



# STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

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DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

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No. 67/13 CANADA'S APPROACH TO THE VIETNAM CONFLICT

Lecture by the Honourable Paul Martin, Secretary of State for External Affairs, in the First Series of the Jacob Blaustein Lectures, Columbia University, New York, April 27, 1967.

In my first lecture I dealt with the Canadian approach to peace keeping by the United Nations and with ways in which the many obstacles to an effective exercise of this function might be overcome. For many reasons we believe that the United Nations, despite certain weaknesses, is, in the long run, the most suitable international instrument to keep the peace. For the present, we have to face the fact, however, that in certain situations the United Nations may be powerless to act and that other arrangements may have to be made to provide an international presence in sensitive areas.

The Geneva Conference of 1954, which brought an end to hostilities in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, was the classic case of the attempt at peaceful resolution of conflict outside the United Nations context. The conference on Indochina, which grew out of the Berlin conference of the Big Four in January 1954, and which was linked with the Korean conference which preceded it, was limited in membership to the five great powers - the United States, the Soviet Union, Communist China, Britain and France - and the four Indochina governments - Laos, Cambodia, the State of Vietnam and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. Five of the nine participants were not at that time members of the United Nations, and the four permanent members of the Security Council who were involved in the Geneva Conference were as deeply divided on the issues of Korea and Indochina as they were on the issues of Europe; it is not surprising, therefore, that negotiations did not take place under UN auspices.

The Geneva Conference achieved a cease-fire and made an attempt at providing a basis for a long-term political settlement in the area. It created, in the International Commissions for Supervision and Control, a supervisory mechanism which to a large extent ensured the short-term viability of the military cease-fire arrangements. However, by not taking full account of the deep-rooted political and ideological divisions which were never far beneath the surface, the conference left unresolved certain issues which were fundamental to Indochina. As these issues emerged in new forms in the years following 1954, it became clear that, as in the United Nations, the absence of agreement among the big powers on long-term objectives, and irreconcilable contradictions among the countries directly involved, can undermine the effectiveness of any international peace-keeping operation.