

# Russia's public diplomacy strategy in Vietnam evolved in response to shifting geopolitical dynamics

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**ABSTRACT:** *This paper examines Russia's evolving public diplomacy strategy in Vietnam over 75 years of bilateral relations. We analyze the transformation from Soviet-era ideological solidarity and military-centered approaches to contemporary multifaceted engagement. The research identifies three key periods: Soviet ideological alignment through military and educational support; post-Soviet pragmatic partnership emphasizing energy cooperation and economic ties; and contemporary nuanced diplomacy adapting to Vietnam's "bamboo diplomacy" framework. Through analysis of public opinion data, online discourse, and generational perspectives, we demonstrate how Russia has successfully maintained strategic relevance despite geopolitical shifts. The findings highlight the effectiveness of flexible, culturally sensitive diplomatic approaches in sustaining long-term bilateral partnerships.*

**KEYWORDS:** *geopolitical dynamic, public diplomacy, Russia, Vietnam*

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Russia and Vietnam celebrated their 75-year relationship on January 30, 2024. Their partnership, which began in 1950, continues to grow stronger. Vietnam stands as one of Russia's most important Asian partners, along with China and India. The relationship's strength shows in the numbers - a 2017 Pew Research survey found that 83% of Vietnamese citizens view Russia favorably. Their partnership has changed by a lot through the years. Vietnam no longer relies solely on connections with the Soviet Union. The country now builds relationships with many global powers while keeping its special bond with Russia intact. Both countries aim to boost their trade to \$10 billion by 2025. The 2015 Free Trade Agreement with Russia's Eurasian Economic Union supports this goal. Vietnam became the first ASEAN nation to create such a partnership. This research will get into how Russia's public diplomacy in Vietnam has adapted over time. We'll see how their relationship changed from ideological allies to practical partners as global conditions evolved.

## II. RUSSIA'S PUBLIC DIPLOMACY IN VIETNAM HAS SHIFTED FROM IDEOLOGICAL SOLIDARITY TO PRAGMATIC COOPERATION.

Russia and Vietnam's relationship has transformed significantly in the last seven decades. Their partnership started with shared ideology but grew into a practical alliance that benefits both countries economically and strategically. This change mirrors the shifts in world politics and shows how both nations adapted to new global realities.

### **During the Soviet era, public diplomacy emphasized ideological alignment and military support, reflecting Cold War priorities**

The Soviet Union laid the groundwork for Russia-Vietnam relations by becoming one of the first nations to recognize Vietnam diplomatically. Moscow's public outreach to Vietnam during the Cold War stemmed from Communist ideology and anti-Western views. The Soviet Union presented itself as the leader of socialist revolution and Vietnam's main ally against Western imperialism.

*Military aid* became the lifeblood of Soviet diplomatic efforts. The USSR gave Vietnam vital military support during its independence war and later conflicts. This included air-defense equipment, radar systems, surface-to-air missiles, pilot training, and aircraft like MIG fighters and IL-28 light bombers (Egorov, 2023). Such military assistance played a key role in Vietnam's victory and made the Soviet Union Vietnam's most trusted international partner.

*Education and training* emerged as another vital part of Soviet diplomacy. The USSR trained nearly 40,000 Vietnamese officials and experts in various disciplines (Vietnamplus, 2025a). These programs served multiple goals: they passed on technical skills, taught Vietnamese leaders Marxist-Leninist ideology, and built a generation of Vietnamese officials with strong Moscow connections. Many Vietnamese leaders, including Ho Chi Minh, studied in the Soviet Union (Nguyen & Kobayashi, 2024).

*Economic support* strengthened these ideological bonds further. Vietnam joined the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON) on June 28, 1978 (New York Times, 1978). This move connected

Vietnam's economy to the Soviet-led economic system. The USSR helped Vietnam rebuild through substantial financial aid and technical support after years of devastating war.

This complete approach reflected Cold War priorities when competition with the West dominated Soviet foreign policy. The focus on shared communist values and anti-imperialist struggle appealed strongly to Vietnam's leaders and public. These deep connections would last beyond the Soviet Union's existence.

### **Post-Soviet public diplomacy focuses on cultural, economic, and technological exchanges to maintain influence amidst Vietnam's diversification of partnerships**

Russia's approach to Vietnam changed drastically after the Soviet Union fell in 1991. Practical cooperation based on mutual economic interests replaced ideological unity. The relationship weakened at first as Russia dealt with its own economic and political challenges.

