

[REDACTED]
BLOOMINGTON, INDIANA

April 7, 1965

The Honorable Birch Bayh
United States Senate
Washington 25, D. C.

Dear Birch:

I am sorry that the loss of several days' time last week on account of grippe has prevented my writing you further in response to your letter of March 24. I have read with interest and appreciation the copy you sent me of your remarks on March 16, dealing with the Viet Nam situation. They constitute the best statement I have read in support of the Administration's course, and I honestly believe that the Government's present policy would seem more acceptable than it now does to public opinion in this country and abroad if it were justified in your manner rather than in the utterly self-righteous, unfeeling manner adopted by Administration spokesmen.

Nevertheless, as you anticipated, I still find myself in considerable disagreement with you and with the course that is being followed. For me, your analysis breaks down at two points. The first is in the historical portion, where it fails to recognize the aggressiveness and disregard of the 1954 agreement in past American policy, and the very considerable justification which people elsewhere in the world consequently have for viewing the United States as an aggressor. These questionable features of American policy should, in my view, be acknowledged and faced at the same time as the sins of the other side are pointed out.

The second point at which I differ with you relates to the conclusion that the Communists are acting upon a "desire to conquer the world," and under all circumstances "cannot be trusted." It seems to me, on the contrary, that the Communist powers have on the whole been behaving discreetly in recent years, have displayed considerable willingness to compromise, and do, like other powers, live up to agreements which are in their interest. Of course they intend to prevail everywhere and do not scruple as to means; but they seem to recognize their limitations; and they are human beings.

The wise policy for the United States, then, would be to exploit skillfully the favorable state of ^{world} affairs that exists, in order to produce a basis for adjustment and, in the meanwhile, to

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stand for decency and work for international substitutes for military force in settling issues. Instead, we proclaim our righteousness, insist on judging others unilaterally, and act on the philosophy that only the use of force (no matter what kind) is effective, and that agreement really is impossible. Down this road, it seems to me can only lie disaster.

What I have said implies a vast lack of confidence in the kind of judgment that is determining our policy. I regret that I possess this feeling about an Administration which, in other matters and by original anticipation in this one, I have supported whole-heartedly. How can one feel confidence in the face of past glaring errors in estimating the military situation; Secretary McNamara's original specious explanation, now abandoned, of our bombing attacks as a reprisal against specific aggressive action on the ground; and, most recently, the horrible immorality and psychological blunder of employing gas warfare? As to the latter, I do not overlook the references to tear gas. Nausea gas was used as well; and the essential point is, in any event, that any kind of gas used by armed forces against an enemy is a form of warfare which slides easily ~~over~~ into the use of poison. I feel deeply concerned that my government should be the one power in the world which since World War I has visibly pushed military action in the direction of this and related kinds of deterioration of methods of combat.

The truth is, I think, that Defense and State Department and C.I.A. personnel whose judgment and spirit are alien to our best traditions are determining our course and threatening the future of mankind so menacingly that they should be fought hard on all fronts and from every quarter; regardless of partisan political considerations or the factor of short-run national face-saving.

Best personal regards.

Sincerely yours,

P.S. - I am mailing this letter after President Johnson's Johns Hopkins talk, which certainly strikes out in a new direction. One can only hope that it does not come too late. Even if it does, it improves the record for future reference.