

here, having just come back from attending a meeting of NATO ministers in London, that a strong and viable Alliance seems to me just as relevant to the circumstances of today as it was in the days of its inception 16 years ago.

If this covert aggression is not met -- if it is not shown to be unprofitable -- in Vietnam, then there is no doubt in my mind that it will have to be met elsewhere. At the same time, I am aware of the very serious risk of escalation and wider involvement if the conflict in Vietnam were to be prolonged. To minimize that risk, we have repeatedly appealed to all concerned for the exercise of restraint. The fact remains that the situation carries a real threat to world peace and that it must be brought under early and effective control.

We do not believe there is any alternative to a peaceful, negotiated solution to the conflict that is being waged in Vietnam. That is why we have welcomed the readiness of the United States, as expressed by President Johnson on April 7 and reiterated on a number of occasions since then, to enter into negotiations without preconditions. I deeply regret that there has been no positive response to that declaration from the other side so far.

The first priority now is to bring the two sides to the negotiating table. We and others have made suggestions with the object of facilitating progress towards a negotiation. I am bound to say, however, that all these suggestions are predicated on a willingness on both sides to contemplate the possibility of a negotiated solution. And of that there is, as yet, no evidence on the part of the authorities in either Hanoi or Peking.

I speak of a negotiation because it now seems obvious that a new solution will have to be found in that area. While one may return to the principles of the original cease-fire agreement of 1954, there will have to be some form of negotiation to work out a formulation of those principles which can be applied in present circumstances. And there will certainly have to be some credible arrangements to guarantee the right of all peoples in the area to live at peace under governments of their own choice and free from outside interference or fear of aggression. That is why we have expressed the view that it would probably be desirable, when the time comes, to build some form of international mechanism into the terms of any ultimate settlement.

The element of free choice seems to me an indispensable part of any such settlement. It is inherent in "the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples", to which we have subscribed in the United Nations Charter. A negotiation cannot simply be used to cover up the take-over of one part of Vietnam by the other. That would not be a negotiation. It would be a capitulation. And it is wholly unrealistic to think that either side would accept such a conclusion to the present conflict.

The situation in Vietnam is one of the most serious we have faced since the end of the Second World War. I have already referred to the direct risks which a continuation of that situation could involve. I am glad to say that there is some evidence on both sides that these risks are appreciated. But developments in Vietnam are also having their effect on the practical efforts we have been making in a number of directions to lessen world tensions and widen the area of understanding.