In spite of that, both countries saw value in keeping their historic partnership. Vladimir Putin took steps to revive ties with Vietnam during his first term as president. He visited Hanoi officially in January 2001, marking 50 years of Soviet-Vietnam relations (Kremlin, 2001). This visit marked a new chapter in post-Soviet relations, leading to a strategic partnership that became comprehensive in 2012 (Nguyen & Kobayashi, 2024).

Russia managed to keep its position as Vietnam's important trading partner in the economic sphere, though not at Soviet-era levels. Trade between the countries has grown by 10-15% each year recently (Nguyen & Kobayashi, 2024). The 2015 Free Trade Agreement between Vietnam and the Russia-led Eurasian Economic Union opened new doors for cooperation. Vietnam became the first ASEAN member to make such a deal.

*Energy cooperation* remains central to their relationship. Vietsovpetro, their joint venture, still extracts crude oil from Vietnam's Bạch Hổ oil field (Kremlin, 2001). This partnership shows successful long-term cooperation and gives Russia influence in Southeast Asia's energy sector while providing Vietnam expertise and income.

*Educational ties* continue to matter in Russia's public diplomacy, though less than during Soviet times. Russia now offers about 1,000 scholarships yearly to Vietnamese students since 2019 (Nguyen & Kobayashi, 2024). More than 5,000 Vietnamese students currently study in Russia (Nhan dan, 2024). Yet Russia no longer attracts Vietnamese youth for higher education as it once did (Nguyen & Kobayashi, 2024).

*Cultural exchanges* have gained importance in post-Soviet diplomacy. Vietnamese President Nguyen Xuan Phuc's visit to Moscow in December 2021 led to a Cultural Cooperation Program between both countries for 2022-2024 (Nguyen & Kobayashi, 2024). This program planned Vietnam and Russia Cultural Days in both nations. These events took place successfully in Moscow in April 2023 and in Hanoi and Ha Long in July 2023 (Nguyen & Kobayashi, 2024). Accordingly, Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin's visit to Hanoi in January 2025 led to a new Cultural Cooperation Program between both countries for 2025-2027 (Ministry of Culture, 2025).

*Technology cooperation* has grown more sophisticated. Russia now sees Vietnam as a capable partner for sharing cutting-edge technologies in high-tech industries (Vietnamplus, 2025a). This shows Russia recognizes Vietnam's technical progress and wants to stay influential through valuable partnerships.

*Military ties* remain strong but different from Soviet times. Russia supplied about 81% of Vietnam's arms imports between 1995 and 2023 (Nguyen & Kobayashi, 2024). Vietnamese imports of Russian arms peaked between 2011 and 2016, during tensions with Beijing over South China Sea disputes (Nguyen & Kobayashi, 2024). This shows how Russia adapted its military relationship to address current security needs rather than ideology.

### **Russia uses historical narratives and shared values (e.g., patriotism and anti-imperialism) to sustain goodwill among Vietnamese citizens**

Russia has strategically used shared history and values to keep its special relationship with Vietnam as the country builds diverse international partnerships. Studies show that memories of Soviet support for Vietnam's independence still give Russia soft power in Vietnam (Nguyen & Kobayashi, 2024).

Historical stories play a key role in bilateral meetings. Russian leaders often mention Soviet support for Vietnam's fight against foreign control. Russia holds special meaning for many generations of Vietnamese people (Kumar & Anoop, 2025). This comes from Russia's support and the cultural bonds between their people (Kumar & Anoop, 2025).

Both countries highlight their shared values, especially patriotism and resistance to outside interference. Russian Consul General in Ho Chi Minh City, Sadykov Timur Sirozhevich, points out that their special relationship stems from similar history, culture, and character. The nations share core values like strong patriotism, determination against foreign invaders, hard work, creativity, and deep humanity (Nhan dan, 2024).

Russia and Vietnam's similar political views create trust between their governments. As one-party states concerned about regime security, both nations support approaches that challenge Western human rights ideas (Ha & Choeng, 2022). Regular talks between Vietnam's Ministry of Public Security and Russia's Security Council Office maintain this alignment, along with Strategic Dialog on Diplomacy-Defense-Security meetings (Ha & Choeng, 2022).

