

I asked Prime Minister Pham Van Dong which he regarded as having the highest priority, his country's desire for peace or the reunification of Viet-Nam as a whole. He replied that the question of priorities did not arise as strict observance of the agreement would lead to peaceful reunification. It was clear from these conversations that both North and South Viet-Nam expected different and in some respects contradictory results.

This was a brief but very intense exposure to the facts of life in the Commission and to the attitudes of those most directly concerned. There can be no doubt that all of us on this visit came back with at least one common impression: that was that the Commission was not performing the tasks assigned to it under the cease-fire agreement -- and this, in spite of the very considerable efforts of the Canadian delegation under Ambassador Gauvin to make it work.

We received another message in several of the discussions in Indochina: that we should not be too exercised as to whether or not the Commission was functioning as it was intended. A number of people suggested to us that there was a very different but quite vital role for the Commission which is nowhere hinted at in the texts of the Agreement or the Protocols. This was to provide an international presence which would be seen as an indication of the continued involvement of the world community in the Viet-Nam situation. In other words, although the Commission may not be indispensable for the purposes of the cease-fire agreement, its absence would be taken as an indication that the agreement lacked world support and consequently our withdrawal could become a further destabilizing psychological factor in an already very fragile situation.

And so for these reasons we decided to remain in the Commission for a further period of 60 days.

We have made it clear, however, and indeed this was one of our earliest conditions of service, that we would leave or otherwise modify our deployment in the field at any time if the Parties to the agreement demonstrated by their actions that they no longer regarded themselves as bound by it.

Resumption of large-scale hostilities or any action tantamount to a direct denial by the Parties of their obligations under the agreement would, in my view, relieve Canada of further responsibility to the ICCS.

I am not predicting that the arduous and skilful work which led to the agreement will be nullified by an early escalation of hostilities. The present situation is an obvious improvement over the situation that existed before January 28. The Commission had its role to play in these developments and if it did nothing else but help to provide the framework within which these accomplishments were made possible that has been, up to the present, ample justification for our role.

In concluding these comments on Viet-Nam let me make one general observation affecting bilateral relations between your country and mine -- and it is this. It seems to me to be in the interests of both our countries that as a member of the ICCS Canada should be -- and should appear to the world to be -- an impartial, objective observer, reporting the facts as we see them, even if this may mean that from time to time we reach conclusions critical of the United States or its ally, the Republic of Viet-Nam. It is no service to the cause of international peace