



STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

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TOWARD A VIETNAM SETTLEMENT

Statement by the Prime Minister, the Right Honourable Lester B. Pearson, in the House of Commons on January 20, 1966.

...I should like to say a few words now, and only a few words, about the situation in Vietnam. Just as the situation in Rhodesia is a threat to peace and orderly development in all of Africa and could bring about an African conflict, so the situation in Vietnam remains a threat to peace and to orderly development not only in Southeast Asia but also in all of Asia. It could ultimately lead to the worst of catastrophes. In recent weeks the United States Government has made offers for a negotiated settlement. I believe, on the information I have received and from the contacts we have been able to make—and these have been close and continuous—among our friends in Washington, in London and in other capitals on this subject, that these offers are genuine and sincere and that they should be supported by all who believe in the necessity of bringing the fighting to an end and beginning a process of negotiation.

In one sense I think it is right to say that these offers have already begun the process of negotiation by throwing out public proposals and by eliciting perhaps not counter-proposals from those to whom the original proposals were made but counter-proposals from one source or another. I hope this process will be continued. Obviously there is a limit beyond which this kind of dialogue cannot be carried but I hope what has been going on will lead to the constructive play of diplomatic negotiation and a chance to explore opportunities for peace, and that those who are more directly concerned than we are and who are bearing the burden of this issue will be able to maintain the patience and wisdom they have been showing in recent weeks since those offers were first made. There is a discouraging side to all this. It is that there has been no response that anyone can detect from Hanoi itself. I think it is wise for the critics of the United States to remember this fact.

At the Commonwealth prime ministers' meeting last June, we tried to take an initiative which would bring the Commonwealth into this issue by way of a Commonwealth mission which would include members who were certainly not unacceptable to the Communists, men who, in two cases, were certainly uncommitted. No success was

achieved as a result of that effort. It was spurned by Hanoi and perhaps by some of those who are behind Hanoi; I do not know.

...We took the position at that time, and I believe it is the American position now—perhaps it was also at that time, though it was a little unclear to some of us—that, in the negotiations which will have to take place, the North Vietnamese Government, as the other government of Vietnam, should bring to the negotiations anyone it wished, including the Viet Cong, as part of its delegation. There were some members of the Commonwealth mission who certainly would have gone further than that.

However, there has been no positive response from Hanoi on this present occasion, and there was no positive response on that earlier occasion either. So far as one can gather from any statement of their position, they have made it clear, at least publicly, that there can be no negotiations without the United States withdrawing and without the Viet Cong being considered as the only legitimate representatives of the South Vietnamese people. That is a very difficult position for anyone else to accept.

Nevertheless, the United States has suspended air-bombing and I hope it will be able to maintain that suspension as long as possible. I also hope that with patience, as well as determination, this effort by the Americans for negotiations will have some success.

I should like to read just one sentence from the President's Congressional address, to which I think considerable importance should be attached but to which not very much publicity has been given. I quote from his address as follows:

"We will respond if others reduce their use of force; and we will withdraw our soldiers once South Vietnam is securely guaranteed the right to shape its own future."

Perhaps progress would be possible if the North Vietnamese even accepted the idea of negotiations. Once that acceptance has been given by both sides (and it has already been given by the United States), it might be possible, on the acceptance of negotiations, to begin a process of withdrawal. Perhaps that is what the President was hinting at as a possibility in that sentence. I do not know. However... in my view it is perfectly clear that military force alone will not settle this problem, will not resolve this issue either by toppling the regime in the North or by permitting the Communists to absorb the South.

Perhaps the result—and it is not one that anyone can get any particular satisfaction out of—perhaps the ultimate solution will have to be, as it has been in other cases since World War II, the acceptance of two Vietnamese communities, neutralized, with other countries staying out. So long as the problem is approached in terms of "puppet regimes" or "national liberation struggles", we run the risk of obscuring the basic

fact that there are now two communities in Vietnam and we also run the risk of misjudging the possibility of one community gaining a complete ascendancy over the other by military means or by subversion, or by any other means not based on the clearly expressed choice of the people concerned. In the case of two communities that have developed for more than a decade along different lines, and towards which such massive outside engagements have already been made, it seems difficult to believe that one would now be allowed simply to extinguish the other.

In my view, we should not preclude the possibility of the reunification of Vietnam which, unquestionably, corresponds with the aspirations of the Vietnamese people, and it would be my hope -- and I am sure of all Honourable Members -- that, when the fighting has ended and peace is restored, the two communities could proceed quickly towards establishing the basis of confidence which would bring about such reunification.

...I cannot help but add that every indication is against Communist China participating in any United Nations intervention.

... Naturally, I think we would all like to see the United Nations involved in this matter as soon as possible if there were any possibility of progress in that way, just as in the Rhodesian conflict we at Lagos agreed that, if economic sanctions, financial sanctions and oil sanctions did not work, and if any member of the Commonwealth thought they were not working, then, having set up the Sanctions Committee, that member of the Commonwealth could appeal to the Sanctions Committee for a reconvening of the Commonwealth Conference or could go to the United Nations and, in the Security Council of the United Nations, introduce a sanctions resolution under Chapter 7 of the Charter which would be obligatory on all members of the United Nations. This could be possible and successful in the case of Rhodesia, but I think it would be quite unrealistic to think UN involvement would be effective in any way in the Vietnamese conflict, unless somehow Communist China could be brought into association with it, and both governments of Vietnam showed a desire to go to the United Nations.

S/C