



STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

CANADA

INFORMATION DIVISION
DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
OTTAWA - CANADA

No. 73/8

CANADA ON THE ICSC: DIFFICULTY AND DILEMMA

An Address by the Secretary of State for
External Affairs, the Honourable Mitchell
Sharp, to the Empire Club, Toronto,
March 22, 1973.

...I am delighted to be here today. Your President's timely invitation has given me the opportunity to speak to you on the subject that happens to be most on my mind at the present time....

...I do not think it is really possible to appreciate the difficulties of Canada's role in the new Commission and the dilemmas about continued participation without some background on the long years of involvement in Indochina. This involvement reaches back almost 19 years -- to the International Conference held in Geneva in 1954 by Britain, the United States, the Soviet Union, France and China. You may recall that this conference followed the defeat of the French at Dienbienphu in 1954. This was the culmination of eight years of hostilities against the French colonial power by Vietnamese nationalists -- under the Communist leadership of Ho Chi Minh and the military leadership of General Giap, whose reputation continues. The task of that Geneva Conference of 1954 was to establish a peace settlement which might prepare the way for free elections and the eventual reunification of North and South Vietnam -- objectives which, I think you will agree, have a familiar ring.

The conference set up an international supervisory group known as the International Commission for Supervision and Control. Poland, India and Canada were invited to be its members. This body was despatched to Indochina with the responsibility to report -- and in this way it was hoped to deter violations of the cease-fire and it was also intended that the Commission would play a role in the supervision of free elections.

In its first year of operation, the old ICC established a good record with some notable achievements, and particularly the supervision of the movements of refugees, of whom there were many hundreds of thousands, probably a million, from North to South Vietnam. By the end of 1954, there were some 200 Canadians in the old ICC, about two-thirds of the number now serving in the revived, or the new, ICCS, and these were located in both North and South Vietnam. The task of the old ICC, at least from the beginning, was made easier by the fact that the cease-fire line was a more meaningful division. The Viet Minh -- that is, the Communist troops in the South -- largely withdrew to

the North, not in the leopard spots which bedevil the present situation but north of what is now called the demilitarized zone. But, of more importance at that stage, the principal parties wanted the agreement to work.

Unfortunately, the early successes of the ICC were not repeated. Commitments to the agreement gradually eroded and the International Commission slid into irrelevance. This was not because Canada had failed in its responsibility as a member of the Commission but largely because the adversaries in Vietnam repeatedly and violently broke the terms of the international agreement and, from watching over the peace, the ICC found itself watching a war.

You are familiar with the tragic escalation of the Vietnam war -- the hundreds of thousands of soldiers and innocent persons killed and maimed, the damage wrought on people in every sense -- socially, morally, economically and psychologically -- and, if I may add, not only in Vietnam.

As the Commission could do nothing to halt hostilities, you may ask: "Why did we stay on, with Canadians exposed to the hazards of war in both Hanoi and Saigon?" Some Canadians did lose their lives in Indochina. What possible Canadian or Vietnamese or humanitarian interest could we serve? Many have asked that question and, when I assumed the responsibility of Minister of External Affairs, I asked that question.

I can assure you that successive Canadian Governments had serious misgivings about staying on. We did so because we knew that ultimately the war must come to an end -- that it was unlikely one side or the other would obtain a clear victory, and that in these circumstances any peace supervisory machinery, however, rusty, might be needed and needed quickly. If in this small way we could help to facilitate a settlement of the war, we were prepared to swallow our frustrations and keep on a skeleton staff which could spring to life, perhaps in a revised form, when a cease-fire was reached. But once over that road has been enough.

There were other reasons, too. Although sometimes wrongly impugned as an American stooge, Canada and Canadian honesty in its work in Vietnam were generally respected by all sides. Some of the parties to the war, as did a number of Asian countries (indeed, even while I have been Minister of External Affairs, I've had these representations from Asian countries), indicated that they wanted us to stay on. They also wanted an international presence, symbolic of the old settlement, to remain intact.

