



# STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

INFORMATION DIVISION

DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

OTTAWA - CANADA

No. 65/9

## CANADA AND VIETNAM

Address by the Honourable Paul Martin,  
Secretary of State for External Affairs,  
to the Editors of the Foreign Language  
Press, Toronto, March 26, 1965.

I welcome the opportunity of speaking to you this evening. I say this because I am aware of the very important part you are playing in the public life of our country. The press has, of course, a vital responsibility to discharge in any free society. And that is to focus public attention on the issues of the day and to generate informed public discussion of those issues. But it seems to me that, as editors of the foreign-language press, you have an area of responsibility which extends beyond that. For you are serving a readership which is concerned, at one and the same time, to preserve its distinctive cultural heritage and to give expression to its identity as part of the broader Canadian scene. In a country which has built and which is building its national life on the conception of unity in diversity, there is an obvious need to meet this dual concern. I know that you are aware of that need and are meeting it conscientiously and with the full measure of your responsibility in mind.

We are engaged in Canada at the present time in a reassessment of the realities of our national life and a determination of how we can best build for the future. In this process we are pledged to take account of the contribution made by the various ethnic groups which you represent and to give thought to the measures that should be taken to safeguard that contribution. We owe what we are as a country to the hard work, and co-operation and the vision of Canadians of many different origins. All our citizens have an equal stake in the country they have helped to build, and all have an equal claim to share in Canada's future opportunities.

I want to speak to you tonight about the situation in Vietnam, which, I need hardly say, has been in the forefront of our preoccupation in recent weeks.

Canada has watched this situation evolve over the past ten years. As members of the International Commission in that country, we have been charged -- along with India and Poland -- with the supervision of the arrangements that were concluded at

the Geneva Conference in 1954 and, it was hoped, would bring peace not only to Vietnam but to the Indochinese area as a whole. These arrangements have always been fragile as far as they related to Vietnam; they are now very near the point of collapse.

There has, of course, been criticism of the Commission for having stood by while this dangerous situation we are facing in Vietnam today was taking shape. I must say quite frankly that this criticism seems to me misdirected. It leaves out of account the very limited mandate within which the Commission has had to operate. It was set up to supervise, not to enforce, the terms of the Geneva arrangements. This was done on the assumption that the parties to these arrangements were prepared to abide by their undertakings. Where those undertakings were being breached, as turned out to be the case, all the Commission could do was to make known the facts and their long-range implications.

I should be the first to concede that the Commission has not always done that as effectively as we should have wished. I have myself had occasion, recently, to refer to the frustrations that have attended our participation in the work of the Commission. Still, taking a dispassionate look at the activities of the Commission as a whole, I should say that it has had a restraining influence on the situation, without which the arrangements contemplated at Geneva might well have collapsed even more quickly and more drastically than, in the event, they did. I should also say that the Commission has played -- and is continuing, in this present situation, to play -- an important role in focussing international attention on the course of developments in Vietnam.

Our presence in Vietnam over these past ten years has enabled us, I think, to arrive at a pretty objective analysis of what has been happening in that country. Nevertheless, it is sometimes suggested that we are taking the position we have been taking because, in the final analysis, we are bound to support the views and policies of the United States on a crucial issue of this kind. As far as I can see, that suggestion bears little relation to the facts.

Of course, we can never be wholly unmindful of the very heavy responsibility which rests upon the United States by virtue of its position in the world. But this has never prevented us from formulating our policies in terms of Canadian interests and on the basis of Canadian assessments. Nor has it prevented us from freely expressing our views where these have differed from those of the United States. I need only refer to trade with Communist China or the maintenance of relations with Cuba as important issues of policy where there have been, and continue to be, genuine differences between us.

But let us look more closely at the position we have taken in respect of the situation in Vietnam. I think it is fair to say that we have tried to take a balanced view of that situation. We have tried to draw the attention of all concerned to the dangers inherent in that situation. We have appealed to all concerned to face up to their responsibilities. We have reported and will continue to report breaches of the Geneva Agreement on both sides. And we have never, of course, in any way whatsoever condoned the use of force -- and again we must remember that force is being used in Vietnam on both sides. In sum, we have tried to approach our responsibilities in the Commission with fairness and impartiality. We have not approached those responsibilities any differently from the way in which we have approached our responsibilities in the Middle East, in the Congo, in Cyprus and elsewhere where Canadians have served to keep the peace.

