



STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

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CAMBODIA

Statements by the Honourable Mitchell Sharp,
Secretary of State for External Affairs, in
the House of Commons on May 1, 1970.

(1) A.M.

...I thought that the House might expect me to make a short comment on the situation in Cambodia. I am sure we all listened to President Nixon's speech with deep anxiety. There can be no doubt that the decisions he announced were hard and momentous at what is bound to be a difficult time for our sorely-tried neighbour and a dangerous period for the world.

During the period before the International Control Commission was asked to leave Cambodia, we were aware, as a member of the Commission, of abuses of Cambodian territory by North Vietnam and we deplored the inability of the International Control Commission to do anything about it, despite our best efforts over a period of years....

Ever since the conflict began in South Vietnam, one of our objectives as a member of the Commission was to try to insulate Cambodia from the effects of the Vietnam war. To achieve this we tried to have the International Control Commission consider a Cambodian Government request in 1966 to have the Control Commission supervise Cambodian ports and borders.

In 1967 we tried to have the Commission strengthened by having it accept a United States offer of helicopters which Prince Sihanouk suggested the United States should provide for the International Control Commission. We tried in 1966 to have the Commission undertake investigations into the presence of North Vietnamese and Viet Cong forces in the very area of Parrot's Beak now the subject of military operations, on the basis of *prima facie* evidence provided by the Cambodian Government and Prince Sihanouk himself.

Had we been successful in persuading our Commission colleagues to take these measures, the International Control Commission might at least have been able to provide some warning of the magnitude of the Vietnamese Communist intervention in Cambodia which has elicited the present United States and South Vietnamese response and might even have helped avoid the situation developing to the present stage.

I certainly hope the situation in Cambodia will not now be allowed to develop as did the situation in Vietnam. I deeply regret that the United States Government has considered it necessary to take this step, but we are somewhat reassured that President Nixon has given an assurance of the limited nature of these operations and that United States forces will be withdrawn once their immediate objectives are achieved. It would be tragic, and I am sure this view is shared not only by all Members of this House but by the American people themselves, if these operations were to result in a further escalation of the conflict in Indochina.

(2) P.M.

I thought it might be useful to the House if I were to begin my remarks with a short historical background to the events that we are discussing this afternoon.

The 1954 Geneva Conference on Indochina drew up cease-fire agreements for each of the three Indochina states. As one of the countries invited to serve as a supervisory power on each of the three international commissions provided for in the cease-fire agreements, Canada undertook, together with India and Poland, to see whether or not the parties involved in the agreements properly implemented the terms of those agreements to which they had subscribed. In Cambodia these parties were the Cambodian national armed forces, on the one hand, and the Cambodian resistance forces and Vietnamese military units, on the other.

The implementation of the 1954 cease-fire agreement for Cambodia proved to be a straightforward matter. The more purely military provisions were put into effect without too much difficulty and, with the Cambodian elections of 1955 over, the Canadian delegation urged that the Commission should be disbanded. In Canada's opinion, the job for which the Commission had been established had been completed. We were not, however, able to convince our Indian and Polish colleagues, particularly when it became clear that the Cambodian Government wished to see the Commission continue in being. So the Commission remained in Cambodia with its personnel progressively reduced, until by 1958 only a token staff was left.

Until about 1963, there was not much for the Commission to do. The renewed conflict in Vietnam, however, began increasingly to be felt in Cambodia -- often with tragic loss of Cambodian lives and property. As the situation in Vietnam deteriorated, incidents in the border area between Cambodia and South Vietnam became more and more frequent. For their part, the South Vietnamese and the Americans maintained that any incidents in which they were involved resulted from clashes with Vietnamese Communist forces who were making use of Cambodian territory as a sanctuary to which they retreated or as a base from which they operated against South Vietnam. The charge was also increasingly made that the Vietnamese Communists were making use of Cambodia as a supply-route, both in the northeastern province, along what was called the "Sihanouk Trail", and through the ports along the Gulf of Siam.

