietnam has been a research subject for me since 1962.<sup>1</sup> From the first the complexity, the muddiness, the ambiguity of the situation was both impressive and depressing. Most of the time I have been ambivalent toward the U.S. position there, never enthusiastic about it. Now Eugene England's caricature of the war has forced me to distill out the essence of my position.

A detailed exposition of that position would be most desirable, but time is scarce, deadlines loom, and *Dialogue* is not the place for such a lengthy treatment, anyway; only for "a draft, nay but the draft of a draft," as Herman Melville put it.

England is wise in proposing that "we take time to re-examine our principles, look clearly at the best information, and then unflinchingly judge our actions and intentions by our principles—and face the consequences." Doing so, it appears that he and I disagree on what "our principles" are, that what he takes as "best information" I believe to be twisted or false at scores of points, and that we arrive at vitally differing judgments of the consequences. Hillam's position, by implication, is nearer mine, so I will comment but little on his paper.

### WHOSE PRINCIPLES?

At several points England follows the view which has become common in the Church in recent decades which identifies Mormons as thoroughgoing Americans and binds the burdens of the country on the Saints' backs. Since most members are indeed Americans this position is unavoidable to a degree, but it was not always so. In the first fifty years or so of our history the bond was far lighter, even to the point where other political arrangements looked more promising to us.

While we (who reside here) are indeed required to uphold the U.S. government, as will be shown below, we are few and need not assume more than proportionate responsibility for American policies which happen to be evil. Our prime responsibility is to build the Kingdom of God, not to drag the U.S. or the world,

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<sup>1</sup>This paper in no way represents the views of any of the sponsors of that research.

protesting, into the millennium by the scruff of its neck in order to act out our "saving remnant" role.

By "our principles" as a standard to judge the Vietnam war I mean the values laid down in the restored gospel, not American values as such.

#### "OUR PRINCIPLES"

What does God intend man's relation to governments to be? Doctrine and Covenants 134 teaches that he "holds men accountable for their acts in relation to them" for "the good and safety of society." Men's beliefs may not "prompt them to infringe upon the rights and liberties of others," nor to "justify sedition nor conspiracy." Governments are to make laws and administer them in equity and public interest." The "safety of society" and men's "defending . . . their government" may require armed forces to be maintained and wars to be fought.

The individual whose conscience, which is properly inviolable as far as *belief* is concerned, leads him to *action* in defiance of the laws gets little encouragement either from the principles already mentioned or from the command: "Let no man break the laws of the land, for he that keepeth the laws of God hath no need to break the laws of the land" (Doctrine and Covenants 58:22).

England's logic is that "If 'life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness' are inalienable rights, then certainly the right not to take another's life or liberty or opportunities for happiness—unjustly—is also inalienable." His problem, it seems to me, is with "unjustly." He assumes that it remains for the individual alone to judge whether another should be deprived of his life. Nephi was faced with that problem as he bent over the unconscious Laban. His problem was solved when he came to realize<sup>2</sup> that God judges justly and may command men to be the executors of his judgment: "The Spirit said unto me again: Slay him. . . . Behold the Lord slayeth the wicked to bring forth his righteous purposes" (1 Nephi 4:12-13). If, then, war is unjustifiable sometimes, how do we know when? That is the essence of England's, and all mankind's, dilemma.

The fundamental revelation on this question is Doctrine and Covenants 98, of which England says it "seems to teach extreme forbearance in the face of offense by an enemy." Indeed it does so, however, only up to a point. Of the patriarchs we are told, "I, the Lord, would give unto them commandment, and justify them in going out to battle against that nation, tongue or people, and I, the Lord, would fight their battles, and their children's battles, and their children's children's, until they had avenged themselves on all their enemies, to the third and fourth generation. Behold, this is an ensample unto all people, saith the Lord your God" (vs. 36-38). Instead of England's pacifistic interpretation, I see here the unchangingly just God Jehovah who commanded the extermination of the Canaanites—and the Christ who drove out the wicked from the temple in righteous anger.

