

## Evaluation on Vietnam's Foreign Policy in 1979 - 1986

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### ABSTRACT

Researches about our past foreign affair policies might be give us some historical lessons.

Using qualitative and historical methods, this study figure out that Vietnam and Cambodia work closely together diplomatic activities, taking advantage of the support of the international public opinion, quickly resolved resolve the issue of Cambodia and step by step break through the encirclement and embargo of the enemy forces enemy. Beside, Vietnam developed relations with Laos and Cambodia, negotiating with China, striving to support the independence struggles in Southeast Asian countries. Vietnam fully supported the working class in capitalist countries.

Our conclusion will draw some historical lessons.

### Keywords

Vietnam, Foreign Policy, Historical Lessons.

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### Introduction

Vietnam and two Indochinese countries Laos and Cambodia have launched many constructive initiatives to connect with ASEAN countries:

1. Sign bilateral agreements between the three countries with ASEAN countries on non-aggression and to build Southeast Asia into a region of peace, independence, neutrality, stability and prosperity Vinh (January 1980).
2. Regional Conference between two groups of countries to discuss peace, stability and cooperation in Southeast Asia, guaranteed by an International Conference (June 1981).
3. Proposed seven principles guiding peaceful coexistence between two groups of countries (September 1981).
4. Establishment of demilitarized zones on both sides of Thailand-Cambodia border (July 1983).
5. Towards a total solution for peace and stability in Southeast Asia and a number of solutions parts related to Indochina and Thailand or the agreement of important principles relations between ASEAN and Indochina countries with international assurance and supervision (January 1984)

### Methodology

We mainly use qualitative analysis: synthesis, analytical, inductive methods combined with explanatory methods.

We also use historical and dialectical materialism methods.

### Main Results

#### Highlights of Vietnam's Foreign Policy in 1979 - 1986

Vietnam's foreign policy in the period from 1979 to 1986 was presented through the 4th and 5th National Congresses. The policy was highlighted in continued cooperation with socialist countries, the communist movement, against imperialism in Asia, Africa. Vietnam developed relations with Laos and Cambodia, striving to support the independence struggles in Southeast Asian countries. Vietnam fully supported the working class in capitalist countries. After signing the treaty with the Soviet Union, the communist party's priority shifted to actively expanding relations, building socialism, and fulfilling the international obligations. At that time, Vietnam made a clear distinction between friend and foe, leaning heavily

on the Soviet Union. This worsened the relationship between Vietnam and China and the US in the context of Vietnam being besieged and embargoed by capitalist countries. Vietnam's relations with ASEAN countries shifted from truly neutral to establishing good neighborly relations with ASEAN countries, promoting a peaceful and stable Southeast Asian region that was no longer neutral throughout the two congresses. The reason was that Vietnam's agreement to the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation and becoming an "ally" was contrary to the Declaration on a Zone of Peace, Free, Neutral (ZOPFAN) in Kuala Lumpur in 1971. In addition, our Party also adjusted economic development from considering agriculture as the leading front to "prioritizing heavy industry development" in the face of threats from the United States, China, and the remnants of the Pol Pot corporation in Southeast Asia. This affected the Party's foreign policy to our country in the early 1980s in the political and economic struggle. Our State took advantage of the cooperation with the Soviet Union and other countries in the Council of Mutual Economic Assistance.

### **Evaluation**

From 1979 to 1986, Vietnam had been through 2 National Party Congresses which witnessed certain changes in the process of planning and implementing foreign policy. In the context of the global political upheavals, Vietnam's foreign policy was able to achieve certain achievements, yet made several mistakes. On the one hand, Vietnam's foreign policy in this period successfully tightened the relations with Socialist states. In particular, the relationship between Vietnam and the Soviet Union reached a new level when Vietnam signed the Treaty, officially becoming a security ally of the Soviet Union. Thanks to this Treaty, Vietnam was able to ensure national security despite the volatile of US - China - USSR relations. Besides, the foreign policy during this period successfully strengthened the historic relations between Vietnam - Lao - Cambodia. On the other hand, the policy was said to have made certain mistakes which caused Vietnam's failure to remain neutral and miss chances to expand diplomatic relations.