Since early 1968, the Cambodian Government itself has complained publicly of the activities of Vietnamese Communist armed forces on Cambodian territory. Evidence substantiating these complaints was contained in an official Cambodian Government report made public in October 1968 in which the Cambodian Secretary of State for National Security reported that armed Vietnamese

continuously installed themselves in certain frontier districts of Svay Rieng Province. In another report, published in October 1968, the estimated strength of these Vietnamese Communist troops was given as 4,000.

By early 1969, public statements by Prince Sihanouk more and more frequently contained charges of extensive Vietnamese Communist infiltration in the border area. In his March 6, 1969, press conference, Prince Sihanouk declared that Viet Cong and Viet Minh units had infiltrated into Cambodia near Mimot and other areas in an apparent attempt to establish a Vietnamese frontier along the Mekong River. In his press conference of March 28, 1969, Prince Sihanouk declared that Viet Cong and Viet Minh units, in some cases in battalion and regimental strength, had infiltrated into Cambodia along Cambodia's eastern frontier and that they had actually engaged in armed conflict with Cambodian military forces in the Parrot's Beak.

In the Canadian Government's opinion, these indications constituted *prima facie* evidence of a violation of the 1954 cease-fire agreement on Cambodia by one of the parties and the ICC had a clear obligation to initiate an investigation to verify the facts. The Canadian delegation proposed such investigations, but this was not taken up by our colleagues before the Cambodian Government, on October 7, 1969, indicated its intention to have the Commission "terminate its mission by the end of the year". Earlier, two Canadian proposals were put forward in the Commission in response to a general request by the Cambodian Government in August 1968 to investigate the alleged presence of Vietnamese Communists in the Parrot's Beak area. These, however, were rejected by the majority in the Commission.

Thus, prior to 1969, the Cambodian Government appeared to us to be genuinely interested in the International Commission. It gave the Commission virtual *carte blanche* to fulfil its responsibilities and provided the permissive framework within which the Commission could act if it so decided. We were unable to persuade our colleagues on the Commission to do so, and by early 1969 the Cambodian Government ceased asking the Commission to undertake any kind of investigation -- even of border incidents allegedly involving U.S.-South Vietnamese forces -- which the Commission had been carrying out. On October 7, 1969, as I mentioned in the House this morning, the Cambodian Government indicated the desire to have the Commission terminate its mission, and on December 4, 1969, it asked the Commission to adjourn *sine die* by December 31, 1969.

It is against this background that we must weigh the present situation in which the United States and South Vietnamese forces have entered Cambodia. The President has declared that this is not an invasion of Cambodia. I express no view on that; that is the statement that he has made. He went on to say that the areas in which these attacks will be launched are completely occupied and controlled by North Vietnamese forces.

He has also made clear that it is not the purpose of the United States to occupy these areas. He said, as I mentioned this morning, that "once enemy forces are driven out of these sanctuaries and their military supplies destroyed, we will withdraw".

I should make it clear here that Canada was not informed about the United States decisions ahead of time. We had no previous knowledge whatever,

and there was, of course, no reason why we should. As I said in the House this morning, there is no doubt that these decisions were hard ones and certainly very momentous. It remains to be seen whether they will accomplish what the President has in mind.

I have no doubt whatever that the President is very conscious of the risks of uncontrolled escalation in this situation, and that this must be a governing factor in the implementation of his policy. I think it is fair to say too that the President made his decision in full knowledge of the opposition of many leading figures in the United States, including Senator Fulbright....

The United States is a democratic country. There are many countries in the world where decisions of government are made without attention to the views of their people. The American people can at any time reject a Government that makes decisions that are contrary to what they believe to be in their interests. I believe, if I may say so, that the American people are as fully conscious as we are as Canadians of the implications of the decisions that have been made by the U.S. Government.

...I doubt very much, however, whether the anguish in Indochina would end if the United States were simply to withdraw its forces immediately and without condition. This seems to me to be the dilemma in which we all find ourselves today.

