

that both sides are now firmly committed to a willingness to negotiate, but I am afraid that this does not carry us very far forward, as is tragically apparent by the unbroken continuation of the hostilities.

Both sides seem to envisage rather different objectives for the talks that are to follow a cessation of bombing. For the North, the objective is to bring about the total and early withdrawal of the United States from Vietnam. For the United States, the objective is to secure South Vietnam from Northern military pressure, so that political change can come about peacefully and through the exercise of free choice. Each side is well aware of the other's objectives, which at the moment seem mutually incompatible.

Hanoi seems to see an unreciprocated cessation of the bombing not only as a necessary pre-condition to undertaking talks but as a gesture by the United States symbolizing the beginning of the process of total cessation of all American military action in the South - and, indeed, total withdrawal from the scene.

We know the conditions which were laid down by the United States at the Manila conference with regard to its intention to withdraw after six months, given the existence of certain conditions.

For their part, the United States and South Vietnam have insisted on some measure of military restraint being exercised by the North - once again, not as a final answer to the problem but as representing a North Vietnamese realization that its military objectives cannot be met, and that its objectives cannot be met by military means.

We must maintain the Commission presence in Vietnam. This is first of all our international obligation, and we must be alive to any possible move which will help find a way out of the present impasse. This is our political obligation. The Government accepts these obligations and, as it has done in the past, it will continue to play an active role in any search for peace in Vietnam.

The immediate problem remains what it has been - how to get negotiations started. I reiterate that this is a matter of the greatest urgency and that a cessation of the bombing will clearly have a key significance in moving the problem in that direction. But the intractability of the problem is demonstrated by the fact that the bombing has not been halted, that military restraint is not being shown and that talks have not been entered into. This suggests that future efforts to narrow the gap between the two sides may have to be directed to matters of political substance as well as to the terms and conditions for a beginning of talks. We are urgently examining this aspect of the matter at this particular moment.

I have never believed that stalemate and rigidity are adequate grounds for a "do-nothing" posture and abandoning all efforts because past endeavours have proved unrewarding.