

Oral Questions

order to allay the fears of Canadians concerning the safety of the members of the Canadian contingent. In the event of a widespread outbreak of hostilities and even open war, what arrangements are being made concerning the Canadians who are there? Will our contingent then be withdrawn immediately irrespective of whether this is before the 31st of May or the end of June?

Hon. Mitchell Sharp (Secretary of State for External Affairs): The answer to that question is yes, Mr. Speaker. As I said in my statement, if there were large-scale hostilities the Canadian delegation would be withdrawn immediately. My hon. friend, the Minister of National Defence, can deal with the question of the arrangements that have been made for that contingency.

Mr. Diefenbaker: Then I would direct my question to the Minister of National Defence. Will he let the Canadian people know whether the Canadian forces will be withdrawn immediately for they certainly stand in dreadful peril having regard to the number of incidents that have already taken place and which are apparently expanding in intensity, and to the number of tanks that North Viet Nam has run into South Viet Nam as well as large contingents of men?

Hon. James Richardson (Minister of National Defence): Yes, Mr. Speaker, I can assure the right hon. member and the House that the safety of our personnel has been of the greatest concern to us from the beginning of this operation. Through headquarters we are in daily contact with our commander in South Viet Nam. We have very clearly defined plans for evacuation either by air or, if necessary, by sea. I can assure the House that the safety of our personnel is uppermost in our minds.

Mr. Diefenbaker: I have a further question, Mr. Speaker. When such a serious incident takes place and Canadians find themselves under attack, will that end the operation of the ICCS? Will it end right there rather than continue until May 31 or the end of June?

• (1500)

Mr. Richardson: I think I would have to say that that is in some degree hypothetical, because it would depend on the degree of hostilities. If there is open warfare, we have all made it very clear and the Secretary of State for External Affairs has made it very clear that we would withdraw our personnel. But if there is an isolated incident of some kind or other, we would have to make a judgment.

Mr. Diefenbaker: In which Canadians are wounded?

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The Chair will recognize the hon. member for Portneuf and then return for supplementary questions to the hon. member for Cape Breton-East Richmond, the hon. member for Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands and other hon. members who have supplementaries on this subject.

[*Translation*]

Right now the hon. member for Portneuf is invited to ask his question.

[*Mr. Diefenbaker.*]

CANADIAN BROADCASTING CORPORATION**SUGGESTED ABOLITION**

Mr. Roland Godin (Portneuf): Mr. Speaker, I would like to direct a question to the right hon. Prime Minister.

Can he say if he contemplates suppressing the CBC eventually?

Mr. Lewis: I hope not.

[*English*]

Mr. Speaker: We will now return for a moment to supplementary questions. The hon. member for Cape Breton-East Richmond.

* * *

EXTERNAL AFFAIRS**VIET NAM—AUTHORITY OF CANADIAN COMMANDER TO WITHDRAW SUPERVISORY PERSONNEL IN EVENT OF HOSTILITIES**

Mr. Donald MacInnis (Cape Breton-East Richmond): Mr. Speaker, I have a supplementary question for the Minister of National Defence. I should like to ask him whether authority has been given to our commander in South Viet Nam to launch any withdrawal movement in the event of hostilities?

Hon. James Richardson (Minister of National Defence): As I said, Mr. Speaker, we are in daily contact. I think our commander would report to the chief of staff and to me before taking that action.

Mr. MacInnis (Cape Breton-East Richmond): I should like clarification of the minister's answer. In the event of an emergency, does the commander in South Viet Nam have the authority to launch the contingency plan for withdrawal?

Mr. Richardson: In the event that he could not make contact with the chief of staff he would have that authority.

VIET NAM—REQUEST THAT HOUSE HAVE OPPORTUNITY TO DECIDE ON CONTINUATION OF CANADIAN PERSONNEL ON SUPERVISORY COMMISSION

Mr. T. C. Douglas (Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands): Mr. Speaker, may I address a supplementary question to the Secretary of State for External Affairs. In view of the fact that members in all parts of the House have not asked merely for a debate but that parliament should have the power to make the decision about Canadian forces being sent to Viet Nam and the length of time they will remain there, may I ask him if he is prepared now to give the House the opportunity to make that decision in the form of a definitive motion so that the House will have the right, which I think it ought to have, to decide how long Canadian forces will be kept in Viet Nam?

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!