Books and cultural works help keep this historic connection alive. Vietnamese people know many Russian writers very well (Nhan dan, 2024). Through cultural exchanges, Russia promotes its language, art, and values to Vietnamese people, building lasting bonds beyond politics and economics.

The Vietnamese community in Russia, numbering 60,000 to 80,000 people, strengthens friendship between the nations (Vietnamplus, 2025a). These communities maintain personal connections that complement official diplomacy.

Vietnam's balanced stance on Russia's Ukraine invasion shows this approach works. Vietnam abstained from UN votes condemning the Russian invasion in March 2022 and February 2023 (Tiezzi, 2022). During his Vietnam visit in June 2024, President Putin thanked "Vietnamese friends for their balanced position on the Ukrainian crisis" and praised Vietnam as a "strong supporter of a fair world order" based on international law, equality, and non-interference (Ghosal, 2024).

Former Russian Ambassador Tatarinov emphasized how inheritance shapes current Vietnam-Russia relations. He noted that the countries have stayed close friends for 75 years, even before formal diplomatic ties (Vietnamplus, 2025b). Their relationship grew from standing together during Vietnam's independence struggle and the 1980s when Vietnam worked hard to rebuild after war (Vietnamplus, 2025b).

Both nations know their relationship must grow. Vietnam follows "bamboo diplomacy" - a term from Communist Party General Secretary Nguyễn Phú Trọng comparing policy to bamboo's flexibility in changing winds (Ghosal, 2024). Russia has adapted to stay relevant. Their traditional friendship provides strong foundations, but both countries understand that practical cooperation must drive their 21st-century relationship.

### **III. GEOPOLITICAL SHIFTS HAVE LED RUSSIA TO ADAPT ITS PUBLIC DIPLOMACY TOOLS IN VIETNAM**

Russia had to adjust its public diplomacy strategies worldwide after global power shifts, especially following the 2014 Crimean crisis and the Ukraine conflict in 2022. Moscow's efforts to adjust have been quite visible in Southeast Asia, especially in Vietnam, where it works to keep its historical influence while adapting to new regional changes.

#### **The Ukraine crisis made Russia speed up its "pivot to Asia," and Vietnam became a vital partner to balance Western isolation.**

Western sanctions from the Ukraine conflict forced Russia to broaden its economic connections beyond Europe. This led to deeper involvement with Southeast Asian nations (Kumar & Anoop, 2025). Vladimir Putin's "turn to the east" policy gained speed around 2010 and picked up dramatically after 2014 when Russia needed to counter growing isolation from Western powers (ISEAS, 2021). Vietnam's historical ties and strategic location made it a vital part of this shift.

Russia holds an increasingly important place in Vietnam's foreign policy as Moscow speeds up its Look East strategy. Russian experts note that Putin sees Vietnam as one of Russia's three most important Asian partners, along with China and India (Vietnamplus, 2025a). High-level diplomatic meetings continue despite international pressure, which shows this importance. Vietnam showed its value to Moscow by abstaining from five UN general assembly votes on the war after Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022 (The Conversation, 2024).

Vietnam serves as more than just a traditional political ally for Russia. The country acts as a vital bridge between Russia and ASEAN (Vietnamplus, 2025a), which helps Moscow's broader regional goals. Russia reshapes its role in Southeast Asia and the global arena through economic partnerships, military cooperation, and diplomatic moves (Kumar & Anoop, 2025).

#### **Russia utilizes energy, arms sales, and educational exchanges as strategic tools of its public diplomacy in Vietnam.**

Arms sales remain the lifeblood of Russia's public diplomacy toolkit in Vietnam. Russia stands as Vietnam's main weapons supplier and a trusted security partner in the region (Kumar & Anoop, 2025). Vietnam bought about \$7 billion worth of Russian weapons between 1995 and 2019—making up 84% of its total arms imports (ISEAS, 2021). Vietnam received 73 million TIV (trend-indicator value) worth of arms from Russia in 2021-2022 and 10 million TIV in 2023 (Kumar & Anoop, 2025).