Given the nature of the situation in Vietnam, however, we have thought it right that events, and the sequence of events, in that country should be set in their proper perspective. And it is part of that perspective, I think, that, almost from the beginning, the authorities in North Vietnam have been engaged in inciting, encouraging and supporting hostile activities in South Vietnam. That support has taken the form of armed and unarmed personnel, of arms and munitions, of direction and guidance. And it has been aimed at nothing less than the ultimate overthrow of the South Vietnamese administration. This is neither a fairy-tale nor a piece of fiction, as some would have us believe today. It is a judgment fully supported by evidence, including evidence presented by the Commission. And it must certainly form part of any balanced assessment of the situation in Vietnam.

I am concerned that there should be no misunderstanding of the nature of the conflict that is being conducted in that country today. Above all, let us not be deluded into thinking that what is happening in Vietnam is a basically domestic matter, a matter of spontaneous insurgency, which the Vietnamese should be left to settle in their own way. Of course, there are in Vietnam, as in many other emergent countries, elements of social and economic discontent, of dissatisfaction and disillusionment with the pace at which it has been possible to make progress towards better conditions of life and a reshaping of political institutions. But that is not the root cause of the instability that has taken such a tragic toll in that country.

What we are facing in Vietnam is a process of subversion directed by the authorities of North Vietnam against South Vietnam; and it is aimed, in the final analysis, at establishing in South Vietnam a form and pattern of government which the South Vietnamese rejected decisively ten years ago. It may not be aggression in the classical sense of the term, but it is aggression all the same, aggression carried on under the guise of a "war of national liberation". And, being aggression, it must be identified as such

and brought under control. For, as the Prime Minister put it only recently, in this nuclear world of ours "we cannot afford any permissible kinds of international violence".

A decade and a half or so back, we were facing a somewhat similar situation in Europe. We decided at that time that we could not afford to let the situation set a trend. And we joined together in the North Atlantic Alliance to resist that trend and to arrest it through the combined deterrent power we were able to muster between us. I am convinced that our action in that situation was instrumental in gradually converting the Soviet Union to the advantages of a policy of peaceful co-existence. And, although our interpretation of that term does not quite coincide with that which the Soviet Union would like to give it, I think it is fair to say that, certainly since the confrontation over Cuba in 1962, the Soviet Union has accepted the implications of the nuclear stalemate and the fact that war can no longer be regarded as a tolerable instrument of policy.

But the position of China is different, and it is with Chinese encouragement that the authorities in North Vietnam are conducting their campaign of covert aggression against South Vietnam. And, if that aggression is not brought under control in Vietnam, can we seriously envisage that similar situations will not arise elsewhere in Asia: in Thailand, in Malaysia - perhaps in India? And can we be sure that there are not sources of instability in Africa and in Latin America which will not be susceptible of being exploited in a similar way? And if we cannot be sure of that, are we right to resign ourselves -- as some would have us do -- to letting the surge of events sweep over Vietnam? Or is this doctrine of covert aggression something that concerns the international community as a whole in its efforts to consolidate peace and security in the world and to establish a sound and viable basis for relations among nations?

I have tried to set the situation in Vietnam in this broader context because that is the context in which, I think, recent developments in that country must be seen. Nothing could be more dangerous, in my view, than to oversimplify the problem we are facing. That would be particularly dangerous at a time when all our attention must necessarily be focussed on achieving a solution in Vietnam. Because I very much doubt if we can expect an unrealistic assessment of the situation to yield either practicable or durable solutions.

As far as the Canadian Government is concerned, we are deeply concerned about the implications of the present situation for world peace. We appreciate the very grave risks of a widening of the present conflict, which must be avoided at all costs. We are directing all our efforts to that end. We wish to see peace restored in Vietnam -- and, when I say Vietnam, I mean the whole of Vietnam. I believe that is also the course which the overwhelming majority of Canadians would wish to see followed. But I know you will understand me when I say that the peace that is

established in Vietnam must be a genuine peace. It must not be a fraudulent peace. It must be a peace which will allow the South Vietnamese to live in conditions they have freely chosen for themselves and which will provide them with adequate guarantees against outside pressure or intervention.

