



# STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

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## VIETNAM

Statement by the Honourable Paul Martin,  
Secretary of State for External Affairs,  
to the House of Commons Standing Committee  
on External Affairs, April 11, 1967.

I would like to be able to tell the Committee that the prospects in Vietnam are encouraging. In some respects I might be justified in saying that they are. In particular, I think there is reason to feel encouraged by the progress that is being made in South Vietnam towards the facts and forms of responsible government. In the wider perspective of the conflict, however, I must frankly confess that neither an end to the fighting nor the outlines of a political solution are as yet within sight.

In my presentation to the Committee this morning I would like to do three things. I shall begin by trying to set out in some detail what we know of the positions of the parties as they have emerged over the past year or so. I will then try to explore whether there is any basis on which it might be possible to break out of the present impasse. I will conclude my presentation by setting out some of the elements which we see as forming part of any eventual accommodation in Vietnam.

Before I proceed with my presentation, however, it might be useful if I were to restate briefly some of the salient aspects of the Canadian position in relation to the Vietnam conflict as I see it. I believe it would be useful to do that because there continues to be a good deal of misunderstanding of our position in the public debate which is going on in Canada about the Vietnam situation.

The first point which I think needs to be made in that regard is that Canada has no direct national interest to assert or maintain in Southeast Asia. Nor do we have any formal military or other commitments there. If we have been drawn into that part of the world, it has been solely as citizens of the wider world community. What we are doing in Southeast Asia is twofold: we are there on a peace-keeping mission on behalf of countries which do have a direct national interest in that area; and we are also there as a contributor to the collective effort to meet the rising expectations of the people in that area for a better life.

Second, there are responsibilities which we have in Vietnam as members of the International Commission. We have endeavoured to carry out these responsibilities with fairness and impartiality and we will continue to do so. I would be the last to deny that the course of events in Vietnam has in some important respects overtaken the mandate of the Commission. But there is agreement among all the parties that, as the representative of the Geneva powers, the Commission cannot simply wash its hands of the situation. There is also agreement that the Commission will have a role to play in the context of any final settlement and, quite possibly, in helping to pave the way for it. Because of these opportunities which are potentially open to the Commission, I believe I can say that it is the unanimous view of the three Commission powers that we are justified in maintaining our presence in Vietnam notwithstanding the anomalies and the frustrations of the present situation.

Third, apart from whatever role Canada may be able to play as a member of the International Commission, we have tried to use our national influence in promoting the course of peace in Vietnam. We have done this on the basis of our close relations with the United States and the access we have to the Government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in Hanoi, as well, of course, as the Government of the Republic of Vietnam in Saigon. I do not want to exaggerate the influence which a country like Canada can command in a matter of this kind, which has engaged the power and prestige of at least three of the great powers. Nor do I want to hold out any promise to the Committee that our efforts will turn out, in the end, to have been of more than marginal usefulness. But there is one thing of which I am sure and it is this: if our efforts are to be of any avail, they must be deployed within the limits of what the situation suggests is realistic. They are best directed towards arriving at some common denominator which the parties themselves are prepared to accept as reasonable. We will neither bludgeon nor shame the parties into accepting a course of policy which they regard as being contrary to their basic national interest. And this is something which I would ask those who would have us follow a different course to remember.

Fourth, the Canadian Government has made it clear that it is prepared to make its own contribution to an eventual settlement in Vietnam. Such a settlement is almost certain to involve some form of international presence which will afford to the parties concerned the necessary guarantees that the terms of the settlement are being fairly and effectively carried out. If, in the light of our first-hand experience of the Vietnam problem over the past 13 years, Canada were to be asked to participate in an international peace-keeping effort in Vietnam, whether under the auspices of the Geneva powers or under those of the United Nations, I am sure that we would be prepared to accept such a responsibility within the limits of our capacity. We have also recognized for some time that, in the aftermath of any settlement, it is likely to be necessary for interested countries to mount a collective effort for the economic recovery and rehabilitation of all parts of Vietnam. I want to remind the Committee that our commitment to contribute to such an effort is on the record and that we will meet that commitment when the time comes.

