

by North Vietnam as a pre-condition to such talks, although the four points would almost certainly figure prominently on any resulting agenda.

To summarize, therefore, the North Vietnamese position would appear to be as follows. If the United States ceases the bombing and all other military action against North Vietnam permanently and without condition, the Government of North Vietnam would be prepared to enter into direct talks with representatives of the United States. The further information we have suggests that such talks could be initiated within a reasonable interval after the cessation of the bombing, such an interval being presumably required by the North Vietnamese side to give effect to their argument that the holding of talks would not, in fact, be regarded as a "condition" of the cessation of the bombing.

I think it is only fair that I should set out the United States reaction to this proposition, which I understand to be as follows: As regards the matter of talks, the United States Government would be prepared to enter into such talks with representatives of the Government of North Vietnam at any time and without any prior condition whatsoever. As regards the matter of a reduction in the scale of hostilities, the United States would be prepared to discuss such a reduction on a basis of reasonable reciprocity. What the United States is not prepared to do, so far as I understand it, is to discontinue for good what they regard as a significant aspect of their military activity in Vietnam in return for a mere undertaking on the North Vietnamese side to enter into bilateral talks.

Perhaps I should say something at this point about the recent series of proposals for putting a halt to the conflict in Vietnam which have been put forward by the Secretary-General of the United Nations. Some 13 months ago, the Secretary-General first developed a proposition which envisaged the following three steps: a cessation of the bombing of North Vietnam by the United States; a mutual de-escalation on the ground in South Vietnam by both sides; and a negotiation involving all the parties which are actually fighting in Vietnam -- that is to say, including the Viet Cong.

As far as I know, the Government of North Vietnam does not object to the first and third points of the Secretary-General's proposal. To my knowledge, however, they have not at any time specifically endorsed the second point, which envisaged a mutual de-escalation in South Vietnam.

The reply of the United States to these proposals was made by Mr. Goldberg in the General Assembly on September 22. As I interpret that reply, it expressed the willingness of the United States to stop the bombing of North Vietnam as a prior and unilateral act on the understanding, which could be conveyed either in public or in private, that there would be a reasonable measure of military reciprocity on the other side within a given interval of time. The United States also reiterated at that time that they did not regard the problem of affording the Viet Cong an opportunity to make their views heard at any future conference as insurmountable.