Which brings us almost up to date. Let us look now at what has happened over the past three months:

- It's not three months since Hanoi and Haiphong were being bombed. That has now ceased.
- Negotiations for a cease-fire went on in Paris; and on January 28 a cease-fire agreement was signed by the four parties -- the four parties to that cease-fire agreement are the Republic of Vietnam (which is South Vietnam), the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (which is North Vietnam), the United States and the Viet Cong (or, as they have various names, the legal term is the Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam).

- Canada was formally invited to participate in the new peace supervisory commission, along with Hungary, Poland and Indonesia.
- And, only a very short time ago, an International Conference of 13 participants, including the Secretary-General of the United Nations, was convened in Paris to consider and endorse the cease-fire agreements.
- I attended as the leader of the Canadian delegation (we were there because we were a member of the International Control Commission) and I unexpectedly found myself a co-chairman of the conference....
- And most recently, in the events of the last three months, we've had the talks between the Republic of Vietnam and the other South Vietnamese party, the PRG -- Provisional Revolutionary Government, which have now opened in Paris.

Now, I have spoken briefly of the frustrations of the old Commission and, if you have a sinking feeling that history -- so far as the utility of the Commission is concerned -- may be repeating itself, I may tell you that I share this anxiety.

Because of this concern and because of our experience on the old Commission, as soon as the possibility arose that Canada might be invited to participate in a new commission, we made it clear that we would only accept such an invitation if our conditions based on this experience were substantially met.

The first, and fundamental, condition was that the provisions for the operation of the new Commission appear workable and offer some prospects of being effective. More specifically we stipulated these conditions:

- First, that the belligerent parties -- that is, the Americans, the South Vietnamese, the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong -- should be bound by the same agreements which set out the role and procedures of the new Commission. Now, this was one of the shortcomings of the previous agreement -- people are inclined to forget that neither Washington nor Saigon were parties to the 1954 agreement and, therefore, never really considered themselves entirely bound by it. The signatures of all of the belligerents were, in fact, obtained in Paris. So that condition was met.
- We sought a "continuing political authority" to which the Commission or any of its members could report and consult and which would assume responsibility for the peace settlement as a whole. I went to Paris and I urged the acceptance of such a continuing political authority. We would have preferred the United Nations as the continuing political authority. It was quite clear before I reached Paris that that was quite impossible, so instead I proposed that the Secretary-General should chair the conference which I ultimately had to chair -- that the

Secretary-General should chair it, that he should receive the reports from the International Control Commission and that he should reassemble the conference, if need be, because of a breach -- a serious breach -- of the truce. We put that proposal forward, and even the presence of the Secretary-General as the vehicle for transmitting the reports of the International Control Commission to the other members of the conference or as the instrument for recalling the conference was unacceptable. And what emerged instead was an arrangement whereby the four parties to the Paris agreement, that is the belligerents themselves, are responsible for conveying to the participants in the Paris International Conference reports from the International Commission which the Commission has to submit to them, and the views of its individual members. Now, this is not a fully satisfactory arrangement by any means, but you'll see that at any rate we made some progress. I'm quite satisfied, if Canada had not gone to that conference and if I had not from the very outset put forward a proposal of this kind, there would have been virtually no provision whatever for any continuing political authority.

-- We also made clear that Canada could not participate unless invited to take part by all of the parties concerned. And this, in many respects, was the most important condition. I was absolutely determined, and so was the Canadian Government, that we would not be there as the representative of any party, of any side in this conflict, that we were going to go there as the representatives of the international community acting in the interests of peace, and that we could not be labelled as the representative of Saigon or of the United States, or of China, or of North Vietnam, however unlikely that might be. This was obtained. All the parties asked us to participate on the Commission.

Now, as you can see, we were not altogether happy with the arrangements and they didn't comply fully with our conditions, and yet it is clear that an effort was made to accommodate our position.

