

Inquiries of the Ministry

hon. gentleman or the Secretary of State for External Affairs indicate whether Canada is prepared to take part in the international advisory body suggested by President Nixon? Has there been any indication that the International Control Commission would be acceptable in this supervisory role, or would it be replaced by some other body?

Hon. Mitchell Sharp (Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, our experience in Viet Nam, Laos and Cambodia in the last 15 years has not been such as to lead us to seek out such an assignment. We would nevertheless examine very carefully any request that Canada serve in a new supervisory body. Whether we would be prepared to do so would depend in part on Canada's other commitments at the time, the terms of reference and the operation of the proposed new body, and on the anticipated duration of the assignment. It would also depend on whether, in our best judgment, the type of supervisory role envisaged would in the context of the statement be likely to make an effective contribution to peace and stability in the area.

Mr. Stanfield: Mr. Speaker, apparently I misunderstood the statement made some months ago by the Secretary of State for External Affairs in which he indicated that Canada was volunteering for such a role. May I ask now whether there has been any communication from the government of the United States asking whether Canada would be prepared to participate in such a role?

Mr. Sharp: Mr. Speaker, if the question asks whether we have been requested by the government of the United States to agree with the proposal it has put forward, the answer is no. If the question is, are we aware of the possibility that we might be called upon to make such a contribution, the answer is yes. Indeed, we have made some preliminary studies of this question, and we have consulted with various governments about this role.

Mr. Stanfield: Mr. Speaker, I am sorry that my question was put so obscurely that apparently it was not understood. I meant to ask the Secretary of State for External Affairs whether there had been any communication from the United States government as to whether Canada would be prepared to participate in such an international supervisory body.

Mr. Sharp: We have had no such request from the United States government, Mr. [Mr. Stanfield.]

Speaker. But, as I said, in reply to the question as the hon. gentleman put it originally, we have had studies made in Canada and we have talked to officials of the United States government and of other governments about how such a role might be fulfilled. Because we feel this is a government with some responsibility in this area, and since we are perhaps the most experienced in the world in peacekeeping operations, we wanted to have some preliminary investigations of the problems that would arise if we received such a request.

Mr. Stanfield: Is it correct in summary to conclude that the government of Canada is not volunteering to participate in this role and will only make a decision after it has carefully assessed all the circumstances surrounding any proposal that is made?

Mr. Sharp: Yes, Mr. Speaker, and I am sure that would be the view which would receive the strong support of Canadians.

Mr. David Lewis (York South): Mr. Speaker, I should like to ask a supplementary question of the Secretary of State for External Affairs. Did the American authorities, the President directly or someone in the State Department, inform the Canadian government ahead of time of the proposal that the President of the United States intended to make, and was there any discussion not only with the government of Canada but with other friendly governments about the way in which the unhappy situation in Viet Nam might soon be brought to an end?

Mr. Sharp: Mr. Speaker, the answer to the first question, as to whether we were consulted in advance about the statement made by President Nixon yesterday, is no. We have, of course, been consulting with the United States over a very long period of time trying to help in bringing about a solution to this very unhappy situation.

Mr. W. B. Nesbitt (Oxford): Mr. Speaker, if Canada were invited to assist in the matter which has just been discussed, would the government prefer to do it under the present auspices of the Geneva agreements, under United Nations auspices or auspices of that nature?

Mr. Sharp: Mr. Speaker, our purpose would be to be as helpful as possible. It would be for those who are directly concerned in the conflict to decide what kind of request they would like to make to us that would be most