These arms transfers mean more than just business deals. Rusvietpetro, a joint Vietnamese-Russian oil venture, showcases how Russia and Vietnam actively cooperate in energy sector, sharing resources and expertise. This joint venture defies Western criticism or narratives that Russia is only an exploitative or unreliable partner, especially after sanctions. It visible demonstrates mutually beneficial collaboration despite international challenges (Deutsche Welle, 2024).

Russia has established itself as a dependable partner for Vietnam's growing energy needs. Russian officials confirmed their readiness to supply Vietnam with oil, liquefied natural gas (LNG), and petroleum products during high-level meetings in 2023-2024 (Vietnamplus, 2025b). Both countries agreed to support oil and gas projects on each other's continental shelves (Russia's pivot to Asia, 2025). Russian companies like Gazprom and Novatek actively seek opportunities in Vietnam.

Educational cooperation has seen new life as another part of Russia's public diplomacy. The Russian government offers 1,000 scholarships each year to Vietnamese students (Nguyen & Kobayashi, 2024). These people-to-people connections support official diplomatic efforts. Vietnam's Deputy Minister of Education and Training Hoàng Minh Sơn led a delegation to Russia in April 2023 to discuss broader educational collaboration. Vietnam then announced 75 scholarships for Russian students in 2024 (Vietnamnews, 2024).

### **Vietnam's "bamboo diplomacy" has led Russia to adopt softer, non-confrontational approaches in public diplomacy.**

Vietnamese Communist Party General Secretary Nguyễn Phú Trọng introduced "bamboo diplomacy" in 2016, which caught the attention of Russian researchers and policymakers (Vietnamplus, 2024). This approach shows how Vietnam keeps its core foreign policy goals while staying flexible in tactics—bending like bamboo without breaking (Press Xpress, 2025).

Vietnam follows four main principles: it avoids military alliances, stays neutral in conflicts, bans foreign military bases on its soil, and rejects force or threats of force (Press Xpress, 2025). Vietnam carefully balances its relationships with major powers. It maintains its closest ties with Russia while building stronger connections with the United States (Vietnamplus, 2024).

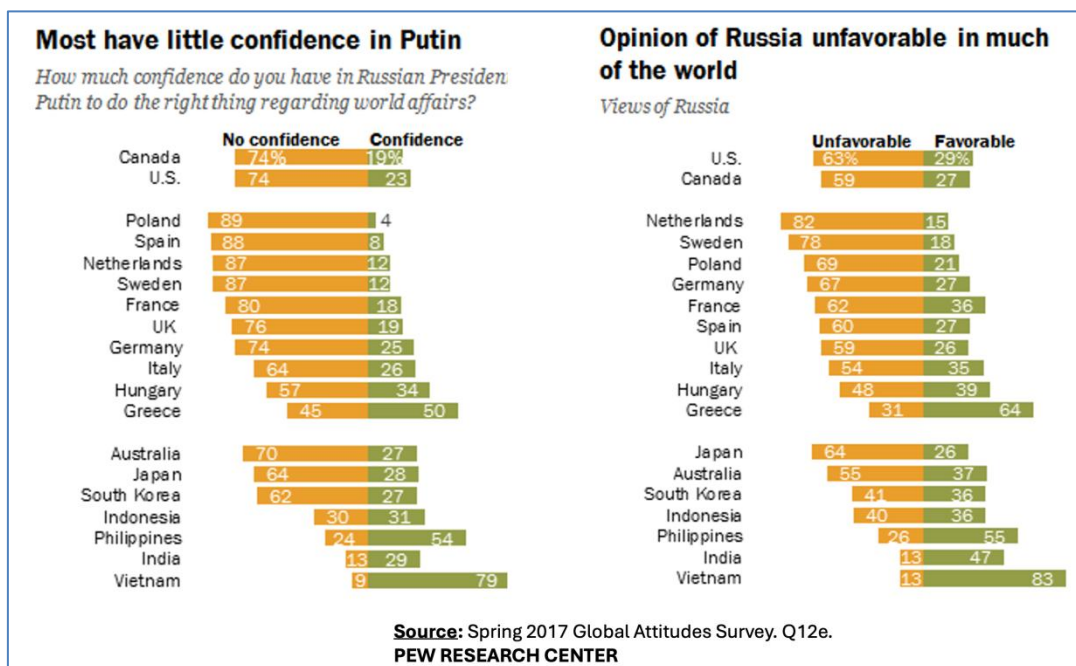
Russia has changed its public diplomacy to match Vietnam's balanced approach. Moscow focuses on shared interests and values instead of pushing Vietnam to take sides in international disputes. Russian experts say Vietnam's bamboo diplomacy "works on many levels and helps maintain the country's influence and independence during ongoing conflicts" (Vietnamplus, 2024).

