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SECRÉTAIRE
D'ÉTAT AUX
AFFAIRES
EXTÉRIEURES.

NOTES FOR STATEMENT BY THE
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR EXTERNAL
AFFAIRS, THE HONOURABLE MITCHELL
SHARP, IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS,
MARCH 27, 1973

CANADIAN PARTICIPATION IN VIET-NAM

It has been a particular source of gratification to the Government that the attitude Canada has adopted toward participation in the International Commission of Control and Supervision in Viet-Nam has consistently enjoyed such a wide measure of public support. Our attitude toward a long-term commitment and the conditions that we have attached to our service appear to be understood and accepted within this country and indeed to some extent outside of it. This has been especially encouraging since the problem of our original participation and now the decision on whether or not to continue has within it the elements of a dilemma. The Government was and still is highly conscious of the fact that there is no course of action it can choose which will meet all the demands being made upon us or command universal approval outside of this country. I venture to hope that the Government's decision will, however, receive the wide approval of this House and of the country and will not be considered unreasonable abroad. Stated at its starkest, the dilemma lies in the desire of all Canadians to serve the cause of peace in Indochina as long as, in the words of one honourable member, there is the slightest hope of a peaceful solution to the Viet-Nam problem. On the other hand, the Government is equally resolved that Canadians should not take part in a charade in which they would be required to supervise not a cease-fire but continuing and possible escalating hostilities. From the purely Canadian point of view it is important that both aspects of the problem be squarely faced. Canada's reputation is closely associated with our contribution to international efforts to make "peace-keeping" a reality. Confidence in the feasibility of peace-keeping anywhere can only be maintained if activities bearing that description are not only effective, but are seen to be effective by world opinion.

During the latter stages of the negotiation of the Paris Agreements on Viet-Nam, the Government therefore informed the negotiating parties that it reserved its position on whether or not Canada would participate as a member in the ICCS until it had seen and studied the agreed arrangements to see if, in the light of our experience, the arrangements were workable. At the same time we presented to the negotiators a set of conditions which, if met, would have in our view made the peacekeeping arrangements for Viet-Nam practical and credible. Also at the same time, we offered through the U.S. Government some detailed proposals regarding the organization and practical arrangements of truce supervising in Viet-Nam based on the conclusions drawn from nineteen years experience in Indochina.

I will not stretch the patience of the House by repeating our conditions which were given in full detail in my speech of January 5. I think it is fair to say that some of our points were accepted and incorporated in the documents that emerged. Nevertheless, when we saw the results of the negotiation as they were signed in Paris it also became clear that, in spite of the best efforts of the negotiators, the truce supervising arrangements left much to be desired. Moreover, one of our most important considerations, the establishment of a continuing political authority to which the ICCS and its members could report, was left for further consideration by an international conference to be held in Paris thirty days after the signature. As the House

is already aware, I led the Canadian Delegation to Paris at the end of February with proposals that would have given the ICCS the reporting authority which we considered necessary to its success.

In the meantime, we had concluded that the other truce supervisory arrangements as laid down in the Agreement left some doubt as to whether the Canadian criteria could be met. As I have said before on all possible occasions, this is no criticism of the Agreements or of those who negotiated them. It is undoubtedly the best agreement that could have been negotiated in the circumstances and the results have, in spite of all, turned the course of world events in a new and more hopeful direction. Our reservations therefore are based simply on a Canadian appreciation that the task as outlined was not one well-suited to Canadian methods and the Canadian temperament. In the final analysis we recognized, however, that what mattered most was the element of good faith on the part of all concerned and this could only be judged by trying to make the machinery work. It was for this purpose that we agreed to serve for an initial period of sixty days -- to which an additional thirty-day grace period was added to enable the parties to find a substitute in the event that we decided not to continue. That 60-day period ends on Thursday.

After returning from Paris I concluded that it would not be possible to reach a well-founded decision without having seen for myself the conditions in which the ICCS and particularly our delegation was operating, or having spoken directly with the leaders of the governments most directly concerned. I had, as the House knows, had several contacts with the U.S. Secretary of State on this subject and was well aware of the views of his government. I wanted to have the views of others as well.

Accordingly, on March 13, a group of representative Canadians, although not unfortunately entirely representative of this House, left for a trip that was to put me in touch with both Vietnamese Governments, the Government of Laos, as well as some leading personalities of the so-called Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Viet-Nam and of the Pathet Lao movement. It was a very intense indoctrination into the facts of life in the ICCS and the attitudes and policies of the governments most directly concerned. I think all those who went came back with at least one impression in common: that is, that the ICCS was not performing the tasks assigned to it under the cease-fire Agreement. I am also quite confident that most of my travelling companions would agree that this was in spite of the best efforts of the Canadian Delegation to make it work. We have heard it from a sufficiently wide variety of sources to accept it as a matter of fact that had it not been for the energy and ingenuity of the Canadian Delegation, even the setting up of the various bodies required by the Agreement would not have taken place as soon as they did.

