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*Le commissaire de la Commission internationale de surveillance
et de contrôle pour le Vietnam
au sous-secrétaire d'État aux Affaires extérieures*

*Commissioner, International Commission for Supervision
and Control for Vietnam,
to Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs*

LETTER No. 29
CONFIDENTIAL

Saigon, February 2, 1961

NOTES CONCERNING MR. GOPALA MENON, I.C. CHAIRMAN

In recent weeks, as our wired reports to you have made clear, the International Commission in Vietnam has almost ceased to function as an effective body. The difficulties the Canadian Delegation has been experiencing in securing effective action on a number of important issues culminated last week when Mr. Wisniewski, on a plea of illness, managed to secure yet another postponement of a Commission meeting scheduled to discuss emergency control of the Russian airlift at Gia Lam airport and the setting up of a Mobile Team to investigate the Kontum attack of last October. (See our Tel. No. 27 of Jan. 27/61).†

2. While many of the less important team controls in North and South Vietnam are still being carried out, those which we regard as essential have been largely discontinued on one excuse or another, e.g., breakdown of transport, unavailability of Liaison Officers, security reasons, etc. (See attached letter, less appendices, to DGPO Army, Brig. R. Bishop, from Brig. Allan).‡

3. Administratively, Commission business has been hampered by an increasing degree of over-centralization, with more and more of even the routine operations being channelled for decision through the hands of the Indian Chairman, Mr. Menon, who is at the same time the Secretary-General of the Commission. This failure to delegate authority has resulted in mounting confusion and delay. In addition to numerous postponements of meetings, our Delegation has not been able to arrange for a sufficient number of meetings to handle what we regard as urgent items.

4. The most important factor in this situation, in our view, is the personality and attitude of Mr. Menon. For obvious reasons, I have refrained so far from commenting on this matter. But five months of association with Mr. Menon have confirmed what we began to suspect not long after his arrival – that he is not a man of any great strength of character or conviction and is also a poor administrator. In contrast to Dr. Ansari, indeed, he has shown up very badly.

5. Mr. Menon's primary aim seems to be to achieve some kind of compromise or agreement among the three Delegations on all issues, regardless of the nature of these issues. This hope was pointedly expressed in his opening address at his first meeting as Chairman. His subsequent efforts to achieve unanimity at all costs have resulted – as might be expected – in the bogging down of practically all Commission business, and in the creation of an atmosphere of irritation, suspicion and frustration.

6. Apart from Mr. Menon's lack of backbone, we have found it almost impossible to negotiate with him on any straightforward basis. Time and again in private talks, we have agreed on certain courses of action only to find Mr. Menon reversing his stand at Commission meetings. At these meetings it has become lamentably clear that Mr. Menon will adopt almost any tactic rather than displease the Poles and with them the Government of North Vietnam. At