

## Late Night Thoughts at the End of a War

*By Eugene England*

Letter to the Editor of *Dialogue* that England wrote reflecting on war and peacebuilding following the first Gulf War.

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I KEEP THINKING of the soldier, somewhere in the desert, being interviewed on TV just as the ground war was to begin. I think of his earnest face and voice: “I want to do this now, so we won’t have to come back and do it five years from now, so my *son* won’t have to do it.” I hope he is one of those now being welcomed by his wife and son. I rejoice in his safety and thank God that there were only a hundred or so Americans killed. I wonder what to say to God about the 100,000 or so Iraqis killed.

And I wonder if that soldier has heard the diplomats already talking about the problems that remain, the storm clouds gathering again: Iran and Syria jockeying for position to fill the vacuum left by Iraq, Middle East countries lining up to buy our new weapons that proved so terribly effective (\$38 billion in orders already). I wonder if he hears expert witnesses saying that the Middle East is more unstable now than it was *before* the war, that the long-range problems that helped produce Saddam Hussein—the Arab-Israeli conflict and the gulf between oil-rich sheiks and the Arab masses—are not solved, perhaps made worse.

I want to be one to help keep that soldier’s sons—and daughters—from war, so late at night I think about what we can do differently next time. And this is what I think: I believe Christ and the modern prophets when they claim that peace can be created, but neither through violence nor through passivity: “Resist not evil, but . . . love your enemies” (Matt. 5:39–44). “Be not afraid of your enemies. . . . Renounce war and proclaim peace” (D&C 98:14, 16). “To all who seek a resolution to . . . an international difficulty among nations, we commend the counsel of the Prince of Peace, ‘Love your enemies’” (First Presidency Christmas Message, 1981). “Our assignment is affirmative . . . to take the gospel to our enemies, that they might no longer be our enemies” (Spencer W. Kimball, *Ensign*, June 1976).

Clearly the only way to do away with wars is to do away with enemies—not by killing them (because the chaos and suffering and injustices of war simply cause more enemies to rise up, even when we “win”), but by *changing* them through the power of active Christian love. We must “take the gospel” to them—through loving service, intelligent aid, morally consistent and peaceful efforts to heal differences and settle grievances, and personal examples of patience and nonviolence—in preparation to preach the specifics of the restored gospel.

Our nation hasn't done that in the past: We supported or acquiesced in the imperialist and then oil-hungry injustices by France and England that created ongoing inequities and grievances in the Middle East but have not consistently used our wealth, our oil-buying power, or our influence to find peaceful resolutions. We have supported the Jews' quest for a homeland, with money and weapons, but not the equally morally demanding Palestinian quest for a homeland. I believe God would have blessed us in positive, consistent purposes, and thus we could have built a solid foundation for peace in the Middle East. Instead we have sold billions of dollars of weapons to all sides in the quarrels, pitting one against the other and constantly changing sides—for advantage, not principle.

I think of that soldier, and I wonder what we will do if we fail as a nation to use the Christ-like means for peace and then are faced again with an aggressive dictator like Saddam Hussein, "another Hitler." Can we avoid sending that soldier to war again? The scriptures and prophets suggest that there *are* conditions that justify going to war. For instance, President David O. McKay called World War II a just war, and he cited as one "possible" condition, "defense of a weak nation . . . being unjustly crushed" (April Conference, 1942). But there are *other* conditions that the prophets and scriptures have set: using every peaceful means possible first, including genuine negotiation; not engaging in revenge or punishment, and *never*, as President McKay insisted, attempting "to establish a new order of government . . . no matter how better the government."