So much for the Canadian position in relation to the conflict in Vietnam.

It is now almost exactly two years since the major parties to the Vietnam conflict began publicly to define their positions in regard to a settlement of the Vietnam conflict. In the case of the United States, I would date that process as having been initiated by President Johnson in his address at Johns Hopkins University on April 7, 1965, when he first announced the willingness of the United States to enter into unconditional discussions with the other side. Almost by coincidence, the first public definition of the position of the Government of North Vietnam was given by Prime Minister Pham Van Dong on the following day -- that is, April 8, 1965 -- in a report to the North Vietnamese National Assembly. The position then set forth took the form of the now familiar four points to which, to my knowledge, the Government of North Vietnam remains firmly committed.

In a sense, therefore, it may be said that a process of public negotiation has been in progress between these two governments over the past 24 months. We have regarded this process as useful and encouraging. At the same time, we have always recognized that there were limits to this process and that, sooner or later, efforts would have to be made by third parties to bring the two sides into some form of direct contact.

As the Committee is aware, that was the essential purpose of the two missions which Mr. Chester Ronning undertook on behalf of the Canadian Government in March and June of 1966. Put in its simplest terms, what we asked Mr. Ronning to explore in the course of those two visits was whether there was any minimal basis on which it might be possible to arrange for bilateral contact between representatives of the United States and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam without commitments of any kind on either side. This seemed to us at the time, and still seems to us, to be a valid approach. The issues at stake in Vietnam are such that no third party could probably presume to negotiate them on behalf of one side or the other. Nor, I think, would such a course be acceptable to the parties to the present conflict. And if that is so, the conclusion which necessarily follows is that the efforts of third parties are best directed towards enabling the parties themselves to enter into such a negotiation at the earliest possible time and before the mounting lack of confidence on both sides makes the possibilities of peaceful accommodation in Vietnam recede beyond reach.

In the discussions which Mr. Ronning had with the Prime Minister and other senior personalities of North Vietnam, it became apparent to us that, as far as the North Vietnamese were concerned, the bombing of North Vietnam represented the key to any efforts which might be made to bring the two sides into direct informal contact. This conclusion, which we reached in the light of Mr. Ronning's first visit to North Vietnam in March of last year, has since been borne out in the official public statements of the Government of North Vietnam. I think the Committee might find it helpful, therefore, if I were to try to say something more about the North Vietnamese position on this subject as I understand it.

As the Committee is aware, the Foreign Minister of North Vietnam, in an interview with the Australian journalist Wilfred Burchett in January of this year, explained the position in the following terms:

"If (the United States) really wants talks, it must first halt unconditionally the bombing raids and all other acts of war against the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. It is only after the unconditional cessation of United States bombing and all other acts of war against the Democratic Republic of Vietnam that there could be talks between the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and the United States".

I do not want to suggest to the Committee that this is the whole position of the Government of North Vietnam as regards a solution of the Vietnam conflict. As far as that is concerned, the Government of North Vietnam continues to stand by its four-point programme, which it regards as reflecting the fundamental principles and provisions of the Geneva settlement of 1954 and as representing the most correct political solution of the Vietnam problem. It is only in respect of finding a basis for bilateral contact between the United States and North Vietnam that the matter of the cessation of the bombing has been put forward as a prior and unilateral condition.