Thereby, Vietnam's foreign policy document no longer contained the phrase "truly neutral". Moreover, Vietnam's foreign policy in 1979-1986 period still kept a 'friend-enemy' mindset towards certain states, such as China and other non-Socialist states, which limited Vietnam's interests. This mindset, which manifested in Vietnam's 1980 Constitution and other documents of the 5th Party Congress, led to an extreme anti-hegemony propaganda towards China. Vietnam also missed the opportunity to normalize relations with the US, hence disrupted the process of integration. Vietnam also showed a negative stance towards ASEAN, considering ASEAN choose the US side. Besides, foreign policy from 1979 to 1986 did not resolve Cambodia issues. In economy, Vietnam only interacted with socialist states without expanding to Capitalist states, and recognized the trend of the world economy.

### **Foreign Policy in 1979 - 1986 vs. Current Foreign Policy**

Vietnam foreign policy during 1979 - 1986 differs significantly from that of the modern era due to the differences in background and other economic - political factors. In the former period, Vietnam was under pressure from both domestic and international issues. In the relations with other countries, Vietnam was in the middle of the Cold War where ideological differences were becoming increasingly tense. Moreover, with the sanctions and diplomatic isolation that Western countries, China and ASEAN imposed, Vietnam encountered many challenges in developing the post-war country, which made it less viable to maintain a neutral foreign policy. Vietnam had to heavily rely on the Soviet Union for its aid and support, which hence worsened the acute relationship between Vietnam and Western countries. Internally, since Vietnam had just recently won back its independence and was fighting in the Northern and Southern border wars, protecting its newly-gained independence and building Communist government were Vietnam's top priorities. However, under new circumstances, the foreign policy of the modern period changed significantly. Firstly, Vietnam has become one of the most open, dynamic economies in the region, attracting foreign investment from many countries. With its development in economy, Vietnam attains enough

resources to maintain its neutral foreign policy and does not need to rely much on outsider support. Vietnam - Cambodia has also improved remarkably since then. With the new tendency of cooperation and the increasing interdependence between countries, especially in the economic domain, Vietnam and China still maintain close economic relations, despite the political dispute in the South China Sea.

In terms of similarities, Vietnam since then has always pursued a friendly foreign policy, promoting close relations with countries and organizations within and outside the region.

### Discussion & Conclusion

Professor Carlyle Thayer in his speech at the 40 year International Conference in Vietnam of Domination, Development and Integration said that Vietnamese leaders felt that the world

The socialist not only owes Vietnam solidarity but also has the obligation to provide material support. At the same time, he gave two reasons for the change in national security policy period in the mid-1980s. According to him, there are at least two main photographic factors affect this development. The first is the serious socioeconomic crisis in the country that Vietnam has to face. The second factor is external and arises from "thinking new politics" came from the Soviet Union under the leadership of Mikhail Gorbachev<sup>12</sup>. This mix of domestic and foreign factors, according to former Foreign Minister Nguyen Manh Cam and Deputy Prime Minister Vu Khoan, Vietnam have moved from a counter policy foreign policy is built on ideology into a focused foreign policy framework to the national interest and practical as well as emphasizing economic forces. The impact of the revolution in science and technology is the decisive factor the main setting of the global order.

### Lessons to Learn from Our Past Foreign Policy

Foreign policy of Vietnam in the period 1979 - 1986 did not totally achieve success in balancing relations with major powers such as the U.S and China and failed to thoroughly resolve Cambodia border issue; however, gave some lessons for descendants. First and foremost, refraining from dependency to other countries is necessary for an effective and consistent foreign policy. In 1979,

Vietnam resorted to sign a Military Treaty with the USSR in order to protect the infantly independent country from external threats, and officially changed Vietnam's neutrality posing challenges towards Vietnam's relations with US China and ASEAN. Thus, Vietnam should utilize resources and conduct relevant eco-socio policies to uphold its neutrality in international affairs. Secondly, Vietnam's foreign policy should adopt flexibility to be in line with the current situation. In the time of globalization, Vietnam should not distinguish between friends and enemies in accordance with previous action in the 5th Party Congress. For instance, there is a territorial dispute between Vietnam and China over the South China Sea, but it should not be a cause for straining blossoming economic ties between both countries since it will harm Vietnam's interest at the very first place. Last but not least, Vietnam ought to enhance its capacity in external media in comparisons with the preceding period. There have been many scholars claiming that Vietnam's involvement in Cambodia border issue was merely an international mission, which proved many differences compared to preceding negative comments. If Vietnam succeeds in performing official external media, not only will foreign states understand Vietnam better, but also minimize distorted and false information generated by several interest groups which can surely damage Vietnam's worldwide reputation.

### Limitation of Research

We need to evaluate the foreign policies in later periods as well, with India and other countries all over the world.

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