

unmindful of the position of the Government of North Vietnam, which is that they cannot accept any proposal which treats both sides on a basis of strict equity because this would ignore the factor of responsibility for the present conflict as they see it.

If this approach or any variant of it were to commend itself to the parties, the International Commission might have a special role to play in translating these general ideas into concrete proposals and, in due course, providing the required guarantees that they were being properly implemented on both sides. I would also like to point out to the Committee that this particular approach is one which the Commission might be fully justified in putting to the parties and to the other members of the Geneva Conference who have an obvious interest in any proposal designed to ensure that the Agreement on the cessation of hostilities in Vietnam is respected.

There is one further point which I should like to leave with the Committee. We have said consistently that we regard a purely military solution of the conflict in Vietnam as neither practicable nor desirable. I would like to take that proposition one step further today and say this: On the basis of all the knowledge I have of the proposals that have been made and the initiatives that have been taken over the past 16 months, I am doubtful if it will be possible to solve the purely military aspects of this conflict without at the same time tackling the political questions which lie at the root of it. As I have already suggested, this applies to the approach I have outlined to the Committee, as it would to any other approach to this issue.

The simple fact is that these aspects are interrelated and that progress on one front may well depend on progress being made on the other. I am inclined to think that the recent experience of the Secretary-General bears out this impression. On the face of it, a stand-still cease-fire does not look as if it should involve any inordinate problems for either side if there was a willingness in principle to stop the fighting. On second thought, however, it will appear that such a cease-fire does pose problems for both sides to the point where one side cannot envisage such a move being made without prior discussion, if not negotiation, while the other cannot, apparently, see it being made at all in present circumstances. It is my considered view that, apart from any possible military problems, there are political problems posed by this proposal which are such as to have a bearing on the terms on which the conflict may eventually be resolved.

The underlying political issue, as I see it, are the ultimate political arrangements in South Vietnam and the willingness of others to allow those to be worked out by the South Vietnamese people without interference from any quarter. One aspect of this issue, of course, is the status of the Viet Cong. What is at stake here is not really their representation at any eventual conference-table but the terms of their participation within the ultimate political structure of the country. These are the really crucial points which will have to be resolved and on which, I am afraid, the position of the parties are as far apart as ever.