The question has been raised in some quarters as to whether, if there was a cessation of the bombing of North Vietnam, this would have to be permanent as well as unconditional. The Committee will note that, in the passage which I have quoted from the interview given by the Foreign Minister of North Vietnam, only the word "unconditional" appears. The same is true of a similar passage which occurs in President Ho Chi Minh's reply of February 15 to President Johnson. I am bound to say, however, that, in other passages, both in the Foreign Minister's interview and in President Ho Chi Minh's message to President Johnson, the word "definitive" is used along with the word "unconditional" in setting out the requirements of the Government of North Vietnam on this subject. Furthermore, if there was any lingering doubt on this score, it was removed by the North Vietnamese representative in Paris in a conversation with reporters from the New York Times on February 22. In that conversation the North Vietnamese representative is quoted as saying that any cessation of the bombing which was not clearly labelled as permanent and unconditional would leave the threat of bombing intact and would thus constitute an unacceptable interference with whatever talks might then be in progress between the two sides. When he was asked how a distinction could in practice be drawn between a temporary and a permanent halt to the bombing, the North Vietnamese representative answered that the United States would have to declare at the outset that the halt was both permanent and unconditional. In any event, it seems to me that North Vietnam could logically say no less since anything less would amount to saying that the United States could resume the bombing if Hanoi did not meet Washington's conditions.

There has also been some question as to whether Hanoi would require the United States to accept its four-point programme before being willing to enter into any direct talks with them. On the basis of what Prime Minister Pham Van Dong told Mr. Harrison Salisbury at the beginning of January this year, I would judge that acceptance of the four points would not be regarded

by North Vietnam as a pre-condition to such talks, although the four points would almost certainly figure prominently on any resulting agenda.

To summarize, therefore, the North Vietnamese position would appear to be as follows. If the United States ceases the bombing and all other military action against North Vietnam permanently and without condition, the Government of North Vietnam would be prepared to enter into direct talks with representatives of the United States. The further information we have suggests that such talks could be initiated within a reasonable interval after the cessation of the bombing, such an interval being presumably required by the North Vietnamese side to give effect to their argument that the holding of talks would not, in fact, be regarded as a "condition" of the cessation of the bombing.

I think it is only fair that I should set out the United States reaction to this proposition, which I understand to be as follows: As regards the matter of talks, the United States Government would be prepared to enter into such talks with representatives of the Government of North Vietnam at any time and without any prior condition whatsoever. As regards the matter of a reduction in the scale of hostilities, the United States would be prepared to discuss such a reduction on a basis of reasonable reciprocity. What the United States is not prepared to do, so far as I understand it, is to discontinue for good what they regard as a significant aspect of their military activity in Vietnam in return for a mere undertaking on the North Vietnamese side to enter into bilateral talks.

Perhaps I should say something at this point about the recent series of proposals for putting a halt to the conflict in Vietnam which have been put forward by the Secretary-General of the United Nations. Some 13 months ago, the Secretary-General first developed a proposition which envisaged the following three steps: a cessation of the bombing of North Vietnam by the United States; a mutual de-escalation on the ground in South Vietnam by both sides; and a negotiation involving all the parties which are actually fighting in Vietnam -- that is to say, including the Viet Cong.

As far as I know, the Government of North Vietnam does not object to the first and third points of the Secretary-General's proposal. To my knowledge, however, they have not at any time specifically endorsed the second point, which envisaged a mutual de-escalation in South Vietnam.

The reply of the United States to these proposals was made by Mr. Goldberg in the General Assembly on September 22. As I interpret that reply, it expressed the willingness of the United States to stop the bombing of North Vietnam as a prior and unilateral act on the understanding, which could be conveyed either in public or in private, that there would be a reasonable measure of military reciprocity on the other side within a given interval of time. The United States also reiterated at that time that they did not regard the problem of affording the Viet Cong an opportunity to make their views heard at any future conference as insurmountable.

In the light of these reactions, the Secretary-General apparently decided that an adaptation of his proposals might be able to overcome the difficulties which the parties evidently had in accepting them in their original form. Accordingly, he discussed with representatives of North Vietnam in Rangoon and subsequently formulated in writing on March 14 an adaptation of his original proposals on the following lines: As a first step, there would be a general stand-still truce by all parties to the conflict; the parties directly involved in the conflict would then enter into preliminary talks, with or without the assistance of the Co-Chairmen of the Geneva Conference of 1954 and the members of the International Commission, the purpose of such talks being to reach agreement on the terms and conditions for reconvening the Geneva Conference; these preliminary talks would be followed by the holding of the actual conference, with the participation of all those who are actually fighting and with the object of returning to the essentials of the original Geneva settlement.