Both countries know they must maintain their relationship amid complex global tensions. Vietnam worries that Russia's growing dependence on China might hurt Vietnamese interests in the South China Sea (Storey, 2024). Staying engaged with Russia helps prevent China from having too much influence over Moscow's regional policies.

Russia now uses more subtle public diplomacy tools. Cultural exchanges, educational opportunities, and people-to-people connections work alongside traditional approaches like arms sales and energy cooperation.

## **IV. LOCAL RECEPTION AND EFFECTIVENESS ANALYSIS**

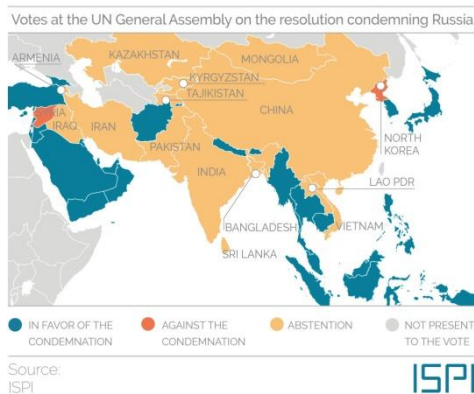
Vietnamese public opinion serves as a vital indicator of Russia's diplomatic success in Vietnam. It reveals long-standing loyalties and recent changes that affect how both countries work together. Research shows interesting patterns in Vietnamese citizens' views of their northern partner.



### Vietnam Russia Relations Reddit: Online Discourse Analysis

Vietnamese opinions about Russia remain divided on online platforms. Reddit discussions about Russians in Vietnam show more curiosity than meaningful conversation. Facebook, Vietnam's most popular social platform, reveals deeper divisions. Conservative, pro-regime pages often boost pro-Russia content. They link anti-Russia views with anti-government conspiracies (Ha & Dien, 2022). Young, educated Vietnamese who understand politics show support for Ukraine. They base their views on international news sources (To, 2022).

### Asia's Reactions to Russia's Invasion of Ukraine



### Public Opinion Surveys on Russian Influence

Formal polls show Russia's strong positive image among Vietnamese people. A 2017 Gallup International Poll found Vietnamese approval of Putin exceeded that of Russians. About 89% supported his leadership (Pew, 2017). Pew Research Center's survey that year showed 83% of Vietnamese viewed Russia positively. Additionally, 79% trusted Putin's international decisions (Pew, 2017).

### Generational Differences in Perceptions of Russia

Age plays a big role in how Vietnamese people view Russia. The older generation strongly supports Russia because of their Soviet-era experiences. They see criticism of Russia as "ungrateful" given past help (Ha

& Dien, 2022). This support comes from years of education that praised Soviet revolutionary heroism (Ha & Dien, 2022). Younger Vietnamese, who have more global exposure, often question Russia's actions. The Ukraine situation creates clear opinion gaps between generations (To, 2022).

## V. CONCLUSION

Russia's public diplomacy strategy in Vietnam shows remarkable diplomatic flexibility across 75 years. Moscow reshaped its approach from Soviet-era ideological solidarity to modern pragmatic cooperation. The historical goodwill between both nations remains strong even today.

The relationship shows how Russia knows how to keep strategic collaborations despite global challenges. Military cooperation, energy projects, and educational exchanges serve as strong foundations of this partnership, though their nature has changed by a lot. Russia focuses on cultural connections and shared values now, along with traditional hard-power tools.

Vietnam's bamboo diplomacy led Russia to use softer, more nuanced methods. Russia respects Vietnam's need to balance relationships with multiple global powers instead of seeking exclusive alignment. This understanding helped create sophisticated public diplomacy tools that respect Vietnam's strategic freedom while keeping Russia's influence intact.

The future points to evolving Russia-Vietnam relations as both countries handle complex geopolitical shifts. Their partnership builds on historical ties yet adapts to modern challenges. This relationship teaches us how traditional bonds can grow stronger even as global circumstances change.

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