

STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES



CANADA

INFORMATION DIVISION

DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

OTTAWA - CANADA

No. 66/1

THE CRUCIAL ISSUE OF VIETNAM

**Statement by the Honourable Paul Martin,
Secretary of State for External Affairs,
in the House of Commons on January 25, 1966.**

...I trust ... that there will be an opportunity soon for the House to undertake a broad review of foreign affairs. Today, I thought I should like to confine my statement on behalf of the Government, to the crucial issue of Vietnam. No issue has so much preoccupied public opinion in Canada or the members of this House in recent months. No issue has aroused greater misgivings or greater uncertainty about where the right course for Canada lies. Probably no issue has cast a darker shadow on the prospects of peaceful accommodation and peaceful co-operation in the world.

The policy of the Government in relation to the Vietnam problem is now a matter of record. It was stated before the External Affairs Committee on Wednesday and Thursday, June 9 and 10. If I restate it today, it is because I regard it as right to do so at the outset of this new Parliament and in the light of recent significant developments in the situation.

In our view, the situation in Vietnam needs to be viewed from three separate perspectives. First, there is what I might call the perspective of internal dissent in South Vietnam. This is something we must expect in any new country where the people live on the margin of subsistence. It exists because the process of social and economic transformation that is the basis of any significant development is bound to involve dislocation and disruption. It exists in greater degree in a country like South Vietnam because of the intervention from the outside. This, in turn, has made it impossible for successive governments in that country to lay a recognizable basis for political stability.

But let us not on that account equate that outside intervention with the desire for social and economic change. Let us remember that long before the conflict in South Vietnam erupted into open hostilities it was the agents of change -- the administrators, the teachers, the public health workers and others like them -- who were the prime targets of terror. Let us remember that, whatever the change of government in Saigon, and there have been many,

the level of that terror did not abate. And let us also remember that, when the government of President Diem was forcibly overthrown in 1963, it was not overthrown by men or groups whose loyalty was pledged to the Viet Cong.

This is not to discount or to downgrade the hold which the Viet Cong has by one means or another been able to establish over sections of South Vietnam and its people; it is merely to suggest that we should be entirely mistaken if we regarded the Viet Cong as embodying a consensus of dissent in Vietnam. So far as we know, none of the major groupings in South Vietnam, the Buddhists, the Catholics, the trade unions, the intellectuals, the students, are significantly represented in the Viet Cong movement. Certainly, there is nothing to suggest that there is any basis for the claim of the Viet Cong to be the sole legitimate representative of the people of South Vietnam.

Second, there is the matter of outside intervention. Admittedly this is a difficult situation to disentangle in a divided country. After all, it is often argued: What is the sense in speaking of intervention in a context where Vietnamese are involved on both sides? I suggest to the House that, whatever the circumstances in which these dividing-lines were drawn, they have come to reflect political realities which it will take time to alter. They neither justify nor diminish the fact of aggression.

What is happening in Vietnam may not be aggression in the classical sense of the term but it is aggression all the same, and it is aggression carried out in this case under the guise of a war of liberation. The aim of that aggression is to establish in South Vietnam a form of political organization which we have no evidence to suggest that the people of South Vietnam would freely choose for themselves.

We have said that in principle we appreciate and support the purposes and objectives of the policy of the United States. This was affirmed by the Prime Minister when the matter was first discussed in this House. We have said that because, as the Prime Minister put it, we cannot in this nuclear world of ours "afford any permissible kinds of international violence" of the kind by which the North Vietnamese are trying to achieve their objectives in the South. We have said this because we are of the view that the people of South Vietnam must be left to work out their own future free from outside pressure or intervention. We are not disposed to deny to the people of the South the right of self-determination which we have conceded to others in accordance with the solemn principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

Third, there is an even more broad perspective, one from which I think the course of developments in Vietnam has to be viewed. I do not want to urge on the House the "domino" or any other currently fashionable theory. But I do suggest to the House that we cannot look at the situation in Vietnam in isolation. In neighbouring Laos, the country is to all intents and purposes partitioned. The part that is under Pathet Lao control is being freely used for the movement of men and materials from North to South Vietnam. Members of the armed forces of North Vietnam have been engaged in open attacks against the armed forces of the Royal Government of Laos. All this is in clear contravention of the undertakings solemnly given in Geneva in 1962; and Canada was a member of that Conference.

