

right circumstances, there was not a role which it could play toward bringing about a peaceful settlement of the issue there. This is the direction in which our thinking has been tending since last December, and it is to this aspect of the Viet Nam problem that I want to turn.

The first question that arises is why it should be thought that the International Commission might be able to make a positive contribution to a solution of the Viet Nam conflict. The Commission was brought into being by the Geneva Conference of 1954. We have served on that Commission since that time, along with India and Poland and, as well, we have served on the comparable commissions in Cambodia and Laos. In a sense, the Commission may be said to represent the continuing interest of the Geneva powers in the Viet Nam situation. It is now clear that when the time comes any negotiation of the Viet Nam conflict is likely to be conducted within the Geneva frame of reference. It is natural, therefore, to think of the Commission as an instrument which might be brought into play in preparing the ground for an eventual negotiation.

The question has been raised in our contacts with interested governments whether there is anything in the Geneva cease-fire agreement which confers on the Commission a mandate on the lines we have been considering. I must say that on a strictly legal interpretation of that agreement the answer must be in the negative. But, I do not think anyone who is concerned about the course of developments in Viet Nam would feel justified in looking at this issue only in legalistic terms. We have never looked at it that way. We have never thought of the commission as possessing a role purely on the basis of powers extended to it under the Geneva agreement of 1954; nor, on the other hand are we thinking of any fresh mandate being conferred on the Commission either by the Geneva powers acting collectively or by the Soviet Union and Britain acting jointly in their capacities as co-chairmen of the Geneva conference.

We have informed the Soviet Union; we have informed the United Kingdom government; we have informed other governments of our views as to the role that the Commission might assume, but we have not thought it was necessary to get their authority for making our suggestion. What we have had in mind is something modest and informal; we continue to believe however that our proposal has potential merit. Our proposal was really in the nature of a good offices assignment which would be undertaken not necessarily by the Commission as such but by the three Commission powers acting as sovereign nations, which have been associated with the Viet Nam problem for the past 11 years, and which have established a fair record of co-operation between them. It is our view that the knowledge and experience of the Viet Nam problem of the three Commission powers and the ready access they command to all the interested parties would make the Commission powers a particularly suitable group to carry forward the search for peace in Viet Nam. This is the common objective of the three members of the Commission.

There have been notable attempts made to try and bring about peaceful negotiation in Viet Nam: attempts made by the British; by a good offices body of the Commonwealth; by individual intermediaries, some publicly known and some not; by concerted action on the part of a group of countries, including