

I found the attitudes of the leaders of the Republic of Vietnam very straightforward. They have no illusion that the Commission would be able to discharge effectively the responsibilities set out in the Paris agreement. I explained frankly to the Vietnamese, both in the South and in the North, that the composition of the Commission made it extremely unlikely that the Commission would ever reach a finding unfavourable to the North or to its allies in the South. At the same time, I said that Canada would not hesitate to support a finding detrimental to the position of the Republic of Vietnam where such a finding corresponded with the facts. South Vietnamese leaders acknowledged this. But for them the important thing was to bring all points of view into the open.

In the North, the political leaders replied to all of our questions by referring us to the terms of the Paris agreement. They regarded this as sacrosanct and, like their counterparts in the South, declared they intended to abide by it.

I asked Prime Minister Pham Van Dong which he regarded as having the higher priority, his country's desire for peace or the reunification of Vietnam 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 Vietnam 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 ceasefire 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 Vietnam situation. In other words, although the Commission may not be indispensable for the purposes of the ceasefire 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.