In Northeastern and Southern Thailand, there are the beginnings of the same kind of terror which marked the first phase of insurgency in South Vietnam. As in the case of South Vietnam, this is being aided and abetted from outside but with this difference, that the Thai Patriotic Front, as it is called, is still operating from Peking. It has within the past several weeks been joined by a new clandestine organization, the National Liberation League and Army of Malaysia, which is dedicated to the overthrow by revolutionary means of the Government of Malaysia.

Are we, then, seriously to assume that all these movements are coming into being because the legitimate channels of local dissent in these countries have been closed? Or is this part of the pattern of permanent revolution which is being propagated in some quarters? I suggest to the House, on my responsibility as Secretary of State for External Affairs, that these are questions which we must seriously ponder before we condemn United States policy in Vietnam

That is our assessment of the forces that are at work in the present conflict. There are those who would have us alter that assessment for the mere sake of giving the appearance of Canadian independence as though independence consisted only in taking positions which are necessarily against those of one's friends. Our policy in this situation represents our own honest assessment of the position and is not a reflection in any way of pressure imposed on us by the United States or by any other country. In this matter we are as independent as in Her Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom. I say to the House that, after more than 11 years of active involvement in the situation in Vietnam, we are perfectly capable of arriving at an independent assessment of that situation without having recourse to false credentials. The question we must surely ask ourselves is this: Can we ignore the challenge of the aggression by these Communist liberation fronts in Asia?

Were we able to ignore the situation in Europe 20 years ago? I am not saying that the situation in Europe now is comparable with that existing at present in Asia. Undoubtedly there is a détente in effect between the West and the Soviet Union in Europe. I am talking about the situation in Asia, where a different state of affairs prevails but where there are some comparisons to the history of the immediate post-war period in Europe. No one will deny that mistakes have been made in Asia and I think some have been made by the United States. But there is, it seems to me, a parallel between the situation in Asia and that in Europe following the end of the war.

We must ask ourselves what the failure of United States efforts in Asia would mean to us as well as to that country. We must ask ourselves what it would mean to India, to Thailand, to the island countries, the Philippines, New Zealand and Australia. We must ask ourselves what it would mean to many countries in Asia and Africa which, although critical of the United States, would be deeply concerned over a Communist victory in Vietnam. I ask what would be the concern of the Soviet Union in these circumstances. I must ask the House whether Canada's real interests would be promoted by a United States defeat. I must ask the House what such a defeat would mean by way of encouragement to an aggressive brand of political action. It is

because of these considerations for Canada and other countries that we cannot deny the importance of this conflict in Vietnam to us all. I have given the House my assessment of the conflict. I shall now turn to the policy which we have thought it right for Canada to follow in relation to this conflict.

In the first place, there is our membership on the International Commission. The House is well aware that this has been an increasingly frustrating commitment. The circumstances facing the Commission today bear little resemblance to those envisaged when the Commission was given its mandate. Nevertheless, we have thought it right to maintain a Canadian presence in Vietnam. We have done so because the Commission still has a function to perform in bringing its objective judgment to bear on the facts of the situation, because the Commission continues to maintain, at least in symbolic form, the validity of the Geneva Agreements on which, all the parties seem to agree, any fresh settlement of the Vietnam conflict must be constructed, and because the Commission may still be able to play a part in the context of such a settlement, if not to serve as a channel of contact between the parties themselves.

The charge is sometimes made that Canada has failed to act impartially in discharging its responsibilities on the Commission. This charge, in my judgment and on my examination and on the advice of my officers in whom I have the fullest confidence, men who have served Canada in Indochina for 11 years, has no basis in fact. I reject it without any hesitation. We have acted impartially in relation to all the facts and all the evidence which has come before the Commission. Contrary to what is sometimes asserted, we have been associated with findings against South Vietnam as we have been associated with findings against the North. We subscribed to the Commission's Special Report of June 1962 because it represented a balanced presentation of events in Vietnam. We also appended a minority report to the Commission's Special Message of February 1965, not because we disputed the findings of the majority but because it was our view that there were other factors which it was legitimate to include on the basis of all the evidence available to us at that time. In all this, I think, we need make no apology to our Commission partners for the way in which we have interpreted our responsibilities on the Commission.