Alma 24 tells the touching story of the people of Ammon who vowed not to kill again even at the expense of their lives. The poignant account seems to me to carry a message quite different from what England draws from it. As individuals those martyrs showed great faith, but read on. Had it not been for someone else,

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<sup>2</sup>O.W. Holmes felt that "The great act of faith is when man decides that he is not God."

Nephites (and later their own children, with the parents' consent), to protect them by force of arms, they would have been exterminated. It is not God's intention in these days that his people be exterminated, thus in the wicked world as it exists now, arms have to be borne.

Consequently it is mischievous and damaging to the society we live in for England to justify conscientious objection to military service "by those Mormons who are convinced a war is unjust." Rather should he expect them and urge them to shoulder their protective burden with the rest of their fellows "for the good and safety of society." The logic that allows each person free choice on each action to be undertaken by and for society lays a foundation for anarchy. ("If ye are not one, ye are not mine.")

Elder John A. Widtsoe addressed the issue of just war during World War II. His explanation is both wise and relevant:

A war can be called just, only when waged against sin and for the victory of truth; when it battles for the preservation of the principles which make up the plan of salvation, then warfare is righteous. If it is waged to defeat the attempt to enslave men under tyrannical rule, it becomes a war against sin. Such a war should be supported by all who love right above wrong; by all who adhere to the right of free agency, for which the heavenly battle was fought, long ago.

If it be desired to test the righteousness of a war, compare the issues with those of the divinely formulated plan for human happiness. No other test is needed. The standards are all there.

In such a spirit, with such understanding, the soldiers who go out from this Church must go into battle. They are fighting sin; they are fighting for truth; no quarter can be shown the opposing side. The soldiers of the enemy, whether willing or not, represent a sinful, destructive cause. They must be defeated at any cost, even that of their lives. Sin cannot be looked upon "with the least degree of allowance" (D&C 1:31). The opposing army must be viewed as a cause, not as a group of men.

The cause must be uppermost. The individual must recede in importance, until the cause for betterment has triumphed. Soldiers of a righteous cause, whether the warfare be great or small, must fix their attention upon that cause, and with determination fight for it. The fate of the enemy as individuals must be set aside in the battle for principle. If right wins, as it must and will, the enemy and all humanity will be blessed. . . .

Nevertheless, though sin can be given no quarter, nor those who seek to impose sin upon others, yet the soldier must recognize that the sinner, as an individual, remains a child of God, subject to repentance and the Lord's eternal mercy. Since he represents a sinful cause, it may be necessary to use against him the only weapons he recognizes, even though it means his destruction. The coin of Caesar is his; we must render it to him to win the Lord's cause. Yet we may hope and pray that on the endless, eternal journey, he may find his way to salvation. . . .

Usually, the best way to love our enemies is to keep the truth from being trodden into the ground by those who are led by evil, designing

leaders. Make truth and right triumphant, and love will bear rule among men. There is no other way.

All need to learn that love, as all other virtues, must be exercised with wisdom and in a common-sense manner. Hysteria and emotional outbursts . . . are not expressions of love, but of diseased conceptions of the right manner of loving our fellow men.<sup>3</sup>

#### "THE BEST INFORMATION"

The inimitable Louis Armstrong's recent observation as he told of Chicago in the '20's, should be taken to heart by more of the writers on Vietnam: "But hell, Man, I got to tell it like it was! I can't go around changing *history*!" England's picture was constructed from sources which more often than not come from axe-grinders. It is as though he had set out to learn about the "Danites" in Church history, but had read little except the shrill sensationalists on the one hand or *Essentials of Church History* on the other.

Most of his authorities know something about international affairs or U.S. history or some such academic topic,<sup>4</sup> but none of them know much about the Vietnamese people. Even astute Bernard Fall, perhaps because of his French background, rarely looked beneath the surface of History, with a capital H.

Notable by their absence from mention are Joseph Buttinger's classics, *The Smaller Dragon* and *Vietnam: Dragon Embattled* (2 volumes), anything by P.J. Honey on the North, Hickey's *Khanh Hau* (the only serious work on a village), Vo Nguyen Giap's or Truong Chinh's doctrinal volumes, *Reporter* magazine's *Why Vietnam?*, or the State Department's white papers, not to mention the tedious but enlightening FBIS transcripts of Radio Hanoi and Liberation Radio.