I do not think the problem in Vietnam is capable of solution by military means. I regard a negotiated solution of that problem at some stage as both right and inevitable. I should earnestly hope that that stage could be reached sooner rather than later, and we shall certainly continue to do what we can to help bring about the conditions which would allow negotiations to be undertaken with a reasonable prospect of achieving a solution. At the same time, we cannot be indifferent to the risks that would be involved in a situation in which negotiations were being undertaken without the ground having been properly prepared. That is why we think it better that patient progress should be made towards a negotiation now, in the interests of minimizing the risks of failure later.

As a first priority, I should say that there must be a relaxation of tensions in Vietnam. But, if that is to happen, it will require a genuine disposition by all concerned to see this situation settled through the instrument of negotiation. And I am sorry to say that all our soundings have not yet disclosed such a disposition on the part of either North Vietnam or Communist China. Furthermore, within the last week, the Soviet Union has refused categorically to associate itself with any call to a conference to settle this problem on a peaceful basis.

The immediate prospects for a negotiation cannot, therefore, be said to be encouraging. And I do not think it would be profitable, in these circumstances, to try to speculate on the precise elements of such a negotiation. There are three general points, nevertheless, which I believe can usefully be made at this stage:

First, there will have to be a cease-fire of some kind in the area. The North Vietnamese have been calling for the cessation of United States raids on North Vietnamese territory. The United States, for their part, have been insisting on the cessation of infiltration and aggression from North Vietnam. It occurs to me that there may be a possibility of balancing off these positions as part of the process of paving the way for a negotiation.

Second, any negotiation, when it comes about, must be meaningful. In other words, it must be a negotiation, not a capitulation. It must be based on the readiness of all concerned to modify their existing policies, to enter into commitments for the future, and to be prepared to abide by those commitments.

Third, the past history of events in Vietnam and the tragic course these events are taking at the present time make it abundantly clear, I think, that there must be an assumption of responsibility by the international community in relation to any ultimate settlement in that area. What form that responsibility might take, whether it takes the form of guarantees or whether it takes the form of a continuing international presence, are matters to be settled in the course of negotiation. But I doubt if there can be any durable settlement in Vietnam which will not, in one way or another, involve international backing.

The problem of Vietnam has caused deep anxiety in Canada. It is only natural, therefore, that we should ask ourselves what part there may be for Canada to play in reversing the course of events in that area.

Of course, the ordinary diplomatic channels are available to us. We have used these and shall continue to use them vigorously to urge restraint on all concerned, to see if there is any contribution we can make towards preparing the ground for negotiations, and generally to prove any openings there may be for useful initiatives. Canada has no direct interests in Southeast Asia, and I think that may help to enhance the opportunities that are open to us.

Then there is our membership of the International Commission. I still think that the Commission, by its very presence, exercises a certain restraining influence on developments, though I should not want to put it higher than that. It is also just conceivable that, being composed as it is, the Commission could serve as a channel of contact if that were desired at any stage by any of the parties. Meanwhile, the Commission has a continuing responsibility to draw attention to any violations of the Geneva arrangements. It must carry out that responsibility objectively and impartially. And it must be concerned at all times to assess events in the balance of the total situation in Vietnam. This we have endeavoured to do and this is the direction in which we shall continue to apply our efforts so long as we think there is a useful part for us to play.

In the final analysis, of course, there may be limits to the influence we can bring to bear on an issue of this kind. These limits are inherent in the status of any middle power in the world today. But they do not in any way diminish our responsibility in a situation which is so pregnant with danger as the situation facing us in Vietnam and is threatening to set back much of the progress we have made over the past two decades towards arriving at acceptable norms of international conduct and co-operation. It is a source of regret to us that, for the time being at least, there is no clear prospect of the United Nations being able to play the part we should expect it to play in this situation. For it is a situation in which the interests of the international community are and will continue to be, deeply engaged.