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STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

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VIETNAM

Excerpt from a Statement by the Honourable Paul Martin, Secretary of State for External Affairs, in the House of Commons on March 18, 1968.

...There can be no differences of opinion about the urgency of the need to help bring this terrible ordeal to an end. We believe the only way to do so is through negotiations that are directed toward the establishment of a durable and stable settlement which both sides can accept and live with.

The immediate problem continues to be what it has been for some time; it is as simple to formulate as it has proven difficult to solve in practice. It is the problem of how to get the negotiations started and how to establish a sufficient measure of confidence between the two sides to enable them to sit down together and start discussing the basic political issues at stake in Vietnam, instead of bringing their military weight to bear on them. This is the aspect of the problem to which the Government has directed the highest priority and urgency. It has seemed to us that a country such as Canada, which has had prolonged experience with the problems of that country and which has ready access to both sides, might well be able to help bridge the gap between the battlefield and the conference room.

No third party, of course, can compel the two sides to change their positions and policies in order to take certain actions or refrain from others. The most we can hope to do is encourage the two sides to reconsider their positions, to clarify ambiguities and to see, in this process of discussion and examination, whether any element of common ground exists.

In my view, there have recently been three major developments which have had a bearing on the diplomatic and military impasse which we face at the moment. I refer to the formulation of the position of the United States by the President at San Antonio on September 29 last, to the formulation of the North Vietnamese position by the Foreign Minister of that country on December 29 and, finally, to the activities on the ground in South Vietnam over the past few weeks. Although separated by a matter of months, these events must be looked at together as essential components in the existing problem.

There is no doubt in my mind, and in that of the Government, that the bombing of North Vietnam is a key factor in the total equation for the de-escalation