Even more crippling to understanding than the sources consulted is the approach, shared by nearly all writers in our language,<sup>5</sup> which describes Vietnamese phenomena in terms such as "free," "Junta," "country," "class," "despotic," and so on. The reader's response usually is, "Ah, now I begin to understand," when in fact, from that point on he understands less than before.<sup>6</sup> It is this cultural semantic barrier which makes almost meaningless a useful debate about "the facts" on Vietnam between two Americans.

Mormons may appreciate a little of the difficulty of cross-cultural translation of the kind I am talking about by listening to a philosopher try to explain Mormon theology to other philosophers in their technical jargon.

#### WHAT IT ISN'T LIKE IN VIETNAM

To point out the overstatements, oversimplifications, and plain errors which I find in England's indictment of what has happened in Vietnam is impossible here. It is only feasible to warn the pondering reader of both our pieces to beware by suggesting a few of the traps.

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<sup>3</sup>John A. Widtsoe, "Should a Soldier Love His Enemy?" *Evidences and Reconciliations*, (Bookcraft, Salt Lake City, 1943, 272-274.

<sup>4</sup>But some! Mary McCarthy's qualifications on any count are negligible, and General Ky might write on linguistics as well as Noam Chomsky on Vietnam.

<sup>5</sup>Frances FitzGerald's article in the August, 1967, *Atlantic* is a dramatic exception.

<sup>6</sup>"Ignorance," says J.K. Feibleman, "is not the lack of knowledge but the possession of false knowledge."

First, let me make clear that among the fictions on Vietnam are those which have poured forth from the State Department and the Defense Department. To be sure, there is a good deal of truth in what those agencies and the President have said, but as with an old-fashioned encyclopedia article on the Mormons, the separation of fact from fancy is almost impossible to a casual reader.

So with Brother England. Much of what he says has elements of truth in abundance. The problem is with the residue.

Ho Chi Minh was a wily, brave, intelligent agent who played to perfection the ruthless life-and-death game of plotting against both the French and his every possible rival. That he "earned" control of Vietnam thereby seems, however, an odd way to state his case to the right to govern. Nor is there any positive evidence that U.S. aid extended to him at any point in his career would have deflected him from his communist course.<sup>7</sup> The gamble might have been worthwhile in 1945 when there was little to gain with the French, but Monday morning quarterbacking is no more profitable in foreign affairs than in football.

Strictures about how despotic the South Vietnamese governments have been are also overplayed. At the worst of the Diem regime (1962-63) large numbers of political opponents were jailed or silenced, but considering the lack of a tradition of law and the newness of the government, some would say that it was noteworthy that more extensive repression was not practiced. Subsequent regimes have been among the world's least-efficient police states, almost to the point of comic opera. In fact, given the chameleon-like adaptability for which the Vietnamese are famous and the nepotism and "corruption" with which the entire country is laced (even known Viet Cong collaborators enjoy impunity under certain conditions), no adequate picture of conditions is conveyed by referring to "little freedom." "Feudalistic" would come only a shade closer. Even reading Terry and the Pirates helps little to suggest to Americans how richly the Vietnamese scene varies in those areas of life which *we* speak of using concepts like "power," "loyalty," "freedom," etc.

The "village polity" has not been destroyed by a malicious U.S./Saigon imposition, nor was such an entity "established" by Ho Chi Minh and the Viet Minh. Traditionally villages (particularly in the north and the central coast portions of the country) conducted their own affairs in conscious isolation from such central government as existed. As the isolation of the villages has broken down over the last century under French, then Viet Minh, Saigon and American influences, an inevitable decay has occurred in the old system of village power arrangements, as in all other villages in the world during modernization. In fact, the Viet Cong have "imposed" even more fully on traditional power forms, and more modernized