To my knowledge, for example (and I state this not by way of criticism but by way of fact), our Polish colleagues on the Commission have never found occasion to support a finding against North Vietnam and have frequently refused even to participate in an investigation where such a finding was likely to be the outcome. Yet it would be found that Canada, as a member of the Commission, did not hesitate where this was called for to criticize the actions of the Government in the South. The Commission has no authority to criticize any state not a signatory of the Geneva Agreement but the implications are there for everyone to read and there was no reservation made in the Canadian position with regard to the Commission's report of 1962.

Then there is the matter of sending Canadian troops to Vietnam. We have made it as clear as it can be made that we should not regard such a course as being compatible with our responsibilities on the International Commission in Vietnam. This is far from being the frivolous argument some

have professed it to be. The Geneva cease-fire agreement, which the Commission is there to administer, prohibits in its very terms the introduction of military forces into either part of Vietnam. It would scarcely be right for one of the powers which has been entrusted with the supervision of the Agreement to abet one of the parties in an infraction of its terms. Any other position on our part would certainly have the gravest consequences to our ability to carry out peace-keeping functions not only in this area but more generally and in other contexts. I believe we can all take pride in Canada's achievements in this field of international activity and I believe it is imperative in the interests of international peace keeping not to jeopardize our ability to contribute significantly to such activities.

Altogether apart from membership on the Commission, however, the Government's policy, as I have stated it twice in this House and as it was reaffirmed by the Prime Minister the other day, is that the Government has no intention to recommend at any time the commitment of our forces to Asia unless pursuant to an obligation under the Charter of the United Nations....

My next point is this. Our policy has been directed towards helping to bring the present conflict from the battlefield to the negotiating table. This has always been our position and it remains our objective. We have made it clear, and the Prime Minister did so again only the other day, that we do not look upon the present conflict as being amenable to a military solution alone. We have taken every opportunity available to us to probe the possibilities for peace and, indeed, we are doing that at this very time. We proposed a pause in the bombing of North Vietnam last April, not because we looked to one side only to make concessions but because we hoped that such a pause might provide a climate in which it would prove easier for the other side to respond in a positive way. We have welcomed the current pause, which has now been in effect for an entire month, and the search for a peaceful conclusion of the conflict which has accompanied it. Although the absence of any positive response from the other side has been a matter of deep disappointment to us, we have expressed the hope that the pause might be further extended until all reasonable possibilities have been exhausted. I simply ask: Have all reasonable possibilities been exhausted? I should hope that the pause would continue as long as possible. I should hope that before any final step were taken in this regard the most careful consideration would be given to an examination of any indication that North Vietnam was now seriously engaged in examining the possibility of negotiations. In the final analysis, however, we must recognize that it is not for Canada to take the crucial decisions which lie immediately ahead since we are not a party to the hostilities. On the other hand, we do think there may well be a contribution which Canada can make to an ultimate settlement because of the long experience we have had of the problems at issue in this whole area.

We have expressed our regret that, in a situation which so deeply engages the concern of the international community, the United Nations has been prevented from playing any effective part. We recognize, as the Secretary-General did again in his press conference on Thursday last, that there are reasons why the United Nations has been unable to act in the present circumstances.

...It is clear that China could regard the Secretary-General, I regret to say, as persona non grata. It is true that China is not a member of the United Nations. It is true that South and North Vietnam are not members. It has not been possible to use the United Nations fully and there has been a failure on the part of some nations to appreciate the great role that the office of the Secretary-General affords in so delicate a situation.

These are obvious reasons why the United Nations has been unable to act and why the Secretary-General himself has not been able to act as fully as he would have liked. But I hope he will continue to explore all the possibilities that may be open to him as Secretary-General to encourage action that will set this conflict on a course of peace. I would also hope with him that there may yet be a role for the United Nations in securing the terms of any settlement of the present conflict. If and when that time comes, I can assure the Secretary-General and the House that the Canadian Government will do whatever it can to enable the United Nations to carry out its responsibilities in this area as it has done in similar circumstances elsewhere.

