

# Canada Expected to Quit Viet

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OTTAWA, March 24—External Affairs Secretary Mitchell Sharp is expected to announce next Tuesday that Canada will continue in the international cease-fire supervision commission in Vietnam for another 60 or 90 days, then pull out for good.

The Trudeau Cabinet debated the question Friday, on the basis of a memorandum reviewing arguments for and against withdrawal from the International Commission of Control and Supervision but did not make a formal recommendation. The Cabinet is to meet again Monday to reach a decision.

Sharp must take a stand before next Wednesday, the end of the 60-day period during which Canada agreed last January to serve on the ICCS.

Since he returned last week from a fact-finding mission to Indochina, the external affairs secretary has made several carefully balanced but generally pessimistic assessments of ICCS operations and of Canada's role in Vietnam.

"We are not going to stay around and watch a war," the minister told the House of Commons Committee on External Affairs.

Doug Rowland, a member of the New Democratic Party who accompanied the Liberal minister in Vietnam and attended most official briefings there, said for his party that Canada should pull out of the ICCS after 60 or 90 days—that is, at the end of May or June of this year.

The NDP stand is highly indicative of the Trudeau government's decision, since the minority Liberals depend on the small left-wing party for parliamentary support.

It is well known that top officials in the External Affairs Department, who closely monitored ICCS operations since early February, are now convinced that the commission has little chance of ever performing as an impartial supervision agency in Vietnam.

## Difficult Decision

The factors involved in Canada's decision are numerous and extremely difficult to assess, ranging from the impact a pullout might have on the extremely unstable situation in Vietnam, the possible damage to Canada's reputation as an expert on international peace-keeping and the reactions of the various parties involved in the Indochina situation.

Most crucial for Canada, of course, is the reaction of the United States; and for a number of reasons, Ottawa officials find it difficult to assess the Nixon administration's real long-term intentions in Vietnam.

Consequently, Canadian officials have refrained from making a formal recommendation to the Cabinet—an unusual procedure. Instead, the Department of External Affairs has listed exhaustively the argument against and for withdrawal.

Here are the main negative arguments:

- First, Sharp was told bluntly by Canadian military advisers in Saigon that despite the Paris agreement, there is no cease-fire in Vietnam. The number of alleged cease-fire violations since Jan. 28 is now well over 7,000. The casualty rate of the South Vietnamese army increased between January and February from about 100 a week to about 200 a week.

In the Mekong Delta, Sharp was told, battles of divisional strength have been staged since the signing of the agreement.

Recent developments have led Canadians to fear a new escalation of the war after the 60-day period set aside for U.S. troop withdrawal and POW exchanges. Among those developments, the most serious are massive infiltration of troops and armaments from North Vietnam and large-scale maneuvers by the South Vietnamese army to rescue outposts harassed by the Vietcong.

- Second, Canadian officials see little hope that political clauses of the Paris agreement can be implemented and that the ICCS can perform its supervision functions in this area. Scheduled talks between the Thieu government and the Vietcong have been extremely slow to get under way, and have so far led nowhere.

From private conversations with representatives of both South Vietnamese parties, Canadians have come to fear that there is little chance of agreement on such crucial and contentious issues as the holding of a free election in South Vietnam.

- Third, Canada has been extremely disappointed by the four Paris agreement signatories' virtual neglect of the supervision machinery they set up themselves. At the

latest count, only 31 of the 7,000 violations reported by all belligerents had been referred to the ICCS for inquiry and report. Furthermore, out of these 31 inquiries, only two have led to unanimous reports by the four-member commission.

- Finally, what little reporting was asked of the ICCS has been severely hampered by the Joint Military Commission's inability to operate as specified in the Paris agreement. The military delegates have not yet been able to deploy fully at all sites; and more often than not they have been unable to guarantee the security of observers, forcing the ICCS to cancel numerous missions.

- Even more frustrating to Canadians have been the blocking and delaying tactics consistently used by the Polish and Hungarian delegations whenever an inquiry threatened to expose the bad faith of North Vietnam or the Vietcong.

"The same old pattern that we experienced during our 19 years on the old ICC is emerging once again; but this time we will not be a party for long in such a farce," an official said.

But against this dismal record and mounting frustrations, Canada has to weigh the pressures of international opinion and the wider diplomatic and military implications of a Canadian pullout.

Sharp has said repeatedly that he was impressed by the fact that all parties directly or indirectly involved in Vietnam, including China, and the Soviet Union, are urging Canada to stay on the ICCS.

Crucial for Canada are the U.S. attitude and pressures.

At a cocktail party held by Canada's ambassador to Saigon, two weeks ago, U.S. Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker told Sharp that the U.S. believed that Canada should stay in Vietnam, "in the interest of peace and international diplomacy."

Some officials in Ottawa

## Truce Group

fear retaliation from the Nixon administration on trade and other matters if Canada withdraws from the ICCS. But other officials believe that the United States will no longer care very much about what happens in Vietnam, once troop withdrawals and POW exchanges are completed.

There is yet a further dimension to the issue. As ineffectual as it has been in practice, Canada's presence in Vietnam may have had a moderating influence. In that case, a Canadian pullout might actually trigger a new escalation of fighting, for which Canada would then be blamed.