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<sup>7</sup>Fall's encapsulation of Ho's career is a valuable corrective to the "Ho-is-just-a-nationalist" believers. The man became in 1920 a "founding member of the French Communist Party, ten years before he was to found, in turn a Communist Party in his homeland. From then on, his careers as an international agent of Communism (he was to work successively for the French Communists; Russia; China; the Comintern in Europe, China, and Southeast Asia; and, finally, his own country's Communist apparatus) and as a Vietnamese 'nationalist' were to be so completely intertwined as to fool all but the most penetrating observers. . . . In actual fact, he has always been a dedicated Communist with Vietnamese reactions. . . . The fact that this was not understood by naive outsiders was certainly not his fault; his career as a Communist has been on record since 1920." (*The Two Vietnams. A Political and Military Analysis*, Rev. ed., Praeger, New York, 1964, 91.)

North Vietnam has incorporated its villages far more fully into national life through the Party apparatus.

England's statement that "There is absolutely no evidence that any of the minority governments we have supported in South Vietnam have been less repressive or more conducive to freedom (measured by *any* criteria) than Ho Chi Minh's government in North Vietnam" cannot be allowed to pass without comment. First, in a developing nation, and perhaps in any, one looks in vain for other than a minority government, unless it has been imposed by force and so maintained long enough, as in the North, that few conceive of any alternative and so "support" the regime by default. Second, the assertion reveals more of a lack of knowledge about the Democratic Republic of Vietnam—North Vietnam—than of knowledge about the South.<sup>8</sup>

The destructiveness of the war has been emphasized also. Yet some reporters have been struck with the opposite, the degree to which life in Vietnam seems not to be disturbed directly by the war activities. Some particular areas have been hit long and often, but usually those are precisely where there is good reason to conclude that the Viet Cong own the zone and benefit from the population. Survey data have shown that in many places villagers blame the Viet Cong's presence for drawing U.S. and South Vietnamese attacks rather than blaming our side; the many refugees, it should be noted, flee their homes to come to areas of U.S. control, almost never to the other side. Nor is defoliation so bad or so widespread as implied by England.<sup>9</sup> Areas so treated can usually be replanted almost immediately, while much of the area affected is thinly populated.

In fact, some assert that not only is the current war the most humane in history considering its scale, but that the Vietnamese population, made stoic by culture and a history of deprivation and exposure to the ravages of nature, feel less subjective distress at the war than many American observers do.

The last factual point there is space to consider in this section is the claim made often by the U.S. government that the war in the South is to a large degree originated at Northern instigation and carries on, thanks to assistance from the DRV. Bombing of the North has been justified as necessary to stop that flow of help. To the contrary, opponents of U.S. policy hold that the North has had little or nothing to do with the war in South Vietnam, that it is essentially an internal affair there.

There is little question that the rebellion began with Southern personnel and developed largely using local resources. North Vietnam did not give substantial aid in personnel and supplies (financing is another thing) until around 1962. Nevertheless there is thorough documentation of the fact that command of the movement and various forms of aid, small in volume but crucial, always came from across the 17th parallel. In the early years the infiltrators were all southerners, communists who had gone north after the Geneva Agreement, where they had spent the intervening years in training. By 1967 the cadres, the organiza-

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<sup>8</sup>The remedy could begin by reading chapters 8 and 9 of Fall's *The Two Vietnams*.

<sup>9</sup>Incidentally, the Nephites and Lamanites together found that food denial was the only successful method they could employ against their guerillas (3 Nephi 4:18-22). The whole episode with the "robbers" contains instructive parallels to Vietnam and the other so-called liberation wars today, not the least of which is the brazen propaganda approach of Giddianhi (3 Nephi 3:2-10).

tional backbone of the Viet Cong, were as often as not actual North Vietnamese, and major DRV army units were operating over as much as one-half of the South. Whether the chicken of sizable aid from the North came before or after the egg of U.S. escalation of forces is academic. Both trends were clear well in advance, and each influenced the other to come to pass.

The National Front for the Liberation of Viet Nam (NFLVN or NFL) has been strictly a front in which the People's Revolutionary Party (Communist Party) has always maintained exclusive control, acting for the parent Lao Dong (Communist) Party of the North. The Viet Minh had been run as a front for that party in the identical manner during the war against the French.