We have also directed our thinking toward the great task of rehabilitation in that whole area that will have to form a part of any durable settlement of the Vietnam conflict. We have resumed our pledge to participate in the works of the Mekong Development Committee. We have subscribed to the capital of the Asian Development Bank, which has now been established. We are prepared to devote further substantial resources to regional development in Southeast Asia, in which I hope both communities in Vietnam could play their full part and derive their full benefit. Indeed, I should go further and say that I should look toward this whole field of regional development as providing a framework within which these two communities might be able to establish a basis for mutual acceptance and co-operation.

Over the past month...efforts have been made by many countries to explore the opportunities there may be for peace in Vietnam. Canada alone, and Canada in concert with others, has done what it could do to try and bring about negotiations. The House will be aware of the efforts which have recently been made by the United States to reaffirm its readiness to negotiate an honourable conclusion to the present conflict. We are satisfied beyond any doubt that the efforts of the United States during the past month through its Secretary of State, through its Vice-President, through its delegate to the United Nations and through others, have been sincerely directed toward trying to bring about negotiations without any preconditions. It is regrettable that no response has been forthcoming, and I think it is only fair to point out that, whatever some may think of the course of action by our neighbour the fact is that no one can suggest that the United States has not sincerely sought to achieve negotiations. As I said in the United Nations, those who criticize the United States ought to engage in the same energetic pursuit to persuade North Vietnam and others that the time has come when we should have negotiations to establish peace.

I cannot predict how much longer the present pause in the bombing of North Vietnam will last. I can assure the House that our views in this regard have been made known in a way which we believe, in the circumstances, to be the most effective way of presenting our point of view. What has happened in conjunction with this pause was an effort by the United States to seek peace.

In the short run, there may well be an intensification of the level of military activity in Vietnam. I should hope that, even at this hour, we could avoid that possibility and that we should have some positive indication from Hanoi, as a result of the efforts that have been made during the course of the last weeks to try and bring about negotiations with the North consistent with the offer to negotiate that has been made.

It is clear that the Geneva Agreement is regarded by the parties as a suitable point of departure for any future settlement. I should not want to suggest to the House that there is formal agreement between the parties on this particular formulation. The Government of North Vietnam holds that its four points contain the essence of the military and political provisions agreed to at Geneva and must be accepted publicly by the United States before any political settlement of the Vietnam problem can be envisaged. What I am concerned to do is to state the minimum common ground on which there appears to be agreement and from which negotiation would necessarily have to proceed.

There would also seem to be agreement between the parties that there should be a withdrawal of foreign military forces and a dismantling of foreign military bases in Vietnam. This is again a minimum formulation. The Government of North Vietnam would regard this as a prior condition to any settlement. For its part, the United States has made it clear that it wants neither a continuing military presence in South Vietnam nor bases in Southeast Asia. But it has also made it clear that this is on condition that there is peace in the area.

So far as the internal affairs of South Vietnam are concerned, there is agreement on the basic proposition that these must be settled by the people of South Vietnam themselves without any foreign interference....

I have said that we are not one of the belligerents in this regrettable conflict. We regret that the United Nations is not capable of serving the function for which its Charter provides. That is not the fault of a country like Canada or the fault of any one member of the United Nations. This is a situation involving grave issues and the Government has had to consider, in its assessment of the problem, the consequences in Asia which in the fullness of time could well provide the same effects as attended the end of the Second World War.

I believe that our relations with the Soviet Union are now on a much firmer foundation. I believe that the threat of conflict between the Soviet Union and the West has very considerably receded. However, we are now faced with a dangerous situation in Asia. Canada, as a member of the International Commission, is doing its utmost to discharge its

responsibilities. Canada is ready to do what it can to provide resources to help in bringing about economic improvement in this regrettably unstable region if only there can be peace, and peace is possible only if the parties to a dispute are willing to engage in a fruitful discussion. I can assure the House that this Government had done everything it could to bring about discussions leading to negotiations which we hope could bring peace in Indochina.

S/C