With the signing of the cease-fire agreement in Paris we had to decide immediately whether or not to take part in the new International Commission. As we did not wish to obstruct in any way the path towards a peace settlement and as it was too soon to determine whether the arrangements for the Commission's operations would be workable, we agreed to take part for an initial period of 60 days and despatched immediately some 290 men and women to Vietnam to form the Canadian team on the International Control Commission, and we were very fortunate to have been able to assign to this responsibility two very distinguished men -- our Ambassador in Greece, Michel Gauvin, and General McAlpine, who is the military commander.

In this 60 days, which expires next week, we have to complete our own evaluation of the effectiveness of the Commission both in terms of its specific tasks and as a stabilizing presence.

It was my view that a personal, on-the-spot visit to the Commission and direct conversations with political leaders in Saigon and Hanoi would greatly assist me in making informed and responsible recommendations to Cabinet. It was also my view that this visit would assist members of the opposition parties to make their own judgments about an important area of Canadian foreign policy.... The visit also afforded us an opportunity to form impressions about the Canadian role in Laos, where we have been asked to expand our participation in a reactivated Commission -- this is, the old Commission in which we are still present.

My invitation was not accepted by the Conservative Party but I was very glad to have with me parliamentarians from the other parties in the House and from the Senate.

With this group, a number of official advisers and 34 journalists, we set off from Ottawa a week ago Tuesday on a journey of 22,000 miles.

...Our first major stop was Tokyo. I was anxious to discuss Vietnam with my Japanese colleague, the Foreign Minister, Mr. Ohira, particularly as I felt the Japanese absence from the Paris Conference deprived those meetings of important and influential counsel. On arrival at Tokyo I was agreeably surprised to learn that the Prime Minister of Japan, Mr. Tanaka, also wished to see me....Both the Prime Minister and his Foreign Minister urged Canada to remain on the Commission despite the frustrations which they acknowledged. Their message was essentially "don't disturb the arrangements by withdrawal -- peace is too fragile". This was to be the prelude of advice which was consistently given to me by almost every political leader with whom I spoke during our visit.

In Saigon, I met with President Thieu, with the Prime Minister, and with my counterpart the Foreign Minister. I had a thorough briefing by the Canadian delegation to the International Control Commission and you may recall from your readings of the newspapers that there was a famous reception in Saigon given by Ambassador Gauvin, which was described as a diplomatic coup. It was, I believe, the first time that all of the parties to the agreement, including the principal representatives of the Viet Cong and of North Vietnam and the four ICCS representatives, had all come together under one roof in Saigon. And it really was quite a memorable occasion....

Saturday morning we flew to the regional headquarters of our International Control Commission at Can-Tho. Can-Tho is in the key Mekong Delta area, just south of Saigon. It was long and bitterly fought over as the rice bowl of Indochina. This was a fascinating and illuminating experience. We received an excellent briefing from Canada's External Affairs and military representatives and had discussions with members of the Joint Military Commission, as well as with the Polish, Indonesian and Hungarian members of the Commission.

The land in the Mekong area is still hotly contested. Indeed, the news of the last day or so has indicated how hotly contested it is because the confrontation that is now taking place at about division level is in the Mekong Delta area and indicates how crucial this area is to the struggle now going on. The Delta is quilted with leopard spots. You see, as I was saying,

the difference between the 1954 agreement and the 1973 agreement is that in '54 you sort of divided Vietnam in half, and there were the Communists and south were the others, although, of course, there were the National Liberation Front in the South also. But, in this case, in the 1973 agreement, it was a cease-fire in place, so that the struggle that is going on now is for small areas, for villages. And, as you go through Vietnam, you can see the flags on the houses indicating the allegiance of the inhabitants of that area. Well, you can imagine what it's like with the Liberation Front and the Government areas sitting side by side. We learned that, since the cease-fire came into effect in January, some 7,000 incidents had been reported throughout South Vietnam. Some of these involved large-scale operations, possibly up to divisional strength. But from all of these incidents came only 31 requests for investigation by the International Control Commission -- and from these requests only two reports have emerged. The Commission's frustrations, as you will see, are very real indeed.

