



CANADA

STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

INFORMATION DIVISION

DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

OTTAWA - CANADA

No. 67/20 A CANADIAN VIEW OF THE UNITED STATES AND VIETNAM

Text of a speech by the Prime Minister,
the Right Honourable Lester B. Pearson,
in the House of Commons on May 24, 1967.

I believe that the purposes and objectives of United States policy in Vietnam were not aggression. I believe that the United States moved into Vietnam in the first place to help South Vietnam, at the invitation of the Government of that country, to defend itself against military action and subversive terrorism aimed at preventing the people of that part of Vietnam making their own decision as to their future development and political institutions, rather than having one particular solution forced upon them under the guise of a liberation struggle conducted in the interests of a totalitarian Communist regime in North Vietnam which has not allowed and does not intend to allow its own people any choice as to their social, economic or political system.

Mr. Bundy, who played an important part in these matters in earlier days as Adviser on Foreign Affairs to the President, has written these words: "United States policy remains based on the continuing conviction that we should be ready to do our full share to help prevent the Communists from taking South Vietnam by force and terror."

We may not agree with this policy, but I think those words are a rational explanation of the policy followed by men in the United States who are men of goodwill and as peace-loving as we are. I can understand their position in this regard. That does not mean a Government in Canada has to support or approve all the measures taken or all the measures adopted by United States forces in Vietnam, let alone by governments in Saigon -- and remember there have been more governments than one -- in achieving their purposes. And on occasions, when I have felt it necessary to speak publicly and not confine myself to diplomacy..., I have made this clear.

I have spoken publicly when I felt it was necessary to do so and might be of some value. Two years ago, in Philadelphia, I proposed a pause in the bombing for what I thought would be a helpful purpose, and later I think I was the only head of a Western government who publicly regretted the resumption of the bombing. I still regret it. I think it was a great mistake on the part of United States Administration at that time to resume the bombing in the circumstances in which it was resumed. But this does not mean and will not mean, in

present circumstances at least, that we should join the chorus which has denounced the United States for being in Vietnam at all. That is a different matter.

If this is our position, I do not think we will accomplish anything constructive by accusing the United States of sole guilt and sole blame for what has happened in that country and by doing so trying to impose a kind of moral sanction against the United States. It seems to me that anyone in the position of governmental responsibility -- and I am certainly in that position -- who adopted those tactics, would by doing so cut, or certainly weaken, the lines of official communication between Ottawa and Washington on this subject and I cannot think any useful purpose would be achieved by doing that, especially if we felt we could use those lines of communication to give good advice to our friends....

I go along 100 per cent with the statement made by His Holiness the Pope yesterday which linked an end to the bombing with a halt to infiltration because it is a statement which has been made on this side in the House of Commons, and outside it, when we previously advocated bringing an end to the bombing and, associated with that, an end to infiltration of troops from the North into the South.

This is not a one-sided matter. There can be very honest, sincere, and indeed emotional differences of opinion on it. Last night I was looking over the record of the negotiation offers that had been made in the last two or two and a half years, each one of which had been rejected by the Government in Hanoi and accepted by the Government in Washington.... This does not mean that we should not try to find some proposal that is acceptable to all parties, and of course we will continue to strive to do that.

The other day I read an editorial in a very influential Washington newspaper, the Washington Star. The editor of the Washington Star says: "The time has come, in the Star's opinion, for the U.S.A. to stop bombing in North Vietnam. We say this without the slightest apology for the Administration's conduct of the war up to now. The decision to start bombing was necessary and right. An aggressor cannot be permitted to take for granted his security at home while he wages war on his neighbours. The policy of the careful escalation of bombing, subject to tight restrictions on the choice of targets, seemed likely to bring Hanoi to its senses and has had our full support. But every military strategy must be subject to constant review and reappraisal. It is necessary to weigh the gains against the risks, to ask whether hoped-for results are in fact being achieved. It is necessary to watch for the moment where a change of strategy may produce a greater gain at a decreased risk. That moment has arrived. We should say nothing, explain nothing, set no conditions or limitations on our switch of strategy. We should simply stop bombing and see what the enemy does...."

I am sure that the Administration in Washington is giving very careful consideration to this idea, which has been repeated in recent weeks by many inside the United States.

I do not think, however, that the adoption of the sub-amendment by this House /to call on the United States to stop the bombing/ by a parliament outside the United States would serve the purpose that we have in mind of bringing this war to an end. It is an amendment which has not been dealt with by any other parliament friendly to the United States that I know of, and I do not think this kind of amendment would serve the purpose we have in mind. Indeed, if we begin to give this kind of formal parliamentary advice from outside the United States, it might conceivably have the opposite effect. I also think we should be careful not to put our hopes so high in regard to the abandonment of the bombing of North Vietnam that we are likely to run into disillusionment if that should take place and fail. I myself would not attach excessive expectations to peace and a negotiated settlement if bombing should end tomorrow.

We might, as we have in the past -- and by we I mean the Western countries, the friends of the United States -- well run up against what has been encountered before, namely escalation of demand on the other side. So I think it might be desirable to find out what the reaction in Hanoi would be to an immediate and unconditional end to bombing of the North. Would they stop fighting and begin talking and, if they refused or attached a new condition, would the danger of massive escalation be increased? This is another factor we have to take into consideration....

S/C