Although our visit left most of us with misgivings on the operation and success of the ICCS in carrying out its assigned tasks, we also had brought home to us that in some quarters this was seen as of very little consequence. We have been well aware for some time that not everybody shares

Canada's concept of truce observation and supervision. There are other points of view with which we do not quarrel. We were also well aware that some of the interested parties at least and many other countries such as Britain and Japan were of the view that Canada should continue to serve on the ICCS regardless of whether it measured up to our standards. In all honesty, Mr. Speaker, I must say frankly that very few countries believed, in spite of our efforts to make our position known, that there was a real possibility that Canada would opt out of the ICCS. My trip to Viet-Nam has, I am sure, convinced some that we were indeed prepared to take this step if in our judgment, the whole arrangement was unworkable and was not serving the cause of peace in Viet-Nam. This had at least one salutary result in that we began to hear less about everything being lovely in Viet-Nam and that the ICCS had the potential of becoming a really vital force in keeping the peace in Indochina. Instead, we began to hear somewhat more convincing arguments that there was a totally different but equally vital role that bore no relation to our previous experience and is nowhere hinted at in the text of the Agreement and Protocols. Roughly stated, this is to provide an international presence as an indication of the continued involvement of the world community in the Viet-Nam situation. Although the ICCS may not be necessary for the purposes of carrying out the Agreement, its absence would be taken as an indication that the Agreement lacked world support and consequently our withdrawal could become a further destabilizing psychological factor in a situation already very unstable.

There are two things I would like to say about this so-called psychological role. The first is that I am not convinced that the ICCS does play such a part in the thinking of the Vietnamese. The second is that I do not believe that Canada and Canadians can be expected over any protracted period to play this part. So far as the North Vietnamese are concerned, I formed a clear impression that they regard the texts of the Agreement and Protocols as untouchable. They undoubtedly have their own interpretation of precisely what each article means and this interpretation adds up to either a peacefully reunified Viet-Nam or one whose reunification by force would be justified on the grounds that the other parties had not "scrupulously adhered to the Agreement". Needless to say, some of the other parties do not share this point of view.

To the Government of the Republic of Viet-Nam the Agreements are seen as an opportunity to remove the North Vietnamese if not from their territory, at least from the negotiating tables, and to give to them an opportunity to deal with their fellow South Vietnamese of the Provisional Revolutionary Government direct and across the table without intervention from the North. The Government in South Viet-Nam believes that in a relatively short period of time it will know whether this possibility holds any prospect of leading to a negotiated settlement in South Viet-Nam. It remains to be seen if this is a realistic aspiration.

It is no part of the responsibility of Canada as a member of the ICCS to judge the relative merits of these two positions. But it is now clear as it was not two months ago that all the Vietnamese parties will need a little

time to demonstrate the feasibility of their solutions; not to bring them about just to demonstrate feasibility. Once confidence has been established and if there has been some movement toward a political solution on either side's terms, the peace will no longer be as fragile as it is and the mere presence of an international commission will no longer be regarded as a vital part of the picture or that such a commission would be in a position to contribute to a solution. On the other hand, if neither side's view of a political solution is making any headway we can look forward to full-scale hostilities regardless of the presence of any observer or supervisory body.

It is out of consideration for this new element and for the possibly far-reaching consequences of opting out now for which we would have to accept some responsibility that the Government has decided not to exercise its option to withdraw after sixty days, even though it could justify doing so on the basis of the reasonable application of its announced criteria. On the other hand, our experience, both past and present, does not justify moving into acceptance of open-ended or unconditional participation. Consequently, the Government proposes to inform the parties to the Agreement that Canada would be prepared to continue to serve on the same basis as it does now for a further period of about sixty days, that is until May 31, after which, unless there has been some substantial improvement or distinct progress has been made toward a political settlement, it will withdraw, giving a further thirty-day grace period for the parties to find a successor. This means that Canada, unless there is a substantial improvement in the situation or some signs of an imminent political agreement, will cease to participate in the ICCS by June 30, 1973. All the parties will by then have had adequate time to carry out those provisions which the ICCS was created to supervise, perhaps even the holding of elections on which I will have more to say. If the South Vietnamese Parties now meeting in Paris are able to reach an early accord on internal matters as envisaged and encouraged in the Paris Agreement of January 27 our decision will present no obstacle.

One important aspect of the Agreement assigns a task to the ICCS, not in the field of truce observing but in contributing to the political settlement which alone can bring about the end of the war. The Agreement calls for an election to form a new national government. The ICCS Protocol assigns an undefined observer role to the ICCS. The meetings now going on between the two South Vietnamese parties are intended to produce the conditions under which the election should be held. This electoral function is distinct and separate from the other functions assigned to the ICCS and the rules have yet to be elaborated. It could therefore be dealt with separately. So far as Canada is concerned, regardless of our status in respect of other aspects of the Agreement, we would remain ready and available to serve, as the parties may wish, in helping to supervise an election provided it was called under the provisions of the Agreement. It would not apply to an election called in other circumstances.

Canada will also inform the four Parties to the Paris Agreement that as Canada neither negotiated nor signed the Paris Agreement we do not regard ourselves as bound by its provisions beyond the extent to which those who did sign it consider themselves to be bound. This was in fact one of our earliest conditions of service. Consequently, we will leave or otherwise regulate our deployment at any time if the Parties who signed the Agreement show, by their actions, that they no longer regard themselves bound by it. The resumption of large-scale hostilities or any action tantamount to a direct denial by the parties of their obligations under the Agreement would, in the Government's view, relieve Canada of further responsibility to the ICCS. Should this decision be forced upon us, the Government will state its reasons for withdrawal publicly.

I am not predicting that the arduous and skilful work involved in reaching this Agreement will be nullified by an early escalation of hostilities. Nevertheless, there is a great deal of evidence that the means to resume the war are readily available and there is, unfortunately, also reason to think that this possibility is not excluded from the calculations of some at least of the parties concerned. We shall reassess the situation again before the end of May and give our definitive view at that time.

In closing, I should state that in the time remaining to us in the Commission we will continue to maintain the objective and open approach we have taken until now and endeavour to see that the ICCS fulfills not only the psychological part that has been superimposed on it by remaining in Viet-Nam but also the duties as laid down in the Agreements. We will not take part in a charade nor will we tacitly condone inaction when we believe action is required.