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SPEECH BY THE
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
THE HONOURABLE MITCHELL SHARP
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"FROM INDOCHINA TO THE MIDDLE EAST--
AN ACCOUNT OF CANADIAN INVOLVEMENT"

Before taking you on a conducted tour of Canadian policy in Indochina and the Middle East, I would like to begin by saying how pleased I was to receive this invitation -- in the first place you have invited me back to my home town -- secondly, I would like to congratulate the organizers of this lecture series. Questions of foreign policy and diplomacy must often seem remote from the lives of young people. In fact, the successes or failures of foreign policy touch the daily lives of most Canadians. Negotiations with the United States, Great Britain, Japan and other countries on a wide range of questions -- oil policy, pollution, duties on cars, wheat sales abroad, air transport routes and so on have a very real impact on our standard of living, the prospects and direction of our national growth -- and on our freedom of choice. The freedom of movement we are able to secure for Canadians travelling or learning in other countries -- all affect the quality of our life. This is the sort of thing that our external relations are all about -- and I believe that this lecture series has served to provide a better understanding of that role.

Contrary to popular mythology this work, or most of it, is by no means glamorous and certainly some of the least glamorous and most difficult of Canada's assignments abroad have been our roles in Indochina and in the Middle East.

Such tasks are undertaken not because there will be direct benefits to the Canadian standard of living but because as a stable and comparatively prosperous and developed member of the international community we accept our share of responsibility to that community. At least we share it when we believe we can be useful (and that is sometimes the rub). To the extent that they contribute to our national security and well being, these activities also serve Canada's self interest. Canada has participated in two major undertakings of this nature in the past 14 months. These are, of course, the ICCS and UNEF.

But as you know, our participation in Indochina has a much longer history -- indeed it reaches back 19 years to the Geneva Conference of 1954 which established a peace settlement following the defeat of French forces at Dien Bien Phu. And, if I were to graphically illustrate the record of Canadian participation in Indochina since that time, I think the result would resemble a game of snakes and ladders -- with this difference. There would be more snakes than ladders.

The Geneva Conference was called by the great powers -- Great Britain, the United States, Soviet Union, France and China to establish a peace settlement which might prepare the way for free elections and the eventual peaceful reunification of North and South Viet-Nam. An international supervisory group was despatched to Indochina with the responsibility to report -- and in this way, it was hoped, to deter -- violations of the ceasefire. It was intended that a commission supervise free elections. This body was known as the International Commission for Supervision and Control and was composed of Poles, Indians, and Canadians.

Free elections for all of Viet-Nam were never held and the ceasefire was not observed. Although there was some limited success in the early years, the international commission became a failure. This was not because Canada shirked its responsibilities as a member of the Commission, but because the adversaries in Viet-Nam repeatedly and violently broke the terms of the international agreement.

You are familiar with the tragic escalation of the war -- the hundreds of thousands of soldiers and innocent persons killed and maimed, the damage wrought on people in every sense -- socially, morally, economically and psychologically.

As the Commission could do nothing to halt hostilities the question was asked "why do we stay on with Canadians exposed to the hazards of war in both Hanoi and Saigon?" What possible Canadian or Vietnamese or humanitarian interest could we serve?

I can assure you that the Government had serious misgivings about staying on. We did so because we knew that ultimately the war must come to an end -- that it was unlikely one side or the other would obtain a clear victory, and that in these circumstances any peace supervisory machinery, however rusty, might be needed and needed quickly. If in this small way we could help to facilitate a settlement of the war, we were prepared to swallow our frustrations and keep on a skeleton staff which could spring to life, perhaps in a revised form, when a ceasefire was reached. There were other reasons. Canadian work in Viet-Nam was generally respected by all sides. All of the parties to the war indicated that they wanted us to stay on. They also wanted an international presence, symbolic of the old settlement, to remain intact.

