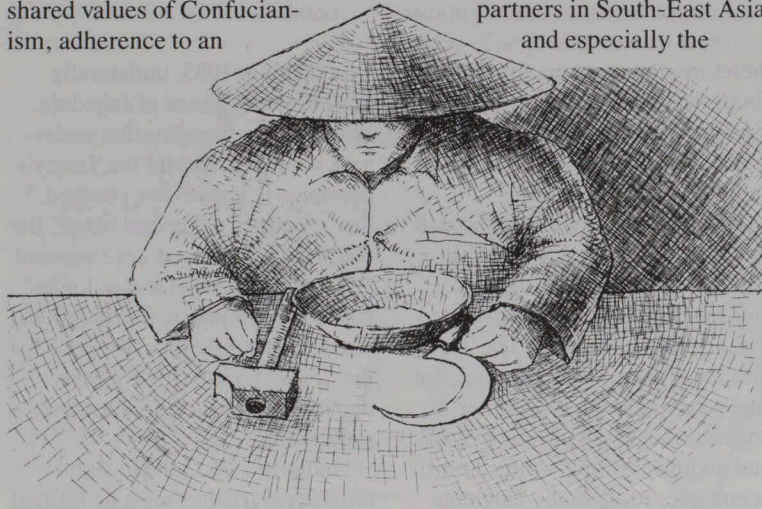


aid, the American refusal to provide economic assistance, a US trade embargo, a halt or reduction in aid from other Western countries, the suspension of loans from international organizations, substantial losses of investment from and trade with many countries and finally, the diversion of Soviet aid to military use.

SINCE CHINA CUT OFF ITS AID IN May 1978, Soviet influence over the Vietnamese economy has grown steadily. In June of the same year, Hanoi joined the Economic Council for Mutual Assistance and in November signed a treaty of friendship and co-operation tying its future to the Soviet Union for the next twenty-five years. Since then, the Soviet presence has extended to all sectors of Vietnamese society and the two economies are now so integrated that it is difficult to foresee a serious rift arising between them. Of course, Vietnam is an expensive ally for the Soviets, but it occupies a key strategic position on the globe and offers some worthwhile economic advantages as a supplier of tropical commodities that do not require payment in hard currency.

There are two standard assumptions about Soviet-Vietnamese relations which closer study shows are false. The first is the belief that resumption of normal relations between Vietnam and the West, Japan and members of the Association of South East Asian Nations might loosen or even strain Vietnam's close relations with the USSR. The second is the assumption that Hanoi is content to become increasingly dependent on Moscow and the Socialist camp in general. The first position ignores the importance of "socialist brotherhood" between the two countries and under-estimates the current Vietnamese leaders' unwavering loyalty to the teachings of Ho Chi Minh which are still viewed as the one true beacon guiding Vietnam's future. The second overlooks Vietnam's extraordinary attachment to independence and its endurance over the centuries. These have combined to create a ferocious nationalist pride that is intolerant of outside interference.

Despite the overwhelming Soviet presence and Vietnam's sincere gratitude to the USSR, the Vietnamese have serious reservations about the Soviet model. This is not as paradoxical as it might seem if one considers the pragmatic Vietnamese attitude which, in recent years and despite current conflicts, reflects a fascination with China's drive for modernization. Despite the recent past, China is the relevant model for Vietnam. The shared values of Confucianism, adherence to an



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identical cultural structure and somewhat similar revolutionary experiences all explain why the Vietnamese feel more affinity with the Chinese than with the Soviets.

Nevertheless, there are still some basic differences in the two countries' situations. On the one hand, the military adventure in Kampuchea prevents any genuine integration of Vietnam into the world economy. On the other, while Mao's tomb in China is now quite often closed and ignored, Vietnam's leaders still look for inspiration to the disconcerting image of Ho Chi Minh's mausoleum.

OPINION ON THE PRESENT SITUATION is divided. Should we continue to take a firm stance with Vietnam in order to exact concessions on the withdrawal of Vietnamese troops from Kampuchea, or would it be wiser to end the quarantine, in the hope that Hanoi will gradually normalize relations and adopt a policy of modernization?

The dilemma does not really apply to Canada, since in 1979 it decided to give unconditional support to the anti-Vietnam coalition. It cut off aid in February 1979 and recognized the Kampuchean rebel

coalition in 1982. This stance may be logical or even desirable in the light of Canada's past experience with Vietnam, as a participant in the trying and ultimately frustrating work of the International Control and Supervision Commissions in Indochina from 1954 to 1973. It is also worth noting that Canada has accepted more than 100,000 Indochinese refugees and that it is not prepared to risk offending its American neighbour, its trading partners in South-East Asia and especially the

Chinese – with whom it has developed extensive and profitable contacts – for the sake of relations with Vietnam.

Unfortunately, however, as was aptly pointed out by Kim Nossal: "... Canada has chosen to allow its policy toward Vietnam to be guided by the preferences of other countries more directly involved." The Canadian government has thus passively adopted the over-zealous policies of others, on the pretext of respecting the rules of a coalition in which the members' anti-Vietnamese interests differ greatly and in most cases have little in common with Canadian interests. It adopted the same intransigent attitude taken toward China in the 1950s and 1960s, counter to a Canadian tradition of negotiation, mediation and dialogue between the antagonists in any conflict. Of course, as a very minor player in the Indochinese conflicts, what would Canada gain by changing its current policy?

In the short term, nothing very much; in the medium term, however, Canada would show all Asian nations that it has a definite policy in the region and that this policy is not subordinate to that of any other nation. Canada could earn the re-

spect of Indochinese governments by launching a dialogue which would prove that we were not simply a mouthpiece for Washington.

If Canadian strategy in South-east Asia is based primarily on economic interests, it is unwise to underestimate the long-term development potential of Indo-China. Why should Canada take a more extreme position towards Vietnam than some of the most anti-communist countries in Asia? Japan, for example, has become Vietnam's first non-communist trading partner and Singapore, one of the most hard-line states in the anti-Vietnam coalition, has followed suit. South Korea is another example, and despite confrontations with Vietnamese troops on the Kampuchean border, Thailand also trades indirectly with Hanoi. Without appearing to condone Vietnam's policy in Kampuchea, Canada could still encourage the growth of private contacts and replace its current policy of isolation with measures designed to slowly bring Vietnam back into the international community.

There is, in fact, no reason why Canada should shun Vietnam as the US does. Without condoning Vietnam's military presence in Kampuchea and Laos, the Canadian government could follow the lead of several European countries in promoting trade and cultural links; it might thus persuade some provincial governments to establish links and thereby expand real Canadian influence with Hanoi. Canada is a member of la Francophonie and it is Vietnam which coined what subsequently became that organization's formal description of itself: "countries using French as a common language." It is unfortunate that Canada has yet to open a dialogue with Vietnam in French, or any other language. □

Further Reading

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