

# Should Canada go into Vietnam to get the Americans out?

Recently Excalibur asked Jack Granatstein if he thinks Canada should agree to send a peacekeeping force to Vietnam in the event of an agreement. Although we do not agree with all the conclusions he has reached, the interview raises most of the important questions surrounding this complicated issue. Granatstein is the author of several books including *Peacekeeping: The International Challenge and Canadian Response*. He is a history professor at York on sabbatical for a year.

**EXCALIBUR:** Should Canada send a peacekeeping force to Vietnam?  
**GRANATSTEIN:** I think basically, yes, we should go in if very tight conditions are met.  
**EXCALIBUR:** What sort of conditions would you suggest?  
**GRANATSTEIN:** It gets down basically to the Canadian experience with the old ICC which turned out to be something less than 100 per cent reliable from the Canadian point of view. They had a troika kind of commission: one communist, one democracy, one neutral. The Canadians began in '54 when the ICC was set up, trying, I think, to be generally fair, to allow the facts of the case to decide. This turned out to be something less than desirable from the Western point of view because the Poles didn't play the game. The Indians tended to waffle back and forth but generally supported the North Vietnamese, which left the Canadians in the difficult position of trying to be fair when nobody else was.

**EXCALIBUR:** Do you mean favour the U.S. when no one else was favouring the U.S.?  
**GRANATSTEIN:** It was a situation where, in the early years after the war where both sides were committing violations regularly. Repeated violations. The Canadian position — mind you I'm not defending this position — was that the ICC was condemning only one side of these violations.  
 John Holmes, a fairly senior officer of external affairs at the time the ICC was set up and now the head of the Canadian Institute of International Affairs, said: "It's pretty galling for Canadians on the ICC to be told by fellow citizens, who have not studied the record, the Commissions have been a farce and have been nothing but docile agents of the Americans. It is not true to say that the Canadian members of the team have closed their eyes to the other side of the violations of the agreements by the Americans. They have simply said what is obvious to any fair minded person; that these violations must be considered in relation to the lack of respect of the terms of the Geneva shown by the other side. Whether or not the United States has been wise or justified in the policy of escalating the military support of the South Vietnamese people is a complex issue. It should not be charged however that the U.S. committed a unilateral or unprovoked violation of the terms of the Geneva Agreement." This I think is not entirely unreasonable. Because the

Americans have committed genocide; because they have acted in every respect as war criminals over the past half dozen years; it would not be fair to say that the entire Vietnamese situation from '54 onwards has been in that vein. The Canadian position has been to try to say that both sides have violated the Geneva agreements.  
**EXCALIBUR:** What was Canada's role in the ICC?  
**GRANATSTEIN:** After the first few years on the ICC, we saw ourselves as being what we were intended to be from the beginning: the western representative. That's the way it was set up. It was deliberately set up to have one western, one communist, one neutral.  
**EXCALIBUR:** What then do you think is behind Mitchell Sharp's claim that Canada does not play that role in the ICC, but rather is a neutral partner?  
**GRANATSTEIN:** Well in a word, I'd say that's bullshit. There's just no question of that. We were accused time and again of spying for the Americans and significantly the Canadian government didn't really deny that. In 1967 we were accused of passing information that we got in North Vietnam to the Americans. And Pearson said at the time (May 11, 1967): "Members of the Canadian delegation in the Vietnam are not engaged in clandestine or spying activities. The Canadian delegation reports to the Canadian government and the Canadian government only. It is for the Canadian government to decide in the case of these reports what is to be made of them in the course of normal diplomatic exchanges with other countries." Now that always struck me as being the barest possible denial. In fact he's saying we're not spying for the Americans but we decide what to do with the information we get. He didn't say we don't pass the information. And the point is, I'm sure that they were. Very clearly we were acting for one side.  
**EXCALIBUR:** In a future peacekeeping force would Canada be acting as a diplomatic cover for the United States?  
**GRANATSTEIN:** A cover is probably the wrong term. But I think they would be in the position once again of acting as the western representative. That's probably why Sharp made the point in one of his initial responses to service on a peacekeeping force in Vietnam that he wanted to be invited by both sides. In other words we weren't supposed to be only the American representative if we could avoid it. We wanted to be representing something in between — acceptable to both sides. I don't think he's going to get that and if he does, it simply isn't going to matter. It's going to be a kind of a troika again. We are going to have a kind of Us, Them, Neutral, layout once more. It's going to be the same kind of bind. So you have to get some kind of tighter agreement that governs the way the new peacekeeping force is going to function. It's rumoured that one of the hangups in the agreement Henry Kissinger and the North Vietnamese almost reached is the roles and duties