U.S. bombing of the DRV has never made more than slight sense as a way to reduce the trickle of aid moving southward, but it has had some potential strategic value as a way to exert leverage on the Hanoi leaders in hopes that they would signal their Viet Cong compatriots to stop the insurgency. (There are those who suspect that another reason for the bombing was to allow the Air Force and Navy to "get into the act" and share in the modernization which the war was allowing the Army to carry out.) Some insurgency could undoubtedly continue in the South even if the Northern leaders decided to end support, but the probable effect would be effectively to stop the conflict, just as the Greek rebellion stopped in 1948 when the Yugoslavs closed their border to the insurgents. That the DRV will make any such change in policy as a result of our military action, no matter the level, is vanishingly slight, however, for they seem dedicated.

#### *OUR (AMERICAN) ACTIONS AND INTENTIONS*

Let us examine first American aims in World War II, as a classic case. Most reasonable citizens would agree that they were two-fold: (1) to defend the nation in an immediate sense, in response to attack, and (2) to help re-shape a world in which American values and goals, a number of them shared broadly in the Western world, had been seriously threatened or attacked by totalitarian powers acting by means we considered intolerable.

Our actions in prosecution of the conflict were mostly destructive. Our authorized representatives had shot, stabbed, burned, corrupted, and smashed their way through scores of lands to the destruction of the bodies and souls of millions by the time the culminating atomic bombs were dropped on Japan. War was, and is, hell.

Did our tactics betray our intentions? Generally, no. L.D.S. prophets firmly supported the necessity to defend ourselves in whatever way was necessary to defeat the enemy. Along with most of us who were directly involved in the war, they lamented the pain, suffering, depravity, and death which resulted, but the end justified the means, broadly. Of course, some of the agony could have been avoided by individual or group decisions at various points without seriously hindering the outcome. Those responsible for that unnecessary pain, as is true in time of peace, must bear their own responsibility before God for it. I believe it was in this sense that President J. Reuben Clark, Jr., condemned the use of the bombs at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, for he had already approved the larger enterprise of the war many times.

In Vietnam our forces have used firearms, bombs, napalm, chemicals, torture,

lies, bribery and many more techniques in the prosecution of the war. But the horror of some observers at any particular one of these strikes me as somewhat absurd when other methods to the same end are accepted as kosher. Unless war is to be fought with marshmallows, people will be hurt and die. For the individual who finds himself on the battlefield, the only moral question open is the state of his conscience. If he uses no more of his destructive power than is reasonable in support of his cause and the protection of himself and companions, then his conscience should be free from guilt—though not of godly sorrow for the victims and for the necessity in which he is caught.<sup>10</sup>

We do not know the necessities of the situation in Vietnam, usually. It is exceedingly difficult to judge how much violence is required when on the scene; for those at a distance it is impossible.

Intermediate between the actions of men in the field of conflict and broad national intentions (the latter will be discussed below) is the problem of strategy. In Vietnam, even supposing that our goals are virtuous, are we pursuing the lines of action most likely to reach those goals? Should we be shooting anyone at all or, say, only sending money and schoolteachers, or perhaps diplomats?

I am convinced that American decision-makers have seriously erred in the past in choosing Vietnam strategies. Ray Hillam's article indicates one of these possibilities and at times in the past there were even more options. They were all basically "soft" (political, social, economic) rather than "hard" (military). With sufficient foresight the U.S. probably could have acted, between 1956 and 1958, or by 1961 at the latest, to bring about conditions within South Vietnam which would have made its viability very likely. Ngo Dinh Diem was no more difficult to deal with than Syngman Rhee in South Korea, yet see the genuine progress which our persistence and patience have helped bring about in the latter country. Yet there are points of no return, and by 1963 our policy-makers had let the opportunity slip by, through their lack of understanding of the nature of insurgency and of Vietnam. From that point on we were left no course but large-scale military action<sup>11</sup> if we were to keep the country from falling into the communist sphere.

Was that so important, England, in effect, asks? In his view U.S. policy has been dominated in recent years by "single-minded," "dogmatic and unthinking anti-communism." Were there alternatives? Was this a mistaken policy?

