

It was clear that the Commissions would have only limited powers and resources; on the other hand, they had no responsibility themselves for the execution or enforcement of the agreements. The parties themselves were required to carry out their undertakings and, if violations of the cease-fire agreements occurred and if the recommendations of the Commissions were not implemented, the Commission was expected to report the circumstances to the members of the Geneva Conference. Thus, although in the last analysis the fulfilment of the provisions of the cease-fire agreements in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia would depend on the co-operation of the parties, the Commissions, by acting as the eyes and ears of the international community, could perform a worthwhile function by providing an element of disinterested deterrence to open violations of the cease-fire.

Canada's decision in 1954 to participate in the Vietnam Commission represented an attempt to contribute to the peace and stability of Southeast Asia. It was clear that, in proposing India, Poland and Canada as members of the Commissions, Communist China had envisaged a troika arrangement in which Poland would represent the interests of one of the parties, Canada would represent the interests of the other, and India, as the major neutral power of the time, would cast the deciding votes. We were aware of the difficulties of the so-called "Neutral Nations Commission" in Korea, in which the requirement for unanimity had hamstrung the Commission. The Indochina Commissions at least provided for majority decisions on a wide range of matters, and for majority and minority reports on the major issues.

Despite the temptation to live up to the conference's expectations, Canada decided from the beginning to avoid the role of rigid advocate for the West and, instead, tried to promote an objective and balanced approach by the Commissions. We were firmly convinced, and remain so to this day, that neither the work of the Indochina Commissions nor the future of international peace keeping would be served if the members of the Commissions gave the impression of being swayed by political bias and of ignoring the terms and intent of the cease-fire agreements in the interests of one side or another. We encountered many difficulties in carrying out this policy, but after 13 years we remain convinced that it was the right one.

Because the 1954 settlement did not produce a lasting peace, it is sometimes argued that the International Commission in Vietnam failed in its role. As I have pointed out, however, the Commission was not envisaged as an enforcement agency. It had not been given the terms of reference, the authority or the resources to impose its will on the parties, and was expected to leave the actual task of keeping the peace to those directly involved, to act in such a way as to encourage observance of the Cease-Fire Agreement, and to keep the members of the 1954 conference informed of results. The deterioration of the situation in Vietnam had complex origins, and although the weaknesses of the supervisory process no doubt contributed to the eventual breakdown, there were other important factors arising out of the nature of the 1954 settlement itself, the policies and objectives of the two Vietnams, and the atmosphere created by the policies of the major world powers.