and functions of the new peacekeeping force.  
**EXCALIBUR:** Could Canada play any sort of a neutral role?  
**GRANATSTEIN:** Probably not. It's very difficult for us to be neutral in this kind of thing because the Canadian government, notwithstanding its recent resolution condemning the bombing. We are on the western side. You might get a situation where the Canadians could play what one might call a western unbiased role as opposed to an outright western role. But that's probably the best you could get.  
 And that would only be possible if you'd have a stabilized situation with clearly demarcated lines between the opposing sides in Vietnam, where there is a genuine willingness on the part of each side to cease fighting — to try and bind up the wounds of war. Now I suspect that you are not going to have the latter. And it's a leadpipe cinch that you are not going to have the former of those two conditions, i.e., a clear line of demarcation between the opposing sides. Given the nature of a guerrilla war and the kind of fighting you have; you have a kind of measles situation with red spots all over the country. And that makes it very difficult. In South Vietnam you have enormous areas that are controlled by the NLF (National Liberation Front). And how do you effectively peacekeep in an area where one hamlet is controlled by Saigon and the hamlet two miles down the road is controlled by the Vietcong. Or what about the situation where you have an entirely South Vietnamese area in the centre of which is a Vietcong controlled area. It's almost impossible to control that kind of situation.  
**EXCALIBUR:** But aren't American forces trying to support a puppet regime?  
**GRANATSTEIN:** Oh, sure. I wouldn't deny that for a minute. I'm not defending the Americans.  
**EXCALIBUR:** Should we as Canadians be asking for a withdrawal of American troops to allow for an election. Even Eisenhower admitted that if there was an election 80 percent of the people in South Vietnam would support a communist government (Ho Chi Minh).  
**GRANATSTEIN:** That was in 1954. I don't know what it would be now. It might be as high. I wouldn't at all be surprised that it is pretty close to that. Sure we should be asking for a withdrawal but what's the best way to get a withdrawal of the Americans? To have the peace. Nixon has in fact said: "Give us the peace and we'll pull out."  
**EXCALIBUR:** But it's a peace with honour they want. They want to hold the trump cards in the card game they're playing.  
**GRANATSTEIN:** Well of course. It's a negotiating position. Do you expect them to give them up. Now look! I think the Americans are negotiating in the worst possible way. I think the recent bombing is absolutely immoral. Criminal. I think Nixon is a war criminal and I use those terms advisedly.