These revised proposals were accepted in their essentials by the United States. In signifying their acceptance on March 18, the United States pointed out, however, that they would expect the Government of South Vietnam to be appropriately involved throughout the entire process envisaged by the Secretary-General. They also implied that a stand-still cease-fire could not be automatically brought about without prior discussion either directly by the two sides or through some other channel. The note indicated that the United States, for its part, was prepared to enter into such discussions without delay.

While I have not seen the reply made to the Secretary-General's proposals by the Government of North Vietnam, I understand that these proposals did not commend themselves to that Government to the extent that they appeared to place the United States and North Vietnam on the same basis, whereas it is the contention of the Government of North Vietnam that a distinction must be drawn between the United States as the "aggressor" and North Vietnam as the "victim of aggression".

It is my understanding that the Secretary-General still stands by the proposals he put forward on March 14. I also understand that he would not wish his more recent public comment on a speech by Senator Joseph Clark to the National Convention of Americans for Democratic Action to be regarded as representing a new proposal or appeal. In view of the great dangers inherent in the continuation of the present conflict, however, the Secretary-General appears to have concluded that it might be necessary for his own proposals to be given at least initial effect by a unilateral initiative on one side or the other. And it was presumably with these considerations in mind that he gave his personal endorsement to Senator Clark's suggestion that the United States give a unilateral undertaking to put a stand-still cease-fire into effect and thereafter to fire only if fired upon.

As regards our own position, I would like to say only this. We have maintained all along that the settlement of this conflict will require concessions on both sides. I believe that this is a view which is widely shared, regardless of how the rights and wrongs of the Vietnam conflict are interpreted.

In response to those who have asked the Government to dissociate itself from the bombing of North Vietnam by the United States, we have made it clear that we would, indeed, like to see the bombing stopped, but that we would also like to see the infiltration stopped, and that we would like to see negotiations looking towards the peaceful solution of this conflict begun. As I indicated to the House on April 4, it is from this general perspective that we endorsed the Secretary-General's proposals of March 14 and that we shall continue to judge all proposals which are aimed at putting a halt to the fighting in Vietnam.

As far as the Canadian Government is concerned, Mr. Chairman, it will continue to be the object of our diplomatic efforts to try to establish a basis on which the two sides might be brought together. There is, of course, no dearth of formulas for trying to do that. But the fact remains that the test of any such formula is its acceptability to both sides. This has been the experience of the Secretary-General; it has been our own experience; and it has been the experience of other countries which have tried to play a helpful part in this matter.

This does not mean, however, that any of those who have tried to lend their good offices to the parties intend to abandon this effort. Certainly, as far as Canada is concerned, I can assure the Committee that we have no intention of doing that. The question that arises is whether there is any new direction which it might be worth exploring in the hope that it might avoid the impasse which has apparently now been reached and which has brought us to the point where, for the first time in some 16 months, no new initiatives, either public or private, appear to be within sight.

It seems to me that, in trying to bring this conflict to a halt, the same principle may be applicable which we have found, in practice, to be applicable to the process of general and complete disarmament. In essence, that principle is that there must be a condition of parity between the two sides at all stages of the process. That is to say, care would have to be taken to avoid a situation where either side is placed, or considers itself to be placed, in a position of relative disadvantage at any given stage.

