

members of the Geneva Conference undertook to respect, but also the peace and stability of Southeast Asia in general. In these circumstances it is natural that there should have been suggestions that a return to Laos of the International Supervisory Commission might help to reduce tensions and promote a peaceful solution of Laos' difficulties.

Such a reconvening of the Commission presented, however, certain difficulties. In the first place, the task originally assigned to the Commission was to supervise and control the application of a cease-fire agreement already reached by the great powers at the Geneva Conference. There was no question of the Commission itself bringing about a cease-fire. Second, it is clear that an essential condition for the effective functioning of a Commission so constituted would be basic agreement among the other powers directly interested on its return and on the duties it should perform. Third, unless it had an assurance of the co-operation of the Laotian authorities it would be unable to operate effectively, and its position would be untenable.

I might remind the House in this connection . . . that at the time the Commission was adjourned we made quite clear that, if, in any future emergency, the Commission were to be recalled, we would always have in mind the rights of the Laotian Government and would respect the sovereignty of that country. The Canadian Government, therefore, while fully in sympathy with the desire to take action quickly in a critical situation, has sought to ensure that the means adopted would be those which, given the existing circumstances, would give the best promise of success.

It was with these considerations in mind that I suggested an exploratory mission might be sent to Laos to find out by consultation with the Laotian authorities what precisely could usefully be done in the present circumstances.

In this connection my suggestion was that the three key men who went to Southeast Asia in 1954 or 1955—I am not sure of the exact year—would go back as members of this exploratory mission. The Canadian member was Brigadier Sherwood Lett of Vancouver, who is now Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of British Columbia. Chief Justice Lett has offered to go out in this capacity. The Indian representative, Mr. M. Desai, unfortunately has not been well and is on sick leave. This proposal that there be an exploratory mission made up of these three key people was not generally acceptable.

Discussions are continuing with a view to establishing an agreed basis of proceeding along these general lines. We for our part are willing, if the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union, as co-chairmen of the Geneva Conference, so request, and subject to the agreement of the King of Laos—we are not asking for the agreement of the Laotian Government but for the agreement of the King of Laos, who is the only generally recognized constitutional authority of that country—to appoint a Canadian representative to the Commission, which would do what it could in present circumstances, by consultation and advice, to contribute to the restoration of peace and to the maintenance of the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Laos.