But clearly the Canadian interest has to be to end the God-damn-war. The only way you can end this war is to get that agreement signed in Paris between the North Viets and the Americans. And it looks as though the only way you're going to get an agreement is if there's some kind of new international force. And it looks as though Canada will be expected to take part. And the Canadians are probably going to be in the position that if they stand up and say: "Phooey it's no go," they're going to blow the whole thing. Now after 15, 20 years of war, I wouldn't want to be the Canadian government that said we won't participate because our demands aren't being met on some point about supply lines to our troops, or something over there. Realistically it's impossible. Now that's in essence why I come down to saying that's why we should go in. Now we should try to get the tightest conditions we can but we should go in, just because to not go in may mean to keep the fighting going on.  
**EXCALIBUR:** Professor Kolko, at the Student Mobilization Committee conference, Nov. 1, analysed the policing agreement as an attempt to put a freeze on the situation in Vietnam, and that even if it were signed it would result in a different stage of the military activity in Vietnam and as such would not bring about peace. Now the role that you've outlined for Canada on such a body would seem to correspond to this attempt to put a freeze on Vietnam. In what sense do you mean that this settlement would bring about a peace in Vietnam?  
**GRANATSTEIN:** Well it will bring a peace in the sense that it would eliminate the American presence in its overt form. It would presumably bring about an end to the bombing. It would tend to de-escalate the war down to a kind of guerrilla war. Now from the Canadian peacekeeping force's point of view that's the worst kind of war to try to observe. And the worst kind of war to be in the middle of. But surely that would be a positive gain over the present state of affairs.  
**EXCALIBUR:** Would that not necessitate a rather large force to police the war?  
**GRANATSTEIN:** Well they're talking about a rather large force.  
**EXCALIBUR:** Wouldn't that be like another invading army?  
**GRANATSTEIN:** Well the Canadian position has been that the troops would be unarmed. Precisely to avoid being cast in that position.  
**EXCALIBUR:** Do you know of situations where the Canadians turned a blind eye to American infractions of Geneva Accords such as the situation at the Gulf of Tonkin?  
**GRANATSTEIN:** Well bear in mind where the Canadians were. There are some in Saigon, virtually locked into Saigon, and some virtually locked into Hanoi. Gulf of Tonkin was happening many miles away from Hanoi. All they could report on over the past ten or so years is what they could see, which is to say almost nothing. There was nobody nearby watching what happened at Tonkin. Now, if they had seen what happened there is no telling what they would say. I suspect that what happened at Tonkin was just a bollocks by the Vietnamese and just seized upon by the Americans. There is enough stuff in the Pentagon papers which could be read to imply that the Americans had contrived to set up that whole situation. They were just looking for an excuse to get things going.  
 The Pentagon papers also revealed that the Canadians were very clearly carrying messages for the Americans. Conveying very strong warnings to the North Vietnamese on their behalf. But that's not necessarily a violation of anything — just part of normal diplomatic relations — although it's not the kind of thing that I wish they had done. It seems to me that it's the kind of role that makes us look like the hand maidens for the Americans.  
**EXCALIBUR:** What do you think Canadians should pressure their government to do: Act in a more neutral way towards the U.S.; Stop trading arms?  
**GRANATSTEIN:** Well I'm all for that, I think we should get out of the defense production sharing agreement. That's one thing that you can say

easily. The Vietnam side; the peacekeeping force; that's really damned difficult. My goal would be more to stop the massive killing than to hope for a total victory where you have in effect national self-determination in South Vietnam, (which I would take as the linking up of North and South Vietnam as one state). But the important thing as I would see it is to apply a freeze and stop that killing and to allow hopefully more normal political processes to achieve that end.  
 ... The criticism that has been raised of every peacekeeping force that's been formed since the fifties is that you apply a freeze and a freeze favours one side more than the other. No question that could happen. But if you interpret the settlement as a way for the Americans to find a face saving way to get out of Vietnam; then an eventual washing their hands of the whole mess and writing of President Thieu off, then in fact that freeze may favour the North Viets more than the south. The reason that President Thieu has been balking, in the peace is very clear because he thinks he is being written off. Given that, the freeze may be the best thing.  
 ... The Americans feel that Vietnamization has succeeded so they will be able to withdraw once a peace has been reached. As the Americans see it, the Vietnamese are now capable of defending their country. Now, you know and I know that that's nonsense.  
**EXCALIBUR:** Well, with the third largest air force in the world...  
**GRANATSTEIN:** ... that they can't fly.  
**EXCALIBUR:** Well the potential exists for mass destruction, even if the Americans pull out, and that is their troops.  
**GRANATSTEIN:** But will the troops fight? Are they committed to the Democratic South Vietnamese state? They're fighting at the moment because they can't do anything else but. But given an absence of the Americans and its huge air support coming from carriers and Thailand, I would suspect that the army and air force will collapse like a house of cards.  
**EXCALIBUR:** If the American government is under such great pressure to withdraw then why is it necessary to support these concessions which are being wrung out of the Vietnamese by bombings?  
**GRANATSTEIN:** Well I'm not really convinced that they're wringing any concessions out of them by bombing. Le Duc Tho said recently that he wants the original agreement. I will wager that there are not going to be any major concessions wrung out of the North Vietnamese. And I don't think it really matters. Because I think that country is going to go fast. Once the Americans get out, given the revulsion to the war at home, there isn't anything that can be done. It's gone! They're writing it off! What they want is a face saving agreement. Give them that and they'll go. If Canada can help give them that face saving agreement by offering to send a peaceforce, it's worth it.  
**EXCALIBUR:** Why all the haggling over the force. It seems they want a large force of about 5,000 so there would be an element of control over the situation?  
**GRANATSTEIN:** But a force of 5,000 simply isn't going to be adequate given the kind of measles state of affairs I mentioned a while ago. It wouldn't matter if you had 50,000 men, the force wouldn't be able to observe all of what's going on. The Americans are just trying to get the best possible peace in order to give Thieu a chance at surviving. In my view, nothing they are going to do is going to stay, however. Thieu is a dead duck.  
**EXCALIBUR:** Do you foresee him killing off a lot of prisoners before his regime falls. (There are 200,000 political prisoners)?  
**GRANATSTEIN:** That's true. But how could you avoid that. It would not be impossible to get Thieu to agree to releasing the prisoners. They'd be turning out the leading opponents of the regime. The Americans couldn't agree to that either because they are committed to keeping Thieu alive. It is perhaps the right thing to do, but how could they accept that.

