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PRESIDENT JOHNSON'S STATEMENT

Comment by the Prime Minister, Mr John Gorton

The statement re-emphasises two important aspects of the approach of the United States.

One is that the United States is firmly resolved to continue the military struggle to the point where it becomes recognised that talks designed to secure a just and lasting peace must take place.

The other is that the United States is prepared now, as it has been prepared in the past, to enter into such talks at once, and is prepared to make concessions in an effort to bring about such talks. The Australian Government has repeatedly indicated that it would support peace negotiations provided they held promise of leading to a just and lasting peace which effectively safeguards the security and freedom of choice of the people of South Viet Nam.

The Australian Government regards this initiative by the American President as a further and significant exhibition of willingness on the part of the United States of America to engage in talks aimed at that end.

The halting of bombing over most of North Viet Nam, without insistence on an indication from Hanoi of a willingness to negotiate or of a reciprocal cessation of military build-up by North Viet Nam, will test the willingness of Hanoi to enter into discussions aimed at a peaceful settlement of a genuine kind. We must all hope that this response by Hanoi is forthcoming quickly.

At the same time, the continuation of bombing in the area to the north of the battlefields will continue to hamper the flow of troops and war material from north to south and will not leave allied troops at too great a military disadvantage.

CANBERRA,
1 April 1968