Having that principle in mind, I wonder whether it might not be worth while to take another look at some of the terms of the 1954 Agreement. The core of that Agreement lies in the concept of a cease-fire and a disengagement of forces. Surely that is what we are seeking today as a matter of first priority. Would it be going too far to suggest that some thought might now be given to the possibility of discussing a stage-by-stage return to the Geneva cease-fire arrangements as a first step towards a more permanent settlement which would necessarily have to encompass many other factors? Of course, the cease-fire arrangements are only one aspect of the Geneva settlement and I recognize the difficulty of trying to persuade the parties to return to one aspect of the settlement in the absence of some preliminary understandings at least as regards the basis on which the other, and more intractable, aspects of the settlement might be tackled in a subsequent negotiation. Accordingly, it may well be necessary to envisage a progressive re-application of the 1954 cease-fire terms as an agreed preliminary to direct discussions between the two sides

and as something which would of itself help to create a favourable climate for such discussions.

If there were any merit in an approach on these lines, I could envisage it being carried out in four stages.

The first step should involve some degree of physical disengagement of the parties. This might be accomplished by restoring the demilitarized character of the zone on either side of the 17th Parallel by the withdrawal of all military forces, supplies and equipment from that zone, by enforcing a prohibition against any artillery action across the zone, and by barring any overflights of the zone except for purposes of impartial supervision. At the same time, it would be necessary to reactivate those provisions of the cease-fire agreement which prohibit either North or South Vietnam to be used for the carrying out of hostile acts against the other. In my view, this would, in equity, have to include the bombing and any other military action against North Vietnam, whether actually undertaken from South Vietnam or from some other point of origin.

Second, I think it would be necessary to freeze the course of military events in Vietnam at its present level. This might entail undertakings on both sides not to engage in any military activities which differed, in either scale or pattern, from the activities which are currently being engaged in. It might also entail the practical re-application, as from an agreed point in time, of those articles of the Geneva Cease-Fire Agreement which prohibit reinforcement of troops or arms, munitions and other war material into North or South Vietnam from any source or quarter.

The third stage of such an approach would logically involve the cessation of all active hostilities between the parties, whether on the ground, at sea or in the air.

The fourth and final stage would complete the process of return to the cease-fire provisions of the Geneva settlement. At that stage, provision would have to be made for the liberation and repatriation of prisoners, for the withdrawal of all outside forces whose presence in the area of conflict was not provided for at Geneva, and for the dismantling of military bases or their conversion to peaceful purposes.

I have been concerned to sketch out one line of approach to ending the present conflict which seems practicable to me and which, in addition, has behind it the sanction of the Geneva arrangements to which both sides have said that they continue to subscribe.

Any such approach, however, would clearly have to be acceptable to the parties concerned. I want to be perfectly frank with the Committee and say that, on present evidence, I am not very optimistic on that score. For, while it is true that both sides are prepared to subscribe to the objective of a return to the Geneva arrangements, I am not so sure that they are at one in their interpretation of what that objective implies or as to the means by which it can best be achieved. In particular, of course, we cannot be

unmindful of the position of the Government of North Vietnam, which is that they cannot accept any proposal which treats both sides on a basis of strict equity because this would ignore the factor of responsibility for the present conflict as they see it.

If this approach or any variant of it were to commend itself to the parties, the International Commission might have a special role to play in translating these general ideas into concrete proposals and, in due course, providing the required guarantees that they were being properly implemented on both sides. I would also like to point out to the Committee that this particular approach is one which the Commission might be fully justified in putting to the parties and to the other members of the Geneva Conference who have an obvious interest in any proposal designed to ensure that the Agreement on the cessation of hostilities in Vietnam is respected.

There is one further point which I should like to leave with the Committee. We have said consistently that we regard a purely military solution of the conflict in Vietnam as neither practicable nor desirable. I would like to take that proposition one step further today and say this: On the basis of all the knowledge I have of the proposals that have been made and the initiatives that have been taken over the past 16 months, I am doubtful if it will be possible to solve the purely military aspects of this conflict without at the same time tackling the political questions which lie at the root of it. As I have already suggested, this applies to the approach I have outlined to the Committee, as it would to any other approach to this issue.

