



STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

INFORMATION DIVISION

DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

OTTAWA - CANADA

No. 65/4 Excerpts from an Address by the Honourable Paul Martin, Secretary of State for External Affairs, to the Board of Evangelism and Social Service of the United Church of Canada, Toronto, February 18, 1965.

In the past week or so we have all, I think, been disturbed by the turn of events in Vietnam. These events cannot, of course, be assessed in isolation. They represent the culminating point in a series of developments going back at least a decade. I think it is particularly important that these developments are understood in Canada because they affect us through our membership in the International Commission which was set up in 1954 to supervise the cease-fire arrangements in that area.

There has, I know, been some criticism of the role of the International Commission from time to time. While I would be the first to admit that it has not always functioned in the way in which the Canadian Government has believed it should, we must remember that Canada is only one of three members. While we can press and, indeed, have pressed, our partners to agree with us, we have not always succeeded. Our efforts have been directed towards highlighting the problem of subversion in South Vietnam, which is the basic difficulty in the situation. We have been prepared to co-operate with our partners and to compromise on detail in reviewing this crucial problem, but we have not been prepared to compromise in our assessment of its fundamental importance.

To those who maintain that the Commission has been ineffectual in preventing the development of this dangerous situation in Vietnam, I can only say that the Commission was never intended to be an enforcement agency; it has no powers to coerce the parties into taking or desisting from action. Its sole function is -- as its title implies -- to supervise. If the parties to the Agreement are not prepared to implement its terms, if they are not prepared to co-operate with the Commission, the Commission itself can only report these defaults in the hope that its reports may influence the policies of those concerned with the situation in Vietnam. Beyond this, I believe that the presence of the Commission has served as a restraining influence and as a force tending towards stability.

In its special report of June 1962, the International Commission in Vietnam, after careful analysis of a large number of South Vietnamese complaints, came to the conclusion that armed and unarmed personnel, arms, munitions and other supplies, had been sent from North Vietnam into South Vietnam with the object of supporting, organizing and carrying out hostile

activities, including armed attack directed against the armed forces and administration of South Vietnam. This same report also concluded that the North Vietnamese authorities had allowed their territories to be used for inciting, encouraging and supporting hostile activities in South Vietnam aimed at the overthrow of the South Vietnamese administration.

It is against the background of these established facts that recent events must be judged. It is not my purpose to justify or condemn retaliation. Least of all would I seek to discount the risks it involves. What I do wish to point out is that to see the recent military action against North Vietnam as gratuitous and unrelated to what has been going on in South Vietnam for years is seriously to distort our appreciation of a complex problem.

The United States Government has made it clear that it seeks no wider war. In responding to provocation, its military action was limited and specific, in being confined to military targets forming an integral part of the network by which the North steers and supplies the rebel military forces in the South. As proof of its intentions, the United States has taken prompt action in informing the Security Council of what had happened.

This does not, of course, lessen the dangers. The situation calls for great restraint on the part of all concerned, and this means, in the first instance, restraint by the Viet Cong and the authorities in North Vietnam. Further attacks in the South, followed by further raids on the North, could lead to escalation, bringing with it Chinese and even Soviet military involvement. To avoid such a course of events, Canada has made an urgent appeal for caution, not only in Washington but also in Moscow and in Warsaw, where we have asked the Soviet and Polish Governments to use their influence in the interests of avoiding new incidents. Similar appeals have been made by the Government of India and by the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

Is there anything more positive that can be done towards working out a durable settlement of the problem in Vietnam? In some quarters, a new Geneva conference has been urged. The machinery for such a conference exists within the framework of the 1954 agreements. As far as Canada is concerned, I have stated on many occasions that we are prepared to participate in such a conference provided it is held in the right conditions. But so long as the North Vietnamese authorities persist in their policy of intervention in the South, it is difficult to see what useful contribution could be made to the peace and stability of Vietnam by a new conference. Surely the right course is to embark on such a conference in conditions where there is a reasonable prospect of arriving at an accommodation.

What is required, I believe, is a period in which military pressure is not being exerted by either side and the build-up of tensions is allowed to relax. It might then be possible for all concerned to take a new look at the situation, including the prospect of a new conference.

Canada is in Vietnam as custodian of an international agreement. Our first concern, therefore, must be to see that that agreement is faithfully observed and peace is maintained. Canada has no national interest to assert in that part of the world. But we do have an interest, as a responsible member of the world community, in helping to ensure that all people in the area are enabled to live under conditions of their own choice. And we shall naturally be ready to play whatever part we can to that end.

s/c