That then was the situation when in the autumn of 1972 it became apparent that there was a real prospect that some agreement might be reached in Paris between Dr. Kissinger and Le Duc Tho. We had no wish to take part in another charade. And as soon as the possibility arose that Canada might be invited to participate in a new Viet-Nam Commission, we made it clear that if Canada was to agree to take part, substantial efforts would have to be made to try to ensure that the operational basis for the new Commission be workable and offer real prospects of being effective. We tried every means of attempting to ensure that our criteria would be taken into account by the negotiators in Paris, who were shaping the new supervisory body.

Some of the conditions that we felt were essential for the effective operation of the new Commission included:

--That the belligerent parties, the United States, South Viet-Nam, North Viet-Nam and the Viet-Cong should be bound by the same agreements which set out the role and procedures of the new Commission. This was one of the short-comings of the previous agreement -- neither Washington nor Saigon were parties to the 1954 agreement. The signatures of all of the belligerents were obtained in Paris.

--We sought a "continuing political authority" to which the Commission or any of its members could report and consult and which would assume responsibility for the peace settlement as a whole.

--We also made clear that Canada could not participate unless invited to take part by all of the parties concerned. This was obtained. All of the parties asked us to take part.

Our preliminary examination indicated that the criteria which we had proposed had contributed to some extent to the new Commission's terms of reference. But as it happened we had to make a decision either to participate or to decline before there was an opportunity for a thorough examination of the complicated documents embodying the agreement. However, as we did not wish to obstruct the

path toward a peace settlement, we agreed to take part for an initial period of 60 days.

In that 60-day period, we had to complete our evaluation of the effectiveness of the Commission both in terms of its specific tasks and as a stabilizing presence. To help me and my colleagues make the right decision, it was my view that a personal on-the-spot visit to the Commission and direct conversations with political leaders in Saigon and Hanoi would be a considerable advantage in making recommendations to Cabinet.

As you may recall, I set off toward the end of March with a group of Parliamentarians, officials and journalists on a journey which was to take us 22,000 miles in less than a week. This proved to be a very useful visit. This is not to say that the reports received from our delegation were not complete or sufficiently reliable. These reports were first class. No, it was simply that as the Cabinet Minister principally charged with making the recommendations to Cabinet, it was invaluable to have on-the-spot exposure -- to have the advantage of full conversations in the field with our Delegation and the political leaders of North and South Viet-Nam.

The visit also gave me a much more vivid appreciation of the extraordinary job our people had been performing, often 16 hours a day and often in appalling and immensely frustrating circumstances. It became abundantly clear to me that if it had not been for the Canadians, it is doubtful that the ICCS would have been in any position to have been even potentially effective.

The views of all the leaders with whom I spoke on this visit were to the effect that Canada should continue to serve on the Commission. While the advice I received from these leaders had a common theme, it is relevant to point out that each party had its own distinctive reasons for wishing us to stay on, and its own conflicting interpretations of how the Commission should operate. It became evident that North and South were (and still are) expecting quite different and in some ways contradictory results from the Paris Agreement.

Many other countries asked us to stay on, at least for another temporary period to give the ceasefire a better chance to set. It was argued, and quite reasonably, that Viet-Nam had been engulfed by war for a generation and that no one could expect peace at the stroke of a pen in Paris. When these impressions and recommendations were balanced and assessed, although we continued to have hesitations and doubts, the Government decided to remain in the Commission for a further period of 60 days.

When I made that announcement in March of last year, I also made it very clear that we would withdraw at the end of this period if there was no evidence of substantial improvement in the situation in Viet-Nam or in the absence of any signs of an imminent political settlement.

In June, I announced our decision to withdraw because neither of these conditions had been met. The Canadian concept of how an International Commission should function had not been accepted and it was our view that it would be in the best interest of all concerned for Canada to withdraw. I think there has been ample evidence that this decision responded to the judgment of most Canadians in this issue.

