

I very much regret having to report to the House that the reply I have received from the Foreign Minister of North Vietnam, together with Mr. Dier's report on their discussions, does not suggest much flexibility in Hanoi's attitude toward factors, other than the cessation of bombing of the North, which clearly have to be taken into account if there is to be any realistic hope that ensuing talks are to have any purpose and meaning.

Speaking before the United Nations General Assembly last September, I urged that the bombing be stopped as a matter of first priority in the search for peace. I saw this, and I urged that it could be considered, not as a sure-fire formula for instant peace but as a deliberate and calculated risk. To break out of the impasse prevailing at that time it seemed to me that the United States might make the first significant move, not as a prelude to capitulation but as a gesture which might encourage the other side to respond in kind, as indeed the North will have to do. It might then be possible for other countries, in the new circumstances which would then prevail, to mobilize pressure for corresponding concessions by the North.

I believe that that was a sensible position to take and one which seemed to me to correspond to the facts as we knew them. I still believe that the bombing will have to be stopped as a matter of first priority, since I think it will be impossible for North Vietnam to appear to be responding to military pressure. All the information we have received from Canadian soundings, and from sources other than our own contacts in Hanoi, only serves to convince me of the validity of this view.

Whether future soundings and exploratory discussions will prove that some form of bargain can be struck I cannot predict. For the moment, the available evidence is clear about the significance to be attached, from the point of view of North Vietnam, to a cessation of the bombing of North Vietnam. But if the refusal of North Vietnam to appear to respond more flexibly under continuing military duress is clear, it is no less important to bear in mind the difficulty that would be faced by the United States in modifying its requirements as a direct result of the other side's spectacular military thrusts.

If the United States was not prepared to take the calculated risk we and others urged them to take at the time when the pattern of military activity on the ground was more or less constant, one cannot be too hopeful about fresh initiatives at this particular moment, but the urgent necessity to break through the stalemate on negotiations has not lessened.

There is one potential danger which must be recognized. If talks are entered into with some hope of reaching agreement and are then broken off under the pressure of one side or the other attempting to score a point by a sudden and suicidal military push, it would be all the more difficult to get them started again. A situation such as this could also be an open invitation to further escalation. This would be regrettable.

Despite the clarification which appears to have taken place in respect of the formally-stated positions of the two sides, the immediate prospects for negotiations can scarcely be described as encouraging, though we do not take this as any reason why we should not persist, as other countries are doing, in trying to encourage negotiations which might lead to peace. It is true