

Santayana's warning that those who fail to read history are condemned to repeat it is brought to mind by The Post's editorial of April 29, which explained the unlikelihood of the United States extending aid to the Provisional Revolutionary Government of Vietnam in the near future.

Beginning with Woodrow Wilson's policy of waiting watchfully for a favorable change in the government of Mexico, the United States during this century has too often denied diplomatic recognition and full economic intercourse to nations with regimes somehow unpalatable to us. The most notorious example, of course, was the refusal of the United States to recognize the Soviet Union for the first sixteen years of its existence, a diplomatic insult that gave sustenance to Stalin's fears of capitalist encirclement.

In 1949, the same barren policy was applied to Communist China. Eastern Europe, too, is studded with states towards whom the United States remained diplomatically hostile during the formative stages of their governments.

In virtually every instance, the United States has ultimately been

forced to normalize relations, but the period of initial American antipathy has made the process of normalization far more protracted and painful than it would have been had we simply accepted the fait accompli at first. Such acceptance was in fact the consistent policy of the United States between 1789 and 1915.

Despite the failures of non-recognition and despite the meaningful nineteenth century tradition of quick recognition of de facto governments, we seem perversely determined to slam shut the door in the face of whatever government emerges in South Vietnam. Since force and diplomacy failed to yield the type of government we wanted there, we ought to maturely signal our acceptance of the limits of our power. The best way to do so would be to extend recognition and offer humanitarian aid to the government that emerges in the next few weeks.

Kenneth J. Hagan,

Annapolis.

The writer is a Post-Doctoral Fellow, Division of Naval History, Smithsonian Institution, and regularly an assistant professor of history, U.S. Naval Academy.