

# If asked to peacekeep, reluctant Canada has no option

By  
Peter  
Desbarats



OTTAWA — The situation that awaits Canada in Viet Nam is of an almost classic "can't win" variety. If Canada refuses to have anything to do with international supervision there, it will diminish whatever remains of its peacekeeping image in

the world. More to the point, it will risk incurring the displeasure of the U.S. government at a time when relations between the two countries have become more difficult on issues of vital economic concern to Canada.

If Canada becomes involved in Viet Nam, and subsequent events there displease the Communist world, the Canadian government will be attacked at home for compromising its international reputation to suit U.S. purposes — a charge that already has been made about its previous attempts at international supervision in that part of the world.

On the other hand, if future developments in Viet Nam anger the

United States, there will be no shortage of critics in Washington who will accuse Canada, as they have in the past, of being willing to accommodate the communists and oppose the U.S. for its own selfish purposes.

The Trudeau government has had plenty of time to consider this dilemma.

It was first discussed at length by the federal cabinet more than two years ago. The conditions for Canadian participation in a Viet Nam supervisory force began to take shape at that time. External Affairs Minister Mitchell Sharp has repeated them several times recently.

For months now, Sharp's own

department and National Defence have been trying to anticipate the problems involved in every conceivable type of supervisory operation. Task forces have rehearsed the logistics of moving various numbers of troops between Canada and Viet Nam. Elaborate "war games" have attempted to anticipate situations that a supervisory force would meet on the ground.

## Data scant

But planning has been hampered by lack of information. Ottawa has been kept almost completely in the dark by Washington about the type of super-

visory force being discussed in the Paris negotiations. Canada's normal diplomatic contacts in Washington have had little information to offer, and U.S. negotiator Henry Kissinger has kept details of his discussions to himself as far as Canada is concerned.

The U.S. response to Canadian queries has tended to be, "Trust us — we're both interested in obtaining a long-term settlement in Viet Nam."

Canadian authorities have found this put-your-hand-in-mine attitude unnerving. The closer they have looked at the supervisory problem in Viet Nam, the more worried they have become.

At the end of a particularly intensive task force session, one of the younger officials of the Department of External Affairs surprised his seniors by exclaiming, "But what we're going to be asked to do in Viet Nam is operate a customs and immigration service."

It took a few moments for the others to realize that he had coined the exact job description. The immigration aspect of the job will involve supervision and reporting of attempts by either side to infiltrate the other's territory; the customs part will relate to movements of military equipment.

## Manpower

One question that immediately arises is whether the supervisory force will have sufficient manpower to do this job. The planners in Ottawa have also realized that previous 'peacekeeping' operations have not given Canadian soldiers the kind of experience that will necessarily be useful in Viet Nam.

As one Canadian official put it, "We are now beautifully equipped to fly a mobile battalion to Cyprus, set up observation posts and drive around in jeeps. The only trouble is — there

probably aren't going to be any more Cypruses."

Another Canadian recently looked across a table in Washington and said, "With hundreds of thousands of men in Viet Nam, with the most sophisticated electronic detection equipment in the world, you people haven't been able to keep track of things. And now you expect a handful of Canadian soldiers to do it?"

The special Canadian nightmare about Viet Nam is described in terrifying detail in the December, 1972 issue of "Saturday Review". Herman Kahn, director of the Hudson Institute, undertakes to answer the question: "What are the likely consequences of a cease-fire?" He produces a short "optimistic scenario" and a long "pessimistic scenario".

## U.S. pressure

The pessimistic version is based on the hypothesis that the U.S. will pressure Saigon into accepting an agreement which is unsatisfactory to South Viet Nam, and that this will lead to infiltration and eventual Communist domination of Viet Nam.

Every time another Canadian official reads the Kahn scenario, he breaks out in a cold sweat.

Despite all this, and a predominantly negative flow of mail into Ottawa from across the country, Canada's international reputation, and the necessity of responding positively to a request that comes from Hanoi as well as Washington, appears to have left External Affairs Minister Sharp no alternative but to "consider the invitation sympathetically and constructively."

That's as far as Canada can go until the phone rings. And when it does, as one Ottawa official said, "Whoever it is at the other end of the line is going to be saying, 'It's all settled. Let's go.' We're not going to have much time then to sit around and think about it."