## 300,000 Viet prisoners face torture, death under Thieu

In August 1972, workers with the American Friends Service committee in Quang Ngai observed several prisoners in the prison ward of Quang Ngai Provincial Hospital after they had passed through a South Vietnamese interrogation centre. A few of these cases illustrate the seriousness of the situation:  
 • A woman prisoner was subject to continual seizures. After interrogation and beating to the point of unconsciousness, she complained of vaginal bleeding and an examination was performed. In the prison ward she had as many as ten seizures a night. Further examination showed swelling on her head which she said resulted from the police banging her head against a wall. An X-ray confirmed a skull fracture with resulting paralysis to the right side of her body.  
 • A 17-year-old boy, near death, had been unable to urinate for four days and was in extreme pain. After treatment by a Quaker doctor, we were informed that the prisoner had been tortured by electric charges to his genital organs.  
 • A young girl had seizures, stared into space and exhibited symptoms of loss of memory. She said she had been forced to drink a lime solution many times while being interrogated.  
 • Another young girl told us she had been forced to drink a lime-filled whitewash solution after which guards had jumped on her bloated stomach. She said she had also been beaten with a heavy club. She complained of pain in the chest and stomach and was observed having seizures.  
 AFSC has called the U.S. to sign a ceasefire immediately and suggest that Thieu should no longer delay an agreement.



In an Oct. 21, 1972 release the committee said "We are aware of and have documentation on the fact that Thieu's police, his brutal interrogators and his prison system received not only U.S. financial support, but advice and consultation from U.S. advisors. Therefore the U.S. has an obligation to help bring this situation to an end by opening the way to international inspection as called for in the agreements. The only way President Thieu can continue these measures indefinitely is with U.S. support. That support must be withdrawn in the interests of peace and humanity. Thieu must not any longer block efforts to end the bloodshed and restore some degree of normal order in Vietnam."

But according to Henry Kissinger, Washington and Hanoi have agreed that the future of South Vietnamese civilian detainees "should be determined through negotiations among the South Vietnamese parties," i.e. the Thieu regime and the National Liberation Front. But the prospects of these two reaching agreement on such an issue are considered remote by most sources.

"A lot of the people around Thieu feel that many of the detainees could pose a real political threat if they are ever released," said one experienced Indo-China observer. "In the confusion accompanying the

ceasefire, it would be fairly easy to eliminate such potential opposition. Some well-informed people believe the plans have already been laid. And a massacre, by its very nature, would be indiscriminate: a lot of innocent people would die."  
 Several sources in Saigon quote the total number of persons now held by the Thieu government as being approximately 300,000. Of these many hundreds have been students, which has effectively immobilized the opposition groups in Saigon which depend heavily on students.

But "it appears that, for the moment, the govern-

ment has avoided making arrests of politically significant or highly visible persons. This coupled with the total censorship of the press has resulted in widespread ignorance among the people on the street of the extent of the arrests."  
 "Under South Vietnamese law anyone can be detained for an indefinite period of time without cause, sentencing or trial. Thus many of the students and others arrested in past months and years have never had any sort of due process."  
 In addition, many people have been kept in jail long after they fulfilled their sentences.

Often there is no real trial, but cases are reviewed by the Province Security Committee. After they are arrested, a dossier is made for them. The committee reviews the dossier and metes out sentences. The accused never hear the charges against them, are never given the opportunity to answer the charges, and are never told the sentences.

In prison the torture that accompanies interrogation and imprisonment goes on. "Payments for privilege within the prisons are commonplace. The trafficking of hard drugs is rampant. Gangs of the 'common criminals' within the prisons terrorize the other prisoners. Gambling provides revenue for the guards and gang leaders. Food is poor.

