

Book Reviews

the Europa survey for comprehensiveness, ease of reference, and quality in coverage. After a review of major events of the year running from June 1981 to June 1982, this volume then offers excellent reference material on the religions of the area; its geography; the Arab-Israeli conflict since 1967; two sections on the Palestinians, including the text of the much-discussed but frequently unconsulted Palestinian National Charter; oil developments with up-to-date statistics on production, prices and reserves; and a review of the critical question of arms trade with the area. The second section covers the Middle East and North Africa in thirty-one separate international organizations. Part three consists of country surveys with data on the economy, a political survey, current cabinet and diplomatic lists, a press survey and a country bibliography. Part four consists primarily of a Who's Who in the area.

Even the area expert would be well advised to consult this excellent reference before moving on to more detailed inquiry. Given the deadlines of an annual, even the most careful editor cannot cover all points. The data on religious membership in Lebanon are presented uncritically and show the Maronite community as the largest single sect. The reader would arrive at a considerable misunderstanding of the grievances in the civil war if these were accepted at face value. The "Who's Who" section emphasizes age and veneration rather than contemporary influence and should be updated. Walid Jumblatt in Lebanon is a notable lacuna. Similarly, the country bibliography sections are in considerable need of updating. Conflict analysts tell us it is vital to separate fact-finding from value judgments in trying to resolve conflicts. Much of the literature on the Middle East starts with polemics; more of us should start with factual reference works such as this one.

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Canada's role in Indochina

by Peter Campbell

In Defence of Canada, Vol. 5: Indochina: Roots of Complicity by James Eayrs. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983, 348 pages, \$45.00 (cloth) and \$17.50 (paper).

When a historian of contemporary events, who is blessed with the ability and elegant style of James Eayrs, has extensive access to official records, the results can be entertaining and revealing.

The stories of the Indochina Control Commissions for Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, upon which Canada served from 1954 to 1973, are little-known, tortuous and murky. One can recall the usually lucid President Kennedy vainly trying on television to unfathom for the American people the quaint intricacies of the political situation in Laos, where there was a King and a Crown Prince, as well as a vice-King; where the Premier of the Royal Government

was a prince whose half-brother, another prince, headed the Communist dissidents! Eayrs's book graphically describes the difficult conditions, both physical and political, under which the Commissions had to work and the main issues with which they grappled.

The largest and most important of the Commissions was, of course, in Vietnam. It was in Vietnam that the fate of Indochina was to be decided. The issues before the Commission, however, turned out to be intractable and the situation there progressively deteriorated until outright hostilities were resumed between Communist North and anti-Communist South, which eventually involved massive United States intervention. This bleak scenario brought upon the Vietnam Commission much arduous and thankless labor, as it strove to shore up the crumbling Geneva Agreement with very little support from the parties immediately concerned.

In Laos, the Commission found itself operating in circumstances of greater flexibility. Here the Royal Government and the Communist Pathet Lao, assisted by the Commission, groped painfully towards political agreement, which was finally achieved. Laos, having common borders with China, Vietnam and Cambodia, was set in a strategic position in central Indochina. General Giap once told me, when the Laos Commission was visiting Hanoi, that the North Vietnamese Government was watching closely to see whether the political settlement involving a neutral Laos would hold. Doubtless the various interested parties had different expectations about the Laos settlement. It is gratifying to note that Eayrs commends the work of the Laos Commission. In any case the settlement was eventually overthrown by American-supported factions. Laos, thereafter, became the focus of deadly infiltration from North Vietnam and armed counter-strokes from the American forces brought in to defend the South.

The title of the book is dramatic but it is, I think, a misnomer. It suggests, as does the author, that Canada betrayed its principles by adopting a pro-Western stance in the Commissions, which finally led to Canada's becoming identified with American policy in Vietnam through permitting its Commissioner, Blair Seaborn, to transmit, on behalf of the United States, threatening messages to the North Vietnamese government. It is a view which has been propounded with some emotion in academic and press circles.

Complicity theory rejected

But the theory does not fit. Canada accepted the invitation to serve on the Indochina Commissions with no illusions that it could or would be expected to carry out its duties in a completely detached judicial manner. It was recognized by all concerned with the Geneva Agreements that the Indochina Commissions must be composed of one country representing the Western allies, one country representing the Communist bloc and one the so-called Third World — in the event Canada, Poland and India. Implicit in this line-up was the assumption that the member nations would protect the general interests of their respective political groupings. Within these broad policy parameters the Commissioners could deal in a judicial manner with matters brought before them in relation to the Geneva Agreements for settlements in Indochina — a very tricky mandate. If Canadian Commissioners had behaved with pristine purity in these circumstances, it could have been disastrous for Canada. Sir Galahad was fine searching for