



VISIT TO US, CANADA AND UK

LOS ANGELES, USA

EXTRACT FROM SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER,
MR. HAROLD HOLT TO THE LOS ANGELES WORLD
AFFAIRS COUNCIL

31ST MAY, 1967

Bombing of North Viet Nam

The American and Australian positions are the same. In February, 1966 I stated (soon after the end of the thirty-seven day bombing pause) -

"It has consistently been the view of the Australian Government that North Vietnam must not be permitted to remain a haven immune from military risk, from which military aggression against the south can be mounted with impunity."

The case for controlled bombing is strong, and it has been conducted with great care and precision. Reasons are -

- * It upsets the flow of men and materials to the fighting zones and damages the transport systems through which that flow goes forward.
- * It helps destroy the enemy's base areas, thereby weakening his capacity to fight and so saving the lives of allied fighting men.
- * It ties up hundreds of thousands of North Vietnamese workforce in repair and reconstruction.
- * It demonstrates to the fighting forces of South Vietnam that America and her allies are giving them full support.
- * It demonstrates to the people of South Vietnam as a whole that we do not expect them to suffer and fight the aggressor only where he chooses to fight.
- * It has the political and psychological effect of reminding the North Vietnamese that they cannot hope to win the war.

There are critics of these operations in your country and in mine. Bombing is regarded as a horrible act of war that, in the name of humanity, should be avoided at all costs. It is said to be militarily unnecessary and without advantage. It is said that it is politically foolish, serving only to strengthen determination in the North to continue the conflict and at the same time making it difficult for the North to enter into negotiations for a peaceful settlement. Since, it is said, the North Vietnamese Government will not negotiate under duress, it is feared that bombing might lead to the war spreading. For example by provoking China, the neighbour and supporter of North Vietnam.

The United States Government has not accepted these arguments, nor has the Australian Government. We have supported the bombing operations.

This is not to say that we ignore the humanitarian aspects and are blind to the political implications. But those involved in the stern endeavour to stop Communist aggression from the North against the Republic of Vietnam, must face the realities of the situation. In a violent conflict of this nature, when

force has to be resisted by force, these realities are harsh. The Communists from the North have, for many years, sought to overthrow the Government of the Republic of Vietnam by defeating its armies and by destroying all prospect of orderly, constructive government.

You know their record of brutal terrorism among the village population and of the endless guerilla attack. Not a day passes in which the Communists do not bomb villages and towns in South Vietnam by mortar attack. These mortars all come from the North. They have also organised in an increasing degree conventional, full-scale military operations. All these things could never have continued if supplies of equipment, arms and munitions and reinforcements of trained men had not continually come from the North. It is the Communist Government in Hanoi, in the North, that is directing and organising this unrelenting attack in the South.

It is the Communist Government in the North receiving supplies from Communist Russia and Communist China that is giving the support of this material to Communist-led forces in the South.

In our view, in Australia, if this aggression is to be stopped, the source of it cannot be immune from attack. We are dealing with a military situation. Major military measures are being taken against those resisting this aggression that can only be combatted by military measures. Is the opponent to be allowed to organise and despatch his manpower and supplies unmolested. Are these only to be dealt with when they finally arrive in the battlefields of the South, intact and in good trim? This does not make sense. It can only prolong the conflict.

It exposes the soldiers in the allied armies, among them your men, who are making the major contribution, to greater dangers. In the Australian view, attacks in the North on the camps and depots of the aggressor, on his arm-making capacity, on his roads and bridges, his railways and sea lanes cannot be avoided if the aggressor's capacity in the South is to be reduced and the conflict is to be brought to an end. To refrain from these measures is to aid the aggressor in his attacks and to encourage him in the hope of victory.

Of course such a policy involves risks. It involves risks of escalation, of involving the innocent civilian population, of narrowing the prospect of peaceful settlement. But how much greater would these risks be if the necessary military measures were taken in some other way than by bombing from the air. It is not our view that a wholesale military attack should be launched against the North, engulfing the entire country in the full horror of war. Surely controlled bombing, limited to military targets, is the best way of sparing the population and avoiding wider risks.

We believe that the effective use of United States power must profoundly affect the attitude of the rulers in North Vietnam. They must come to see that they can have no prospect of success. We also believe that the restraint exercised by the United States in the use of its massive power, while fulfilling necessary military requirements, would have a beneficial influence in China for the cause of peaceful co-existence. China is not threatened. Nor is China's neighbour, North Vietnam. But week by week the cost and futility of aggression are clearly demonstrated.

Suspension of Bombing

It is in the context of these considerations that we must judge the question of suspending the bombing, a demand repeatedly raised especially among those who overlook the basic military aspects of the situation. It would be foolish to

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say that bombing should never be relaxed or suspended. Military requirements alone will from time to time make a different tempo and scale of operations desirable. What we do know beyond argument is that whenever there has been a suspension of military activity the other side has taken full advantage of this to build up supplies of men and material as rapidly as possible. But the political aspect can never be neglected. Should the Communists be prepared in good faith to enter into negotiations, there is a substantial case for suspension of bombing. In this case, the Communists themselves must be assumed to be demonstrating their good faith by a suspension, or at least a major relaxation of their own attacks. But there are no signs that the Communists are interested in negotiation, and in these circumstances military operations, including bombing, must continue.