In recent weeks, the Provisional Revolutionary Government has made claims of liquidation taking place within the prisons. Although this has not been confirmed it is evident that the government has the means to quietly put away a number of people without anyone knowing for some time.

"Many people speculate about whether the government will try mass executions of those in the jails at the time of the ceasefire. All of this is guesswork, but based on real and painful past experience with the Thieu regime and its capabilities. In addition, members of the foreign press are fearful that a ceasefire will bring a crackdown on those of their number who have published articles critical of Thieu and his regime.

"It is apparent to many... that the release of the political prisoners now held by the Thieu regime is crucial to any kind of peace that might emerge after a ceasefire.

"If Thieu does not allow Third Force people to participate in efforts at making a political settlement, and reconstructing the country, there is no hope that any sort of reconciliation can occur." There are fears of a war among the Vietnamese, engineered and paid for on one side by the American government.

"The American government should not be allowed to escape responsibility for the many thousands imprisoned. Many of them were originally arrested by American troops and turned over to the Vietnamese authorities. The U.S. government foots the bill for the huge police forces of the Saigon government, and the massive expansion of many interrogation centres, detention facilities, and prisons. The Phoenix program, under which so many of those detained were picked up, was originally designed and operated by the CIA.

"The U.S. government continues to finance the Thieu regime, a group of rabid anti-communists, bent upon maintaining for as long as possible a polarized political climate, the only kind of climate in which they can survive politically. Peace is not in their interest; they need war and American dollars to maintain their position.

(From reports by the American Friends Service Committee)

## Kissinger and Nixon "are too impatient" says Thieu, bombing will bring peace

President Nguyen Van Thieu has advocated that if current peace efforts fail, the United States and South Vietnam should "step up the war in all possible ways."

In an interview with Italian journalist Oriano Fallaci, Dec. 30, reported in the Jan. 13 New York Times, Thieu forcefully defended his objections to Henry Kissinger's efforts to negotiate a settlement with the North Vietnamese.

"Of course I would like to go down in history as the man who brought peace," he said, "... but if I had signed what Kissinger wanted, within six months there would be bloodshed."

Commenting on mistakes Nixon and Kissinger might have made he answered: "They were too impatient to get a peace, too impatient to negotiate and sign. When you negotiate with the Communists, you shouldn't fix a deadline. You must not tell them that you want to repatriate the prisoners as soon as possible, to bring peace as soon as possible, otherwise they exploit you."

Thieu said he told Kissinger in October there were two fundamental disagreements between them — one, the presence of North Vietnamese troops in South Vietnam, the other the political formula worked out for a council of National Reconciliation made up of members of the Saigon government, the Vietcong and neutralists.

"Like the whole agreement those two points were conceived by the Communists in Paris," he said. "So I told Dr. Kissinger that accepting them would mean submitting to the North Vietnamese demands. What (they) demand is the loss of South Vietnam, the end of South Vietnam."

Thieu called the suggestion made by Kissinger Dec. 16 in a press conference, that the U.S. is willing to sign an "in place" cease-fire that would allow the North Viets to keep troops in South Vietnam "absolutely unacceptable."

He said, "It's like recognizing their right to call themselves liberators, their right to say that Vietnam is one country, from Hanoi to Saigon" and belonging to Hanoi. "... accepting an army of 300,000 men inside a country means to recognize



the sovereignty of that army over that country."  
 "It means considering the North Vietnamese as liberators instead of aggressors, thus reversing the roles; consequently, it means considering the South Vietnamese Army as a mercenary of the Americans."

"In fact, this is what I said to Dr. Kissinger: 'Dr. Kissinger in doing so, you put the legal government of South Vietnam in the position of a puppet government installed by the Americans.' On the strategy for the war he said, 'had we attacked the North Vietnam with a classical war, had we bombed North Vietnam continuously, had we landed in North Vietnam, the war would be over by now.'

"... if peace fails and we want to end this war, we must bring the war to North Vietnam. In all possible ways, including landing."

He said that had the Americans bombed steadily, the war would have been over in 1966.

Thieu denied in the interview he is the most corrupt man in South Vietnam, stating that his daughter lives in a pension run by nuns in London; that he attends Catholic mass each Sunday; that he has no money outside the country; and that he enjoyed only an austere life style characterized by a run-down Mercedes with an engine that constantly breaks down.