

of the conflict. In the San Antonio statement of last September, the President of the United States announced a new United States approach to the cessation of bombing. He said that the United States would be prepared to stop the bombing if this would lead promptly to productive talks, on the assumption that North Vietnam would not take advantage of this significant measure of restraint on the U.S.A. side to increase its relative military strength in the South. The President's position evidently was formulated to avoid a situation in which, with the bombing stopped and the talks proceeding, the other side would be able to exert renewed and unimpeded military pressure on the ground in the South if the talks did not progress to their liking.

In setting out this approach the President had not abandoned his earlier insistence on the other side making some contribution toward bringing about military de-escalation. He did, however, present it in a flexible way which it was hoped might make it easier for Hanoi to make a gesture toward meeting this requirement without totally abandoning their forces in the South. As I understand the situation, this continues to be the basic position of the United States.

Turning to Hanoi's position, it appeared that some degree of change had taken place there too. In the past, one of the problems has been that Hanoi, for whatever reason, had been unwilling to commit itself publicly to anything more than a demand that the United States stop bombing North Vietnam, and unwilling to give a firm commitment on whether or not this would be a first step toward a negotiated peace. In an interview in January 1967, the North Vietnamese Foreign Minister said that talks "could" take place if the bombing stopped. Speaking at a reception at Hanoi in December, almost a year later, he said that talks "will" take place once United States attacks on North Vietnam had stopped.

At the turn of the year, then, it seemed to us that, while the positions of the two sides remained some distance apart, there were signs of change which deserved further attention. Accordingly, I instructed our Commissioner in Vietnam, Mr. O.W. Dier, to proceed to Hanoi to deliver a letter from me on behalf of the Government to the North Vietnamese Foreign Minister, seeking confirmation and clarification of his year-end statement. I also reaffirmed the importance Canada has attached to the International Commission as an agency which could make a useful contribution to the establishment and maintenance of some element of confidence between the two sides while talks were in progress. In issuing these instructions to our Commissioner, I hoped it might be possible to find some way of bridging the remaining gap between the San Antonio formula and the formula outlined by the Foreign Minister for Vietnam in his year-end statement.

The United States had said that the bombing could be stopped in return for an undertaking to talk, plus the exercise of military restraint by the North, while the North had said that talks would follow the cessation of bombing. What I had hoped might be possible was a further modification of positions and agreement by both sides whereby the International Commission might reassert its legitimate presence at key points, such as the Demilitarized Zone, to facilitate the exercise of restraint by both sides in terms of military activities around these key points and areas. If both sides were agreed that a Commission presence of this character would be useful, this could be brought about without any change in the Commission's mandate or without either side openly declaring that it would not do something or that it would do something else. In other words, the Commission by its very presence, rather than by the exercise of force, could exert a restraining influence.