...(I)t has been suggested that we ought to do more to have the International Control Commission in Cambodia revived. It has also been suggested that we should do more to reconvene the powers involved such as the members of the Geneva Conference. Others have suggested we should take steps to bring the matter before the United Nations.

Let me deal first with the question of reconvening the International Control Commission. We have been discussing this question with those governments directly involved in any decision that would be taken on this matter and there is no indication yet that they see the reconvening of the Commission as being helpful. I have made the Canadian Government's position clear. We are, of course, prepared to see the Commission reconvened if there is any reasonable prospect of its being able to do a job. We have indicated our readiness to participate in a tripartite meeting in New Delhi in order to discuss with India and Poland the function of a reconvened International Control Commission as well as improvements in its methods of operation which would be necessary in order to make it more effective than it was before. Whether there is now any better prospect of the Commission being reconvened is at least doubtful. The only responsibility which the Commission has is to supervise a cease-fire which has already been agreed upon. It may facilitate the implementation of an agreed cease-fire, but it has no mandate, and, indeed, no capacity, to stop the parties engaging in a full-scale conflict.

The French Government has put forward the idea of negotiations among what they call interested parties with a view to the neutralization of the whole of Indochina. When I discussed this proposal with Mr. Schumann in Paris a few weeks ago, he made clear that this was not a new proposal for a new Geneva Conference, although that possibility was not ruled out....The Soviet Union appeared to show some interest in the idea of a Geneva Conference. However, the Soviet Union made no specific proposal, as some believe, and subsequently made clear, in the words of the Soviet Ambassador to the United Nations, that

"convening such a conference is unrealistic at the present time". The New Zealand Prime Minister, Mr. Keith Holyoake, has also urged the convening of a new Geneva Conference on Indochina. No concrete proposals, however, have been made by anyone, and from our own reports we have concluded there is no agreement on the part of the parties most directly concerned that a Geneva Conference should be called.

There is some movement toward the convening of a meeting of Asian countries in Djakarta on May 11 and 12....

While Canada has not been invited to attend this meeting, naturally we have a keen interest in it, since it represents an effort by the countries of the region to reach a consensus on the Cambodian situation and to make recommendations to the parties involved.

It has been suggested that Canada should bring the question of Cambodia before the United Nations. In fact, the Cambodian Government is capable of doing so itself and has, indeed, brought the situation in Cambodia to the attention of the United Nations. So far, however, it has not pressed for a Security Council meeting. If, in fact, the Cambodians believe they have been invaded, notwithstanding the view expressed by President Nixon, then of course they could certainly take this matter before the Security Council.

The difficulty about discussing the situation in Southeast Asia at the United Nations remains as it always has. Many of the parties are not members. Neither North Vietnam nor South Vietnam...is represented and of course the chair of China is occupied by the Republic of China Government rather than by the People's Republic. Furthermore...the Communist side in the dispute has always vigorously denied the authority of the United Nations to discuss the war in Vietnam. ...

It is very difficult under these circumstances to feel that this would be the most useful thing today since there seems to be expressed opposition on the part of one of the parties to the conflict. For the moment, the prospect of any Security Council consideration of the Cambodian situation does not look promising, but there may be other United Nations machinery which might be employed.

I throw out this suggestion. In the past the despatch of a personal representative to troubled areas by the Secretary-General has proved a helpful intervention. This is something which I think might be a useful initiative at the present time. When it comes down to it, however, any of these efforts will be successful only when the various parties agree to negotiation. Until the parties are prepared to discuss the issues, a Geneva-type conference or any other initiative cannot be forced on them. As soon as there is any hope in this respect, there will be an opening for Canada, and indeed the other interested governments, to make a helpful contribution. All we can do in the meantime is to urge the parties to get together, but the idea that one could call upon a group of countries that are not involved in the dispute to settle the dispute is obviously unrealistic. There must be a disposition to negotiate and there must be a disposition to agree. In this case I can assure the House of the Canadian Government's desire to see this agony in Indochina come to an end as quickly as possible. We will spare no effort....
