In 1964 both Gough Whitlam and myself were asked to spend about 2 months in the United States as guests of the US Government. The purpose of the visit was to get some understanding of the United States and to study any matters in which we had a particular interest. I might add that the United States makes grants of this kind available to people in many different fields — in industry, journalism — but this was the first time they had made such an offer to Australian politicians.

I spent a good deal of the time while I was there in Washington and New York because I wanted to get as good an understanding as possible of the United States attitude to many international and defence problems, especially those involving our own part of the world.

At the time I never for a moment thought that the visit would, on my return to Australia, lead to quite unpleasant and unnecessary incidents with Gough Whitlam.

It is well known that the Government and the Labor Party are strongly, and at times bitterly, divided on questions of foreign policy and defence. We do not see things the same way. But the Australian public has a right to expect that debates on these issues will be kept within realistic and, as far as possible, factual bounds.

Over recent days you will have seen reports of statements made again by Mr. Whitlam about the Prime Minister. From the time of the Corio By-Election the Leader of the Opposition has been repeating the statement that a speech the Prime Minister made in Los Angeles had embarrassed the United States Administration, implying that the bombing of North Vietnam had been continued virtually to save the face of the Australian Prime Minister and the King of Thailand. This charge was made on the basis of what some unnamed U.S. official is obliged to have said. The Prime Minister did make a speech in Los Angeles supporting the bombing as being a necessary part of the Vietnam war. This is a view which I have strongly supported on more than one occasion because I know the consequence and reality of increased casualties that would arise if the bombing were stopped without some reciprocal move on the part of the North. As a member of the Government with a particular administrative responsibility for our Army force in Vietnam I would hope the Australian people would demand that our forces should have all the support and all the strength that Australia can give them.

Mr. Whitlam's claim that the Prime Minister had embarrassed the United States Administration is patently absurd. If it were true, it
would mean that the US was continuing a policy in which it did not believe merely to please Australia and Thailand. But the plain fact is that we know the views of the Administration. The Australian Government is in constant contact with the United States on many different aspects of this tragic war. Shortly after the Prime Minister's visit there was actually an intensification of the bombing and this again would hardly seem to support the view that it was being maintained merely because of what our Prime Minister had said.

In other words, Mr. Whitlam has imputed views to members of the US Administration which it seems quite impossible that they could have expressed to him.

Let me return to the point at which I began, which was the trip we both undertook at the same time to the United States in 1964. Of course, we spoke to a number of the same people but on different occasions. Shortly after I became Minister for the Army, Mr. Whitlam sought to embarrass me, and possibly the Government, by saying that officials of the US Administration were appalled at conversations I had had with them in which I had advocated the dropping of nuclear weapons on Hanoi and the breaking of the dikes on the Red River, which would destroy North Vietnam's food supply and drown possibly 2-3 million people in Vietnam. My reply to this in the Hansard report of 11 May 1966 reads in part as follows: "Not only is it a fabrication as to fact but also I am completely confident that officials in the State Department and the Pentagon with whom I spoke would not report to the Deputy Leader of the Opposition the substance of my conversations."

It is therefore clear that I denied the allegation. It is also clear from the Hansard of the same date that Gough Whitlam, having made the charge, was determined to repeat it. It should be noted that despite my denial he continued to make the charge on the basis of what some unnamed U.S. official had supposedly said to him. I can well understand Mr. Whitlam's not wanting to retract what he had already said but I would have thought that as a result of my categorical denial his charges would not be repeated on later occasions. However, on two occasions recently he has repeated them, still using the alleged comments of an unnamed US official as evidence for this validity. On 17 August, in the International Affairs Debate, he raised the matter again and by interjection I denied it a second time. His reply to my denial (and I quote now from the Hansard report of 17 August 1967) was: "If the Honourable gentleman had any reputation for truth I might ask for the withdrawal of that remark.

I think it is interesting to note that this second accusation occurred after he had made a different but similarly based charge against
the Australian Prime Minister - that is to say, a charge again based on the alleged remarks of some unnamed official of the US Administration. As recently as 2 October at the Monash University Teach-In on Vietnam he repeated this charge against the Prime Minister. At that time I pointed out the inaccuracy of his statement and this received some prominence in the Melbourne Sun.

And now, in a Parliamentary debate on 5 October, he has once again come up with his earlier statement and my alleged advocating of the bombing of Hanoi and the breaking of the dikes. Since he was speaking in Parliament at a time when the proceedings were being broadcast I denied it again and reminded Mr. Whitlam that I had done so on the previous occasions when he had made the charge. Of course, he was still using the same evidence as before and making his charge on the basis of what some unnamed US official was alleged to have said to him.

What sort of politics is this?

The part that is difficult to understand is that the Leader of the Opposition should make this kind of charge, not having heard me advocate the matter because I never have, but on the basis of what some unnamed US official is alleged to have said.