Anti-communism was a policy forced upon us by the realities of history, geopolitics, and the will to survive. It does no good denigrating the idea now without appreciating the circumstances in the late 1940's which crystallized it. In the absence of a well-articulated ideology in the U.S. at that time to back up our highly-pragmatic foreign policy which was developing in the face of Russian expansion, the equivalent of ideology had to be developed. Anti-communism, the

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<sup>10</sup>Compare the situation of Mormon, the military leader, as told in his portion of the Book of Mormon.

<sup>11</sup>The growing military influence in the United States, which President Clark warned about and which concerns England—and me—undoubtedly has played a part in shifting policy in Vietnam to harder and harder options. While we all owe a debt of gratitude to those who undertake the burden of defense of the nation on our behalf, the danger remains that the military's self-fulfilling prophecies, as in the anticipation of future war with China which their spokesmen are voicing, will increasingly channel our action. That we may already be irredeemably along the road to a war society is now hauntingly proposed in the "Orwellian Hoax," *Report from Iron Mountain on the Possibility and Desirability of Peace* (Dial Press, 1967).



result, rapidly took on the institutional trappings—myths, heroes, scapegoats, ritual, etc.—necessary to make it manageable and stable.

Many of us decry the excesses to which some of our friends have been carried by accepting uncritically this entire institutional apparatus as though it were revealed from God. Nevertheless the anti-communist thesis has been basically sound as a basis for American policy abroad for years. Despite the need to rephrase the content of this rationale in recent years, as the communists have themselves shifted position slightly, it remains an important element in the American and Mormon view of the world. President McKay has said: "The position of this Church on the subject of Communism has never changed. We consider it the greatest satanical threat to peace, prosperity, and the spread of God's work among men that exists on the face of the earth." A Franco or a Somoza or a Duvalier may actually be more repugnant to our feelings than a sage communist leader such as Krushchev, but they are more or less isolated in miserable little enclaves doomed by geopolitical realities to constitute dangers only to their own people. The communist bloc is fundamentally different.

What distinguishes the bloc is their aggressive expansiveness based on Marxist-Leninist ideology combined with the geopolitical position and resources to maintain the threat. To be sure, there are encouraging evidences of disputes in their camp, but the Vietnam war has made evident that it is still a dangerous camp. And the North Vietnamese leaders are camp followers, whether reluctantly or willingly.

Those leaders have made explicit that the Vietnam conflict is a test of the concept of "wars of national liberation." To fail that test, the U.S. would be exposing many places to spurred insurgency—Laos, Thailand, Malaya, Cambodia, Burma, India's Assam, the Philippines, Indonesia. All these have movements watching the test with great interest. Perhaps the domino theory is not discussed much anymore, as England says, but its more sophisticated forms remain valid.

Meanwhile, in our own country the costs of the war—not just in dollars and lives—threaten serious consequences of a different kind. But that is another matter, requiring discussion somewhere else.

### *THE CONSEQUENCES*

1. America has made many mistakes in Vietnam and, in a sense, has asked for the trouble it is in there by blindness in times past.

2. Nevertheless the consequences of defeat or withdrawal would be too grave to permit. We must ensure that South Vietnam becomes and remains a viable nation until its people are strong enough to choose without duress the course of action they prefer in relation to their Northern brothers.

3. South Vietnam's friends must share military duty with her to protect her; however, there is no such thing as "a military solution" to the war. Military action should be reduced as soon as possible to the lowest level which the real, not the myth-labelled, danger demands. Bombing of the North could be abandoned immediately with little hurt to our cause.

4. The U.S. should not intervene in other insurgencies with military force except under emergency conditions where all else has failed.

5. Church members have a general obligation to see the U.S. responsibilities through in Vietnam, but also to work for peaceful solutions to similar problems as far as that is possible in the future.

6. The world is in such a state that decisions regarding future U.S. action to meet communist or other inflammatory challenges will require greater wisdom than our leaders have shown in this case. Miscalculations can prove disastrous, given the increasingly complex national and international situations in which old decision rules are inadequate. We thank Thee, oh God, for a prophet. Help us understand his words.