From the outset we had determined to be as open as possible about our participation in the ICCS, about its successes, its failures and the reasons why. This became known as the open mouth policy. I decided to take this course essentially for two reasons. The first was to enable the Canadian Parliament and public to have the fullest information on which to base their judgment on this Canadian commitment in which Canadian lives, as was so tragically proven, were put at risk. Secondly, our experience on the old Commission had revealed to us the advantages of exposing obstructionist tactics to the full scrutiny of the international press.

In the first objective -- to inform Canadians -- I believe that we were very successful -- and for this much credit must go to Canadian press, radio and television -- both in Canada and in the field in Indochina. In its second purpose, that of revealing partiality and obstruction to impartial international journalists and commentators, the open mouth policy also achieved success. Regretably the second stage of that objective, which was to dissolve partiality and obstruction by open scrutiny, did not succeed.

But neither the limited success of the open mouth policy nor the enormous and painstaking efforts of the Canadian Delegation to make the Commission effective could have enabled it to discharge its duties properly without the underlying willingness of the parties to abide by the Paris Agreement. Everything ultimately depended on that. Even if sweet reasonableness and impartiality had characterized the attitude of every member of the International Commission, the task would have led to frustration if the parties of some of the parties to the conflict chose not to honour the agreement or take widely differing interpretations of its meaning.

I have made clear to you our reasons for withdrawing. I think it is equally important to make sure that the wrong inferences are not taken from our withdrawal. Our attitude about the Commission results in large part from Canadian experience with the old ICC and Canada's wider experience in more peacekeeping and peace observer roles than any other nation.

No criticism of the peace agreement was intended. We welcomed the Paris Agreement and regarded it as a good agreement that provided as sound and honourable a basis for peace as was negotiable.

During our long period on the old ICC and in the shorter run we had with the new Commission, we sought to be objective. We have not been anyone's stooge or anyone's representative. We were invited to take part not by one side to the conflict but by all of the parties. We insisted on that. We also insisted in seeking and participating in investigations of alleged violations by the United States and the Republic of Viet-Nam just as we did with regard to alleged violations by the Democratic Republic of Viet-Nam and the other South Vietnamese Party. When, following the investigation, we found the Republic of Viet-Nam or the United States to have been at fault, we did not hesitate to say so. Because we strenuously objected to the obstruction of attempts to investigate alleged violations committed by the Democratic Republic of Viet-Nam or the Viet Cong, we were charged with partiality. This was simply not true -- the record reveals those who have been attempting to be impartial and those who have not. We have every reason to be proud of Canadian objectivity in the Commission.

I think it should be clear from what I have said as much as from our record that withdrawal does not represent in any way a shrinking away from

international responsibilities. We do not withdraw from responsibilities because we may think a task is thankless, dangerous and difficult -- but we do when it has become futile.

Some of you may have wondered whether our experience in Viet-Nam did not turn out just as many feared it would from the beginning. In other words, with the benefit of hindsight, should we have gone at all?

Looking back I can confirm that our initial decision to participate was the right decision. Our reasoning then for joining the Commission, as well as our reservations, have been largely vindicated. In Paris, the negotiators envisaged that the ICCS, with its four members, would form part of an integrated package designed to accomplish a series of objectives. While the central objective of peace was not attained, the Paris machinery, including the ICCS, provided a working framework for a number of solid achievements. Although the fighting continued, the level of violence subsided when compared with the period preceding the Paris Agreement. The United States has been able to disengage and withdraw its ground forces from Viet-Nam. There was the long awaited exchange of military prisoners. These are not inconsiderable accomplishments and there should be satisfaction that we were able to contribute, even modestly, to their achievement.

Less than four months after our withdrawal from the Commission in Indochina the Middle East erupted again into war. The fighting between October 6 and October 22 was the most furious and bloody in that beleaguered area in modern times.

