

It is always difficult to find a starting point for any development in the Vietnamese war. Official announcements and military action have seldom coincided. The decision to bomb North Viet Nam was made public months before the first air strikes were made. Conciliatory statements on the diplomatic front frequently have been accompanied by an escalation of the military effort.

But if a starting point for the present U.S. initiative is to be chosen, then December 9 is the most logical date. On that day President Lyndon Johnson promised to exhaust every peace effort "before other hard steps are taken". This was followed by the Christmas ceasefire and the suspension of bombing against North Viet Nam.

Now, for the first time, the United States is pursuing a policy both militarily and diplomatically aimed at bringing the war to the conference table.

The pause in the bombing of the North has entered its eighth day. On the ground, the 30-hour Christmas ceasefire failed to hold as the Viet Cong renewed the offensive. The Communists, however, have offered to observe a four-day ceasefire over the Vietnamese lunar New Year, which is celebrated January 20-23. There is every indication that the air war against the North will not be resumed as long as the diplomatic offensive shows any chance of succeeding.

This offensive is taking many forms, more perhaps than have been made public. On Wednesday, Ambassador-at-Large W. Averell Harriman, considered the most likely candidate to represent the United States at a Viet Nam peace conference, flew to Warsaw for talks with Premier Wladyslaw Gomulka and Foreign Minister Adam Rapacki. Poland, along with Canada and India, is a member of the International Truce Supervisory Commission in Indo-China. Today, Mr. Harriman meets President Tito of Yugoslavia, one of the countries which has been trying to arrange peace talks. This weekend, he goes on to Paris to confer with Foreign Minister Maurice Couve de Murville.