There is one famous case, which has been well documented -- the investigation of some missiles that were said to have been located up at Khe Sanh in the northern part of South Vietnam, and the difficulties that emerged for our Chairman, Michel Gauvin, in trying to get an investigation under way, is simply too incredible to be recounted. First of all, it was said that the photographs that had been submitted by way of evidence must be forgeries. And then it was suggested, if they were not forgeries, they were taken before the truce came into effect, and so on, and so on, and so on. And, in the end, no investigation took place. The Commission divided two in favour of investigation, two against and, as you know, the argument of a straightforward Canadian like Michel Gauvin was: "Well, you know, they may be forgeries, let's go and find out whether they're forgeries. If they were taken before the truce, let's find out whether they were there before the truce." You know, that's what it's all about. But, in fact, nothing happened.

In Vientiane, which is the centre of government in Laos, I had a long conversation with the Prime Minister, Prince Souvanna Phouma. While recognizing a direct relationship between the war in Vietnam and the use of Laotian territory for military purposes, he was particularly anxious to ensure some measure of international involvement in the future of Laos through the reactivation of the old International Control Commission. We have now two people in Laos -- that's the skeleton that remains. A cease-fire has been achieved. However, the two sides in Laos have not been able to find common ground for a military agreement on the modalities of disengagement and supervision. Until this takes place, it will not be possible for us to determine our response to the request for Canadian participation in a reactivated Laos Commission.

I also had discussions in Vientiane with representatives of the Pathet Lao. Now, the Pathet Lao are the political grouping in Laos that is opposed to the right-wing element, I suppose you would say, in the Royal Laotian Government. But it is unlike the Viet Cong, because the Viet Cong pretends to be the Government of South Vietnam, whereas the Pathet Lao is simply a political force working in Laos, and it is possible there to incorporate them into the Government and this is now being done. I raised with them the case of Lloyd Oppel, the

Canadian missionary who was seized in Laos last October. I was quite frankly shocked to hear them tell me that Mr. Oppel's release would be delayed until certain domestic political arrangements in Laos had been agreed on. In other words, until a government had been formed in Laos under the new agreement. I replied in very plain language, making it clear to him that there could be no possible relationship between the continued imprisonment of a non-combatant Canadian citizen and political developments in that country. He promised to report my position to his superiors and I also raised this question with the political leaders when I was in Hanoi and they too promised to look into it. The reason I raised it in Hanoi is that Mr. Oppel's name first appeared on a list of prisoners supplied by the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, so I felt justified in raising his name with them, and he said "we will take this up with our allies, the Pathet Lao". Finally, I spent a day in Hanoi talking with Prime Minister Pham Van Dong and the Foreign Minister, Trinh. This was the first visit ever made by a Canadian minister to the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, which we just recognized a few weeks ago in order to show our impartiality as a member of the International Control Commission.

All of my talks with political leaders in Hanoi and Saigon centred upon the question of continued Canadian participation in the Commission.

As I have already indicated, the views of all the leaders with whom I spoke were to the effect that Canada should continue to serve on the Commission. Most of these leaders emphasized that the consequences of an early Canadian withdrawal would be far-reaching. I have also received similar views from the Governments of the United States, Britain, Indonesia and China. I made no commitment to any of them at that time and, in case you think I'm going to reveal any secrets, I'm not going to make any commitments here today, because the question is still before the Government.

While the advice to us had a common theme, I think it is relevant to point out that each party has its own distinctive reasons for wishing us to stay on.

For reasons which are very understandable, governments of countries not directly involved in Vietnam tend to suggest that any international presence is better than no international presence and that it's even better if Canada is there. For Canadians our 19 years in Vietnam have long since disabused us of any such illusions.