The mounting fury of the fighting was possibly the main reason why it so abruptly ceased. The great powers, who were supplying arms in increasing quantity to each side, fortunately realized that they were being drawn into a dangerous confrontation. It was at this crucial stage that the United Nations Security Council agreed to the establishment and dispatch of an emergency force to supervise a ceasefire and to prevent a recurrence of the fighting.

Canada did not seek participation in the emergency force. There was, at the time some criticism that we were actually looking for a role for ourselves and that the new crisis in the Middle East was being seized by the Canadian Government primarily as an opportunity to polish our reputation as an international peacekeeper. Let me be very clear on this. Canada did not seek a role in UNEF any more than we had sought a role in the ICCS. The Secretary General of the United Nations invited Canada to provide the logistic component to the United Nations Force. That role was assigned to us precisely because of the effective way that Canada discharged that same role from 1956 to 1967.

At one point, it is quite true that the Soviets raised difficulties about Canadian participation. They had nothing against Canada. This was because of their concern at the absence, in the original plan, of representation from the East European countries. I say East European -- and not Warsaw pact countries -- advisedly. This is because we do not see a "balanced force" balanced in terms of NATO and the Warsaw pact. Balance as I envisage it means the regions of the world -- divided geographically -- not ideologically. In the event, the Secretary General modified the arrangements with the result that Poland and Canada share the logistic support role. In fact, so far, this cooperative arrangement has worked out very well.

So soon after our Vietnamese experience -- and with many people saying "not over that road again" we find ourselves engaged in a multinational peacekeeping operation in the Middle East. Are we being consistent or are we just letting ourselves be talked into a dangerous, thankless and perhaps useless task.

We did remember our frustration in Viet-Nam, some of the recurring problems of the Cyprus operation and we certainly recalled the collapse of the old UNEF in 1967. We did not accept the call to participate in a new UNEF without careful consideration.

Experience over the years has led us to look for certain criteria that, in our judgment, should be met if a peacekeeping operation is to be effective and if Canadian participation in it is to be worthwhile. We have no illusion that, in this imperfect world, the criteria for an ideal peacekeeping operation will ever be met in full.

The criteria Canada seeks to apply when considering participation in a peacekeeping operation include certain points of a political nature, as well as others of a more technical kind. A fundamental point is the existence of a threat to international peace and security. There was no doubt of that in this case. Ideally, peacekeeping should be directly linked to agreement on a political settlement among the parties to the conflict. At least, there should be reasonable expectations that the parties will negotiate a settlement. The peacekeeping force must be responsible to a political authority, and preferably that authority should be the United Nations. The sponsoring authority should receive reports and have adequate power to supervise the mandate of the force. The parties to the conflict must accept the peacekeeping force and Canadian participation in it must be acceptable to all concerned.

The Secretary-General gave us formal assurance that the presence of a Canadian contingent would be acceptable to all parties, and especially to Egypt, since UNEF was to be deployed on Egyptian territory.

With respect to the question of a United Nations political authority, on this occasion the super-powers jointly proposed a peacekeeping force, and all members of the Security Council, except China, approved.

The Secretary-General set out as essential conditions that the force must have at all times the full confidence and backing of the Security Council, and that it must operate with the full cooperation of the parties concerned. This was approved by the Security Council and we felt more assured that the new UNEF was to be on a sounder basis than that of 1956. It was on that basis that we acceded to the Secretary-General's request and accepted our assignment on the force.

I do not want to give you the impression that Canada has played a central or key role in this Middle East crisis. But with other participants in UNEF we have helped to provide a breathing space that has been indispensable. It has permitted an exchange of prisoners of war between Egypt and Israel. It has enabled the Egyptians and Israelis, with Dr. Kissinger's remarkable and indefatigable assistance, to work out an agreement on the disengagement of forces and has provided the essential security in which that agreement could be implemented. This is, of course, only a beginning. Problems remain which have proven intractable

over a generation. But as a result of concerted international cooperation, it is a better beginning than many of us would have dared to predict a few months ago.