The simple fact is that these aspects are interrelated and that progress on one front may well depend on progress being made on the other. I am inclined to think that the recent experience of the Secretary-General bears out this impression. On the face of it, a stand-still cease-fire does not look as if it should involve any inordinate problems for either side if there was a willingness in principle to stop the fighting. On second thought, however, it will appear that such a cease-fire does pose problems for both sides to the point where one side cannot envisage such a move being made without prior discussion, if not negotiation, while the other cannot, apparently, see it being made at all in present circumstances. It is my considered view that, apart from any possible military problems, there are political problems posed by this proposal which are such as to have a bearing on the terms on which the conflict may eventually be resolved.

The underlying political issue, as I see it, are the ultimate political arrangements in South Vietnam and the willingness of others to allow those to be worked out by the South Vietnamese people without interference from any quarter. One aspect of this issue, of course, is the status of the Viet Cong. What is at stake here is not really their representation at any eventual conference-table but the terms of their participation within the ultimate political structure of the country. These are the really crucial points which will have to be resolved and on which, I am afraid, the position of the parties are as far apart as ever.

It is clearly not for Canada, any more than for others, to prescribe to the South Vietnamese people how to order their affairs. I have made it clear that we regard a continuance of the present division of Vietnam into two communities as probably unavoidable for the time being, if only to allow the scars which have been opened by the conflicts of the past quarter-century to heal and for new dispositions to be agreed for the eventual reunification of Vietnam. It will be for the people in the two parts of Vietnam to decide how soon and under what conditions the first steps towards reunification can reasonably be taken. I am convinced that there is a basic desire for reunification in Vietnam, as there is in other divided countries. At the same time, it seems to me, on the basis of recent statements, that there is also a realistic appreciation on both sides that reunification is not something which is likely to be accomplished overnight.

Whatever the prospects of early progress toward actual reunification, I would hope that, once the hostilities have ceased, a basis can be laid for a genuine reconciliation between the two communities. I appreciate that this may not come about either quickly or easily. But I am sure there is much to be said for the early opening of channels which respond to the interests of the people of Vietnam on both sides of the temporary dividing-line. I have in mind, in particular, such matters as the reunification of families, the establishment of at least minimum facilities of communication, and the institution of commercial exchanges on a basis of mutual advantage. It is around such a nucleus of common interest that I believe the foundations for the eventual reunification can most securely be laid. And, if any international presence in Vietnam could lend its good offices in that direction, I would hope that this is something which could be explored.

I have already had occasion, at the outset of my presentation, to comment on recent constitutional developments in South Vietnam. We welcome these developments, which are likely to culminate in the election of a genuinely representative government before the end of the current year. We would like to think that, once the hostilities have ceased and a settlement of the present conflict has been reached, the constitutional structure that is currently being evolved will be strong enough and flexible enough to accommodate all segments of the South Vietnamese people who are prepared to play their peaceful part in the political life of South Vietnam.

When I last spoke to the House, I said that we could see merit in proposals which are being made for the neutralization, in due course, not only of Vietnam but possibly of a wider area in Southeast Asia. I continue to think that such proposals may well offer a promising basis for political arrangements in that area. I think it important, however, that, whatever arrangements are ultimately arrived at, they cannot be imposed on the countries of the area against their will. They must be such as to reflect the genuinely held preferences of these countries based on an assessment, which each country can only make for itself, as to the course which is most likely to serve its own best interests and those of the area in which it is situated.

That, Mr. Chairman, concludes my review of the Vietnam situation. I cannot say that I assess the prospects in the short term any too hopefully. I say this because, so far, the simple formula which will bring the two sides together without raising other intractable issues has eluded all those who have tried. I can assure the Committee, however, that the Government remains committed to the search for a solution of this conflict. I am in close touch with the representatives of all countries which may be in a position to help in this matter -- in particular, of course, our Commission partners, with whom we hope it will be possible to concert our efforts in the right circumstances. I am firmly convinced that there is a role which Canada will be called upon to play in Vietnam in one form or another, and we are now looking into the results of our experience over the past 13 years to determine how best we can play that role when the time comes.

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