I found the attitudes of the leaders in South Vietnam very direct. They have no illusion that the ICCS would be able to discharge effectively the responsibilities set out in the Paris agreement. Indeed, I'm inclined to think sometimes that the way we want the ICCS to work is just an amiable eccentricity on our part. I explained very frankly to the Vietnamese, both in the South and in the North, that the composition of the Commission made it extremely unlikely that the Commission would ever reach a finding unfavourable to North Vietnam or to its allies in the South. At the same time I said that Canada would not hesitate to support a finding detrimental to the position of the Republic of Vietnam if we felt that the facts indicated such finding, because we take an impartial view. We don't look upon ourselves as representing

any side in this struggle. Whereas, obviously, some of the other members of the International Commission feel that's what their job is.

The South Vietnamese leaders acknowledged this. However, they said that the important thing was to bring all points of view into the open. They also attached importance to the Commission's presence in connection with the political settlement.

In the North the political leaders replied to all of our suggestions by referring to us the terms of the agreement. They regarded this as sacrosanct and like their counterparts in the South declared they intend to abide by the agreement.

I asked Prime Minister Pham Van Dong of North Vietnam which he regarded as having the highest priority, his country's desire for peace or the reunification of Vietnam as a whole. He replied that the question of priorities did not arise as strict observance of the agreement would lead to peaceful unification.

It was clear from these conversations that both the North and the South are expecting quite different, and in some ways contradictory, results.

In my conversations with Foreign Minister Lam and President Thieu, I raised the question of civilian prisoners in South Vietnam. I urged them to consider the weight of public opinion in Canada and abroad on this matter. Both told me that they had already released 5,000 civilian prisoners on the occasion of the recent lunar new year celebrations, and that they had provided a list of over 5,000 additional civilian prisoners to the other South Vietnamese Party, that is, the Viet Cong, for release in accordance with the Paris agreement and protocols. Both went on to contrast their record on this issue with that of the other side. They told me that of the 60,000 South Vietnamese civilians missing and presumed captured by the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong, only 200 or so had been included in the list required under the Paris agreement and protocols. This will give you some idea of the flavour of the situation or of the atmosphere.

If I appear to be passing out a lot of bouquets it is not to be diplomatic -- but because they are more than justified. I was enormously impressed and proud of the efficiency and dedication of our people in Indochina -- both civilians and military. Many of them are working 16 hours a day, seven days a week, in appalling conditions. Their challenges and frustrations would be daunting on a weekly basis. Theirs are daily. The problems are not only those of a political and military character. Just as often they are administrative. It was soon abundantly clear to me that, had it not been for these Canadians, it is doubtful that the ICCS would have been in any position to be even potentially effective.

I would not like to leave you with the impression that nothing has been achieved and that this enormous effort has all been in vain. However unsatisfactory we find the present situation, it is an obvious improvement over the situation that existed before January 28. Prisoners of war on both sides are being released. Very soon the last American forces in Vietnam will

have departed. The ICCS had its role to play in these developments and, if it did nothing else but help to provide the framework within which these accomplishments were made possible, that in itself is ample justification.

You will have noted from what I have said that the Canadian approach is cautious, but it is also responsible -- responsible to Canadians, who would not wish us to make reckless and unrealistic commitments and responsible to society at large, which earnestly wishes an end to the bloodshed.

In conclusion I would emphasize that it has never been part of our mission in Vietnam to make peace. That can only be done by the Vietnamese themselves. Others have tried without conspicuous success and we have no such ambitions. We had felt that our readiness to respond to the unanimous request that we participate in the International Control Commission at the beginning could help to give a start to the cease-fire -- imperfect as it might be. That it has done. What now must be decided is how much further we should go. It has been my object during the past few weeks to ensure that the Canadian public, the Parliament and the Government have the fullest possible information on which to base their judgement....

S/C