Our war with Iraq met the first condition, but I do not believe it met the second, and it is right now failing the others. We have *never* offered to negotiate (which means *some* compromise) with Saddam. We simply stated what we called our "unconditional" (non-negotiable) demands. When Saddam *tried* to negotiate on August 12—including offering to leave Kuwait—we made no response, and President Bush simply dismissed as "outrageous" the efforts, just before the ground war began and during its last few days, of Jordan, Russia, and finally Iraq to negotiate. He did so, I believe, because he had decided to go beyond the UN resolutions and the implied mandate of Congress (which was simply to free Kuwait) and to destroy Saddam's army and government and, if possible, Saddam himself. The result was the destruction of roads and bridges and water supplies all over Iraq and finally the killing of tens of thousands of Iraqi soldiers as they were retreating along the highways north out of Kuwait. Iraq is left in chaos, with rebellions and disease continuing to kill thousands, a nation likely to remain, like Lebanon or Cambodia, politically unstable and constantly violent.

I think about that soldier and how to keep his sons and daughters at peace, and I believe we can do so by thinking about how we could have avoided sending him to war *this* time. The responsibility is *ours*, not that soldier's, who did and risked what we asked—and is rightly welcomed home as a patriot. *We* can think about being willing to patiently negotiate, to use non-lethal, economic and moral sanctions in the face of aggression, and to avoid the spirit of war euphoria, of revenge, even blood-thirstiness, that the scriptures warn is a constant danger, even in a just war—a spirit that always plants the seeds of future conflict and causes the spirit of God to withdraw (see Mormon 3). Jordan's King Hussein has testified that in his efforts to

negotiate Iraq's withdrawal from Kuwait immediately after the August 2 invasion, he became convinced that Saddam originally meant only a show of power to force Kuwait to take seriously his grievances (border incursions, including taking his oil, and desire for a port on the Gulf). But when Egypt and Saudi Arabia joined the U.S. in a coalition against Saddam, he responded to force with force—annexed and brutalized Kuwait and escalated his own rhetoric and intentions. Whether or not this is true, we will perhaps never know, but it doesn't matter because we refused to negotiate and eventually went to war.

Why *should* we be more patient next time, at the risk of a Hitler later causing a much greater war? Because, as President Hugh B. Brown of the British Mission wrote in 1937, in the very face of Hitler's increasing aggression, "War never settles anything satisfactorily. . . . No one could with consistency maintain that [Christ], in any sense, favoured the resort to arms" (*Millennial Star*, 4 Nov. 1937). The next year he unreservedly praised the Lord for blessing Chamberlain in his "courageous" application of "Christian" principles in dealing with Hitler at Munich (*Millennial Star*, 6 Oct., 1938). President Brown never changed his judgment about Chamberlain's actions in trying every possible means to avoid war, even though they ultimately failed.

Richard Bushman has written, in an essay on President Brown, "Whatever was lost by [Chamberlain's] compromise in 1938 was regained many times over after war broke out by our virtually unanimous sense that we had done all in our power to prevent hostilities. . . . The partisans of Christian love, though slow to fight back, are more likely to enjoy the strength of moral unity [and, I would add, the hope for God's blessings] when they come at last to battle" (*Dialogue*, Summer 1988, p. 59).

The time to have stopped Hitler, *without war*, was at the end of the *First World War*, when the Allies punished Germany, demanded reparations (as President Bush is now demanding of Iraq), and isolated it in a long depression that produced the chaos and resentments that sustained Hitler's rise to power. A Marshall Plan then, rather than *after* WWII, could, I believe, have prevented that terrible war. And economic aid, backing up serious negotiations and continuing nonviolent sanctions until they succeed, is our only chance for peace in the Middle East.

We have used over \$70 billion in the Gulf War, much more than it would have taken to meet *all* of Hussein's legitimate grievances and also to *pay* for a Palestinian homeland. Now, when we have won a great victory, our greatest danger is the pride President Benson warned about two years ago and our greatest need the mercy President Hinckley pled for last year.

Late at night, thinking about that soldier, I read and reread a passage from the Book of Mormon, which was written to us about our sins, not to Saddam Hussein about his: "Man shall not smite, neither shall he judge; for judgment is mine, saith the Lord. . . . Why do ye . . . suffer the hungry, and the needy . . . to pass by you, and notice them not? Yea, why do ye build up your secret abominations to get gain, and cause that widows should mourn before the Lord, and also orphans to mourn . . . and the blood of their fathers and their husbands to cry unto the Lord from the ground?" (Mor. 8:20,39–40).

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